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### Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Women's Claims to Water in a Global City: Race, Scarcity, & Violence in Cape Town

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

in Global Studies

by

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September 2023

The thesis of Julia Denny is approved.

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May 2023

Women's Claims to Water in a Global City: Race, Scarcity, & Violence in Cape Town

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By

Julia Denny

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Master's Research, conducted from June 2022 to November 2022, was made possible through the generous funding and support of the UCSB Global Studies Department and the Orfalea Foundation. Thank you to my committee, Professors Satyajit Singh, Ricardo Jacobs, and Kum-Kum Bhavnani, for their advice, interpretations, and recommendations – their scholarship was essential to my framing of Cape Town's water governance.

When in Cape Town, I interned with Environmental Monitoring Group, and found many comrades who enabled my research and continuously supported me, including Apiwe Mdunyelwa, Mandy Moussouris, Thabo Lusithi, Siya Myeza, Anne Plaatjies-Hanase, Nick Hamer, Erna Curry, Afika Ndlela, Siyasanga Mhlamanzana, and Ulrika Runsala. They helped me analyze my findings, understand Cape Town politics, and navigate Cape Town safely. My research would not have been possible without their help.

I am highly grateful to Executive Director Webster who took time to speak to me about the Bulk Water and Sanitation and Department, and my welcoming into the Portfolio Committee and City Council meetings. His words and efforts to create public trust between government and informal settlements will be essential to the project of equitable water governance going forward.

I dedicate this Master's thesis to the women of Cape Town, who struggle everyday for water access and continuously find ways of public participation. In particular, Ndileka Matume, Mama Lulama, Faeza Mayer, Mama Dondi, and many other women who I met and worked with, who overcame environmental, social, and economic barriers to participate in

community spaces and have their voices heard. Their work as community caretakers is incredibly inspiring and moving, and I honor their work with this thesis. Water is life!

# Women's Claims to Water in a Global City: Race, Scarcity, & Violence in Cape Town

Julia Denny

## ABSTRACT

As the Day Zero Drought and the Cape Town Water Crisis came to an end in 2018, and the City of Cape Town celebrated its demand management and consumption reduction efforts and no longer becoming “the first major city to run out of water”, the women of informal settlements wondered when their Day Zero would come to an end. Neoliberal water governance, built on physically embedded and uneven Apartheid infrastructure, continues to prioritize white capital interest and tourism initiatives, rather than redressing historical inequalities that are cemented in the pipes beneath the City. The lack of pipes, or overall water and sanitation infrastructure, necessitates Black and Coloured female labor to maintain household normalcy and stability, despite state-constructed environmental scarcity. These women work as community caretakers to reproduce the lives of themselves and their families, and enable the capitalist market to extend to informal settlements. The City limits the scope of its municipal mandate by selecting which informal settlements it will and will not service, but simultaneously projects itself as a “water sensitive city”, “world city”, and “the entry point to Africa”. This rhetoric reflects the City’s goals of being the top tourist destination in Africa, and it demonstrates this priority by establishing City Improvement Districts, excluding informal settlements from the visual purview of tourists, and using Western modes of governance. The lack of physical infrastructure comes at a severe cost to the Black and Coloured women of informal settlements, who face gender-based violence and

social judgment when they go to the bathroom, menstruate or transport water. Community caretakers overcome this barriers however, and continue to struggle for secure water access and recognition, and continuously find time for public participation.



## Acronyms

African National Congress (ANC)

African Water Commons Collective (AWCC)

Bulk Water and Sanitation Department (BWSD)

Central Business District (CBD)

City-level Bulk Water and Sanitation Portfolio Committee (BWSPC)

City of Cape Town (CoCT)

City Improvement Districts (CIDs)

Day Zero Drought (DZD)

Democratic Alliance (DA)

Existing Lawful Uses (ELUs)

National-level Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS)

Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG)

Kuils River Catchment (KRC)

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Western Cape Water Supply System (WCWSS)

Water Management Devices (WMDs)

## Terms

**Availability Charge:** “charge payable for all serviced vacant or serviced undeveloped land (excluding unproductive vacant land e.g. Public Open Spaces, private roads.)”<sup>1</sup>

**Backyard user:** “households who reside on council rental stock property within a given area as determined by Council and who are registered via affidavit as being backyard dweller”<sup>2</sup>.

**Community caretakers:** A term that I have coined to describe the Black and Coloured women who live in informal settlements outside of the City Centre who help care for others, through environmental monitoring, whistleblowing, resource/information/knowledge sharing, and. This a term that I drew out of my research in Cape Town’s informal settlements, but also exist in many of the world’s cities with informal settlements disconnected from municipal infrastructure

**Comrades:** A term colloquially used to refer to someone in the same fight or struggle with you against oppression; a gender-neutral term used often in non-profit and community organizing spaces.

**Existing Lawful Uses:** exempted from licensing obligation under the National Water Act of 1998<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>City of Cape Town. “2022/23 - 2024/25 BUDGET”. (2022), 22.

<sup>2</sup> City of Cape Town. “Tariff Policy” (2022), 14.

<sup>3</sup>Hellberg, Sophie. “Scarcity as a means of governing: Challenging neoliberal hydro mentality in the context of the South African drought”. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 3(1), 196. (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848619853551>

**Femicide:** “Also known as female homicide, is generally understood to involve intentional murder of women because they are women but broader definitions include any killing of women or girls. In South Africa, it is defined as the killing of a female person, or perceived as a female person on the basis of gender identity, whether committed within the domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship or by any other person, or whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or its’ agents and private intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners, i.e. “a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover”. Intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners, i.e. “a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover”<sup>4</sup>

**Gender-based violence<sup>5</sup>:** “The general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with the gender associated with the sex assigned to a person at birth, as well as the unequal power relations between the genders, within the context of a specific society. GBV includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse or threats of such acts or abuse, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life, in peacetime and during armed or other forms of conflict, and may cause physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic harm.”

**Indigent Register:** “means registered indigent debtors who meet certain criteria as determined by the City from time to time”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Republic South Africa. “National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide”. (2020), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Republic South Africa. “National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide”. (2020), 11.

<sup>6</sup> City of Cape Town. “2022/23 - 2024/25 BUDGET”. (2022), 57.

**Patriarchy:** “a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property”<sup>7</sup>

**Sanitation:** “generally comprises on- or off-site facilities for the collection, transport, treatment and disposal of waste under hygienic conditions. Collection systems usually refer to a toilet system. Transportation in the context of typical grey infrastructure refers to a piped underground sewage system, although in some instances waste is transported by trucks, and treatment — when available — usually involves centralized sewage treatment plants or localized systems (e.g. septic tanks). Disposal of end products is usually split into liquid and solid waste that can be disposed of safely into the environment or, if not, collected in hazardous waste facilities to be destroyed in an incinerator”.<sup>8</sup>

**Social reproduction:** “the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work—mental, physical, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Republic South Africa. “National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide”. (2020), 13.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO. *World Water Development Report*. (2019), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Bhattacharya, Tithi. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press, (2017). Print.

**Subcouncil:** “The metropolitan area governed by the City is divided into subcouncils, each of which is made up of a number of wards. Each ward is made up of a number of suburbs and is represented by a councilor”<sup>10</sup>

**Water Abuse:** “for purposes of indigent properties means properties that exceed 15kl per month due to continued inefficient use of water”<sup>11</sup>

**Water accessibility:** “refers to how water is physically delivered or obtained. Piped water is the least costly method to transport water in densely populated areas. Where piped networks are unavailable, people mostly rely on wells or community water supply systems (e.g. water delivery through kiosks and vendors, or water trucks). In the latter case, they often pay prices several times higher for water of lesser quality, further exacerbating inequities between the rich and disadvantaged”<sup>12</sup>

**Water availability:** “depends upon the amount of water physically available, and how it is stored, managed and allocated to various users. It includes aspects related to the management of surface water, groundwater, as well as water recycling and reuse”.<sup>13</sup>

Water sensitive city

World City

**Vacant land:** “all properties without any buildings or structures that could be used for residential or other purposes, as determined by the Director”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> City of Cape Town. “2022/23 - 2024/25 BUDGET”. (2022), vii.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO. *World Water Development Report*. (2019). 15

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO. *World Water Development Report*. (2019), 2.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO. *World Water Development Report*. (2019), 2.

<sup>14</sup> City of Cape Town. “Tariff Policy” (2022), 14.

## Introduction

Water access for Cape Town’s informal settlements is entirely dependent upon female labor, but this undeniable fact was left out of the City’s narrative about how it avoided the Day Zero Drought (DZD). When the City of Cape Town was labeled “the first major city to run out of water” and this scarcity came at an economic and reputational cost to the City, the City quickly acted to mitigate its damages. The City had neglected to invest in supply augmentation in the lead up to the 2015 – 2018 drought, despite repeated urgent recommendations, and its reputation as a World City was tarnished with the label of being without water, relegating it to a lower level in the neoliberal hierarchy of global, world cities. But while the official Cape Town water crisis ended in 2018 and the City received accolades for its response, the City and its Bulk Water and Sanitation Department has still maintained its neoliberal forms of municipal water governance, despite its self-labeling as a “water sensitive city”. The City’s water infrastructure, predominantly built under the Apartheid era, remains beneath the City, and the lack of pipes flowing to Cape Town’s informal settlements reflect racist disconnection of Black<sup>15</sup> and Coloured residents from basic services. It also reflects the culture of survival and struggle in places like Mfuleni, Khayelitsha, Nyanga, where women act as municipal infrastructure, somewhat like pipes, to service their households and families with essential resources like water, sanitation, and toilet access.

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<sup>15</sup> I will capitalize Black, Coloured, and White to illustrate the social construction and ongoing re-interpretations of these racial identities, particularly in Cape Town as racial identity was historically used to mobilize dispossession and segregation under colonialism. The Apartheid psyche allowed Coloured communities to receive preferential housing, land, and employment options, so as to create social conflict and competition between Black and Coloured communities, and overall subjugation to White power.

Anthropogenic climate change and its impacts are being determined in large Global South cities predominantly by its water infrastructure, or lack thereof. Seen in Cape Town's DZD, in the face of water scarcity, women maintain household normalcy and stability, despite the extreme physical, emotional, and economic costs to themselves. Despite the high cost of water provisioning, women find time to attend community meetings on water and sanitation, attend subcommittee meetings and lobby their councilors for better servicing, and lead community spaces of their own to increase the circulation of water-related knowledge. They are environmental whistleblowers, community caretakers, and essential workers for the City of Cape Town, and they rely on knowledge accumulated from *zabalaza*, or struggle, and social capital to reproduce themselves everyday. Black and Coloured women's labor in informal settlements like Khayelithsa, Gugulethu, Nyanga, Delft, Langa, etc., creates enough environmental and community stability to allow some residents to go to work and participate in the City's economy, and their underpaid labor power forwards the City of Cape Town's World City goals, which are antithetical and neglectful toward its responsibility to its citizens.

Water is the strongest determinant of daily freedom in Cape Town's informal settlements, and it is essential for the activities of cleaning, drinking, bathing, sanitizing, watering gardens, filling toilet cisterns, and overall hygiene and safety. While the current Cape Town government does not intentionally service its citizens based on race, there is de facto racial segregation in Cape Town that limits the water access of Black and Coloured communities, many of which are living in informal settlements outside of the City. Informal settlements access to the City's services is highly dependent on the property rights, history of land ownership, and treatment of their particular informal settlement by the City.

The City's mandate for providing social services apathetically differentiates between legal and illegal informal settlement, and the latter is punitively excluded from the City, subjecting thousands to often tedious levels of survival. Much of the resource scarcity experienced in informal settlements is both state-constructed and neoliberal-maintained, through capitalist logic of public exclusion, anti-homeless, and sanitation.

By analyzing case studies that demonstrate women's abilities to overcome scarcity and social conflict, it is highly evident how the City relies on women to act as pipes for the City, or conduits for social reproduction. Women like Ndileka Matume and Mama Lulama demonstrate different approaches to overcoming social burdens, and in different informal settlements and relationships with the City of Cape Town. Their lives and abilities are depended on by many around them, and their particular skills and stories resemble different attributes of many women around the world providing water despite social and environmental hazards. The global water system is highly dependent on women, but municipal governments have neoliberal mandates that select who is eligible or non-eligible for resources; who is legally occupying space and who is not. These punitive mandates are used in Cape Town to legitimize the City as the appropriate custodian of water access, or moreso rights to life itself. The City's water governance system allows Apartheid to exist, through its avoidance of past wrongdoing and revocation of guilt. Its defensive posture toward informal residents can be seen in its treatment of new informal settlements in COVID-19, and in the City Council and the City's Bulk Water and Sanitation Portfolio Committee's (BWSPC) passive maintenance of a highly racist and exclusionary system.



# Chapter 1: Neoliberal Water Governance Devoid of Material

## Realities of Crisis and Scarcity

### Political History of Water Governance

Cape Town, South Africa is a city in environmental, social, and economic crisis, but the material realities are heavily concentrated to Cape Town's informal settlements and historically marginalized neighborhoods. While spatial and modern understandings of the City tend to focus on longue duree trends of historical marginalization, such as analyzing Dutch and British colonization, and Apartheid's more recent spatial conglomeration of Black male laborers close to the City, it neglects the current tactics of municipal organization utilized by the City of Cape Town. Recent globally renowned events like the Day Zero drought illuminated how the City ignored repeated reports that called for urgent supply augmentation; the COVID-19 epidemic saw the City waiving the individual rights of houseless citizens, relocating them to fenced areas for the "health of the broader community"<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, the City continues to reflect its anti-homeless beliefs, because they do not fit into the economic and neoliberal logic of municipal governance.

The City of Cape Town is home to an estimated 4.6 million people as of 2021, compared to 3.7 million people in 2011. By 2025, the population is expected to be 5.1 million<sup>17</sup>. With regard to racial identity, as of 2016, 43% of Capetonians were considered

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<sup>16</sup> Sacks, Jared. "Independent monitor report submitted to the South African Human Rights Commission: An update on the conditions of street-based people detained during the COVID-19 lockdown at Strandfontein Sports Complex, Cape Town Independent monitor report for the SAHRC". (2020). <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.27232.71688>

<sup>17</sup> Socio-economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), Members of the Steering Group of the South Africa's Ratification Campaign of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its Optional Protocol. "Informal Settlements and Human Rights in South Africa: Submission to the United Nations Special

Black Africans; 40% were Coloured, or mixed-race; 16.5% were White; and 1.1% were Asian. The City of Cape Town has experienced a rapid increase in population since the end of Apartheid in 1994, and has an increasingly young demographic; today, 25% of Capetonians are under fourteen<sup>18</sup>. The City population is becoming increasingly male, and by 2025, the male/female ratio will be equal, predominantly attributed to an increase in wage-seeking males. According to the 2011 Census, out of 1,068,572 households in Cape Town, 232,027 are registered as indigent and 129,918 are informal structures in informal settlements<sup>19</sup>. More recently, the Western Cape has estimated that 14.4% of Capetonians live in informal dwellings not in a backyard, and 7.3% live in informal dwellings in backyards, meaning 21.7% of legally recognized Capetonians live in informal dwellings. However, these facts and figures exclude and obscure the families and households living physically in Cape Town's municipal limit, but outside of the City's basic servicing mandate. 35.7% live below the poverty line of less than R3500 a month, or \$180 USD.

The current water infrastructure and unequal access was borne out of centuries of dispossession from Black South Africans and capital accumulation privileged for White communities. Important Apartheid-era legislation included the Water Act 54 of 1956, which formalized riparian rights, which was adapted from British laws that directly tied water access to land ownership<sup>20</sup>. As a result of this system, water consumers were reliant on those who owned the land to service them, and left many marginalized Black and Coloured South

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Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living" (2018). [https://www.seri-sa.org/images/Submission\\_Informal-Settlements\\_UNRAPP\\_2018\\_Final.pdf](https://www.seri-sa.org/images/Submission_Informal-Settlements_UNRAPP_2018_Final.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> City of Cape Town. "Five Year Integrated Development Plan: July 2022 – June 2027". (2022), 32.

<sup>19</sup> Republic of South Africa. Census 2022. [https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=1021&id=city-of-cape-town-municipality](https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1021&id=city-of-cape-town-municipality).

<sup>20</sup> Mdunyelwa, Apiwe. "Hydro-politics in South Africa". Environmental Monitoring Group. 2.

Africans with no option but to rely on state servicing, which was highly limited in townships<sup>21</sup>. Instead, the Apartheid state centralized and intensified its control over water resources, and focused on alleviating the “poor White problem” through large-scale investments in water supply for the CBD and forced removals of black and Coloured communities. Water was intentionally diverted for White populations, and weaponized as a method of control and surveillance<sup>22</sup>. By the 1970s, the Apartheid state started to discuss water conservation, but through rhetoric of efficiency and water pricing, stimulated by drought, scarcity, but also high stagflation in the South African economy<sup>23</sup>. Black and Coloured communities were considered wasteful, and through Foucauldian analysis, it’s clear how water users became policed and regulated by the state<sup>24</sup>. Through these processes, end water users had to self-regulate and be hyper-aware of the amount of water they were using so that their meters stayed on and they didn’t accrue debt and subsequent extra policing from the state<sup>25</sup>. In the 1970s, South Africa became an opportunity for capitalist neoliberals to speculate on potential future White power decline and how they could preserve the White hegemonic market order<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Mdunyelwa. “Hydro-politics in South Africa” 2.

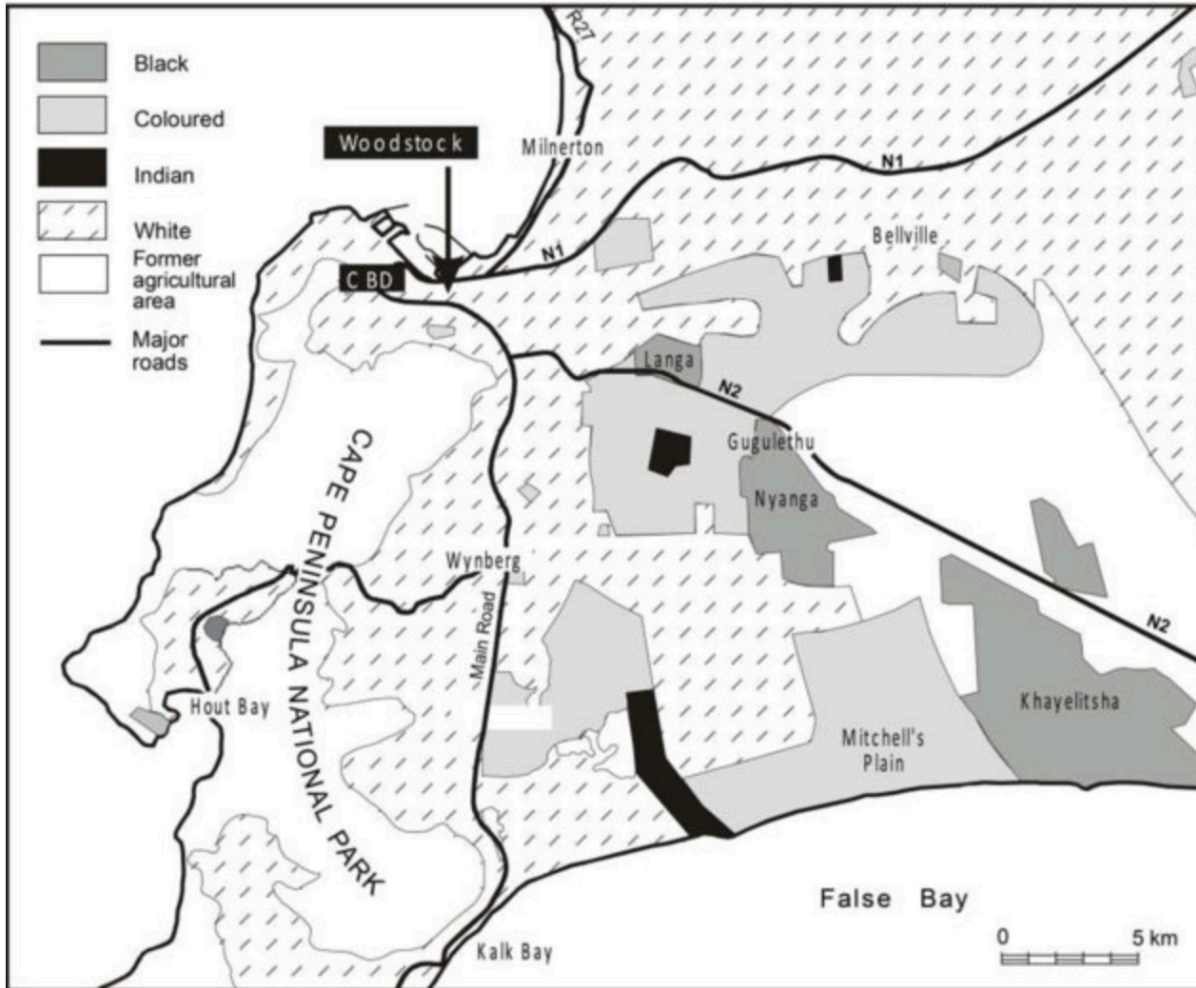
<sup>22</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 192.

<sup>23</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 192.

<sup>24</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 192.

<sup>25</sup> Mehta, Lyla. “Whose scarcity? Whose property? The case of water in western India” *Land Use Policy*, 24: 661. (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2006.05.009>

<sup>26</sup> Phiro, Madalitso Z. “The South African Pandemic of Racial Capitalism”. *The Monthly Review*. 73, no. 5 (2021). <https://monthlyreview.org/2021/10/01/the-south-african-pandemic-of-racial-capitalism/>



Cape Town racial segregation under the Group Areas Act of 1950<sup>27</sup>

The informal settlement of Khayelitsha was established by the apartheid regime in 1983 under the stipulations of the Native Urban Areas Act, and since has expanded to the size of a million people, with many smaller neighborhoods like Nyanga, Mfuleni, Burundi, Blue Downs, Delft, etc., with their own environmental struggles, histories, ward membership, and political affiliations. At the end of Apartheid in 1994, 20% of South Africans lacked access to any form of piped water, and this statistic ranged from 1% to 98% depending on the municipality. The South African state was systemically racist and bigoted, brutally violent at

<sup>27</sup> Houssay-Holzschuch, Myriam & Ninot, Olivier & Thebault, Emma. "Watch this space! A Visual Essay on vacant land in Cape Town." *Cybergeog*. 2018. 10.4000/cybergeog.28974.

times, and built out of a highly patriarchal culture. Neoliberal economic ideas of efficiency and growth implanted on top of this uneven and traumatized society has resulted in both anger about the past, and fears of what capitalist, privatizing governance might come. In the 1980s, townships engaged in service protests and rejected their obligations to pay for severely limited services. In 1986, Cape Town officials (it wouldn't officially become the City of Cape Town until 2000), started to provide public housing for informal settlements, and a result they zoned wetland, and sandy dune land for its poorest citizens to live, only reproducing the same segregatory logic of Apartheid<sup>28</sup>. Increasing global governance rhetoric of human rights and civil liberties reached South Africa during the 1990s, and in its transition to a constitutional democracy, there was optimistic hope that a democratic governance structure would benefit the poor and marginalized<sup>29</sup>. This can be seen in Section 27 of the Constitution, where well-being is progressively extended to include spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of the environment, including “a sense of place” - a right not fully formalized or explained, but optimistically pursued by the new democratic government<sup>30</sup>. The end of Apartheid coincided with a rise in neoliberal economic thought, particularly the desires for a mass-consumption society where Black South Africans could saturate the consumer base and participate in the market economy, and hopefully lift themselves out of difficult financial circumstances.

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<sup>28</sup> Enqvist, Johan P, and Gina Ziervogel. “Water governance and justice in Cape Town: An overview”. *WIREs Water*: 6, no. 4, 4. (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1354>

<sup>29</sup> Jooste, Yvonne. “‘The subaltern can speak’ reflections on voice through the lens of the politics of Jacques Rancière”. LLD Thesis, University of Pretoria. (2015), 12. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/53132>

<sup>30</sup> Mdunyelwa. “Hydro-politics in South Africa” 5.

Under Apartheid, Cape Town had been run by twenty-five separate authorities [eighteen White local authorities (WLAs) and seven Black local authorities (BLAs)], and due to its scattered management, there were no consistent records of water or electricity consumption. Capitalists saw this as a huge opportunity for gains in efficiency and productivity, particularly as all twenty five municipalities were merged into one single tax unit: the City of Cape Town<sup>31</sup>. At this time, many businesses and entities chose to leave the City, after increased taxation in the municipality, and relocated to smaller surrounding cities like Paarl, Stellenbosch, Wellington, and Franschhoek<sup>32</sup>. A highly important decision was made about Khayelitsha simultaneously; it would remain one large “development burden”<sup>33</sup> for the Cape Town City Council, but it shouldn’t be subdivided. Compared to older African townships like Langa, originally established in 1923, Khayelitsha had newer infrastructure, but was passed around by taxpayers, user associations, and the City Council, as various groups tried to deny responsibility for retrenching the inequities of the past. Although the City increased its taxation post-Apartheid, its overall taxation on property rates is limited due to the national ceilings put on local property surcharges<sup>34</sup> and tariffs on businesses are simultaneously too low<sup>35</sup>.

Post-1994 political reforms were full of cries of liberation and the success of *zabalaza*, or struggle. One of African National Congress’ main strategies toward social uplift for South Africa was decentralization, or the empowerment of local government. Municipal

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<sup>31</sup> Macdonald, David. *World City Syndrome: Neoliberalism and Inequality in Cape Town*. Routledge. (2009), 284.

<sup>32</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 268

<sup>33</sup> Local Government Demarcation Board for the Western Cape, “Outer Boundary for the Proposed Cape Transitional Metropolitan Council., Cape Town. 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Republic of South Africa. Constitution, Section 229, 1996

<sup>35</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 268

service delivery, such as water, electricity, sanitation, policing, etc., was seen to be most effective when distributed by the local government, as municipalities were theoretically most in tune with the communities in need of servicing. The new constitution written in 1996 emphasized every citizen's right to access water and sanitation, and the Water Services Act of 1997 specified the roles, regulatory systems, and standards for South Africa's new water governance system. The Free Basic Water policy, passed in 2001, mandated that municipalities provide a daily twenty-five liters per person, at no cost to them and accessible no more than two hundred meters from their homes<sup>36</sup>. This policy was revised in 2007 and 2014, in which the Department of Water Affairs acknowledged the limited infrastructural capacity of municipalities, and re-constituted the Free Basic Water policy to only apply to indigent households<sup>37</sup>. The definition of an "indigent" household is based off of the municipality's poverty threshold which is continuously reviewed by the municipality. In 2020, the CoCT reviewed their policy and introduced the General Valuation Roll, which decreased the number of registered indigent households from 220,796 in 2019 to 197,224 in 2020<sup>38</sup>. The CoCT guarantees 10,500 liters per indigent household per month, and Bulk Water and Sanitation Department (BWSD) Executive Director Michael Webster explained in an interview that residents receive no debt action until 15,000 liters per month, at which point water supply will shut off<sup>39</sup>. The municipal policy on water, sanitation, and hygiene services (WASH) prescribes one toilet for five households, and one tap per twenty-five households, however the material reality of informal settlements is not up to this standard.

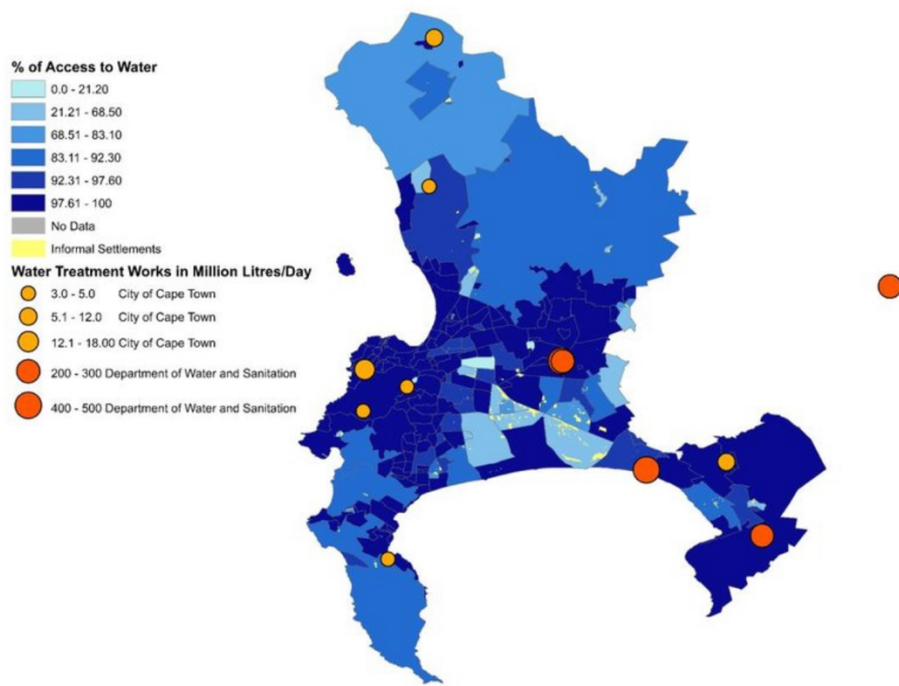
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<sup>36</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 5

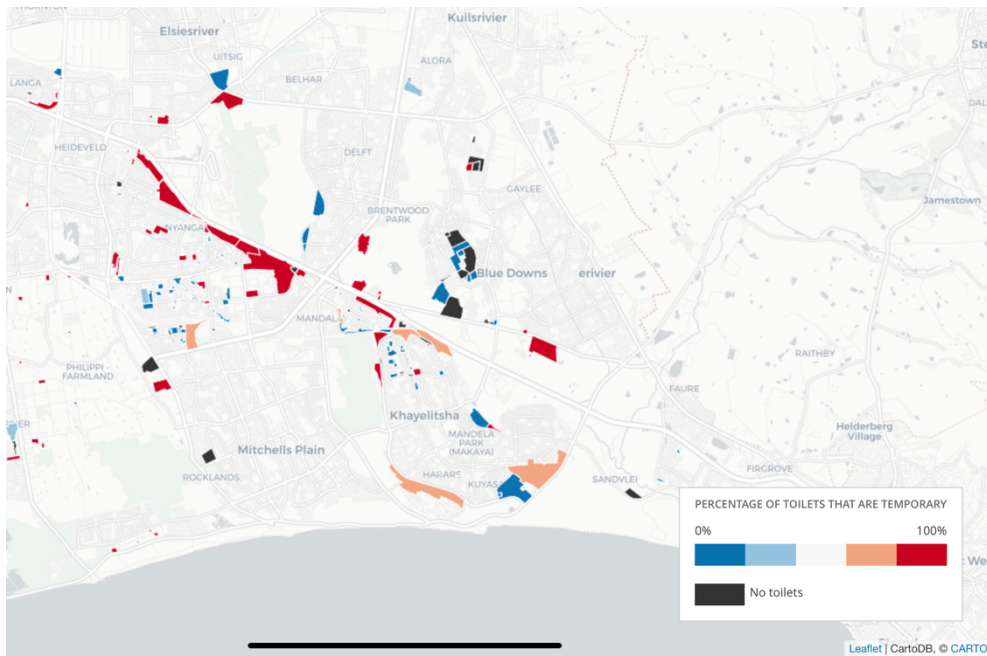
<sup>37</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 5

<sup>38</sup> Western Cape, "Socio-economic Profile", 13.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Webster, interview.



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<sup>40</sup> Currie, Paul & Musango, Josephine & May, Nhlanhla. (2017). Urban metabolism: A review with reference to Cape Town. *Cities*. 70. 91-110. 10.1016/j.cities.2017.06.005.

<sup>41</sup> Cape Town City Viewer. <https://citymaps.capetown.gov.za/EGISViewer/>



Decentralization of water and sanitation servicing was an integral part of South Africa's transition to democratic governance. As a water service provider, the City of Cape Town is required by the Water Services Act of 1997 to plan for water management for current and future needs, including conservation, recycling, supply, and sanitation. The City receives and treats raw water from the Western Cape Water Supply System, and then distributes it around to end users, including households, schools, hospitals, and communal standpipes<sup>42</sup>. The National Water Act of 1998, specifically Act 36, also formalizes a decentralized structure of water governance, also includes a stipulation for compulsory licensing, which requires water users to register and license their personal extractive uses, like boreholes<sup>43</sup> - however, a majority of boreholes are currently not registered in the City<sup>44</sup>. The point of compulsory licensing it to reconsider all water use in an area to reform inequitable access, but private land ownership and property rights limits government oversight into assessing how much is being consumed in the system.

Decentralization was also meant to increase local taxation revenue, and the Municipal Services Act of 2000 stated the duties and obligations of citizens to “promptly pay service fees, surcharges on fees, rates on property and other taxes, levies and duties imposed by the municipality”<sup>45</sup>. The new democratic government was left with a paradoxical task of undoing past trauma with the state, while simultaneously developing technologies of population management to register informal communities. The ability of the state to follow through on postcolonial promises of service delivery were hampered by a growing housing backlog and

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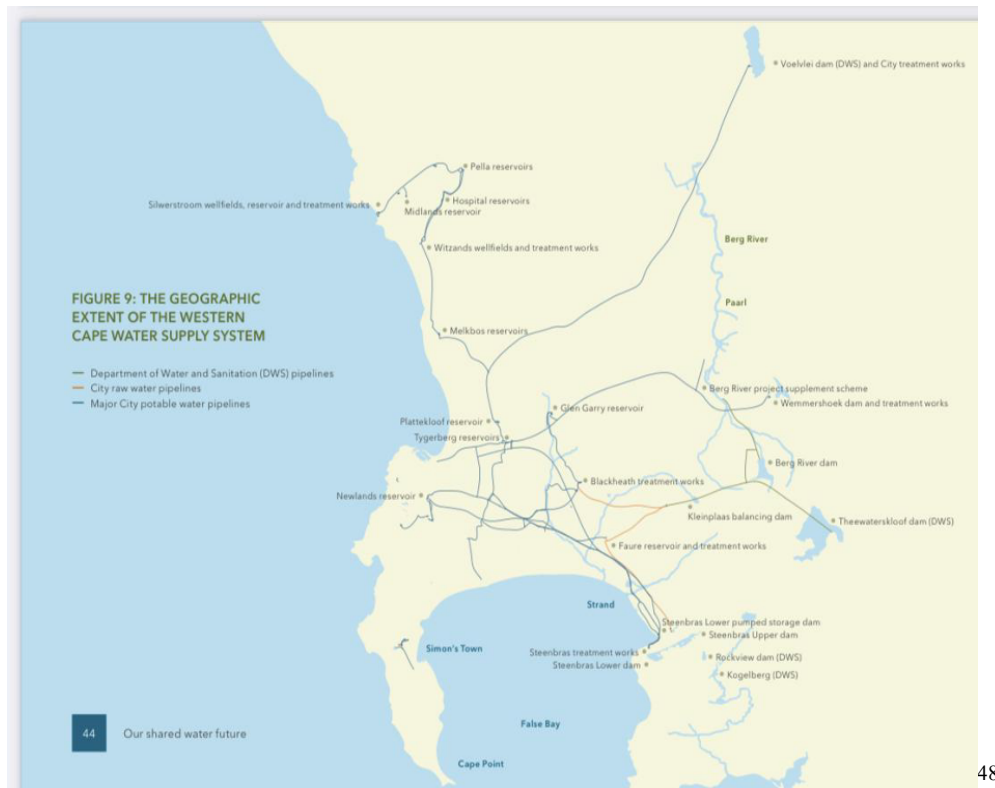
<sup>42</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Mdunyelwa. “Hydro-politics in South Africa” 5.

<sup>44</sup> Groundwater Management Seminar, Water Research Commission, October 17.

<sup>45</sup> Republic of South Africa. Constitution, Section 229, 1996

continuous population increase since 1994<sup>46</sup>. Decentralization has also been hampered by increased political capture at lower levels of government, particularly in service delivery industries, requiring strong relationships of accountability between actors in the service delivery chain<sup>47</sup>.



The Water Act of 1998 specifically laid out how the City of Cape Town was going to fund its Free Basic Water promises, amid financial constraints and lots of questions about integrating its informal settlements into the City’s mandate. The Water Act demonstrated that the City intended to use demand management as its main mechanism to increasing supply, rather than building new dams, reservoirs, or groundwater abstraction infrastructure<sup>49</sup>. The

<sup>46</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmad et al., “Decentralization and Service Delivery”, 2.

<sup>48</sup> City of Cape Town, “Our Shared Water Future”, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 5.

formation of the City of Cape Town, as a metropolitan municipality in 2000, was to enable the redistribution of tax revenue and cost recovery tariffs across the city, and across uneven spaces like the City center, wealthy suburbs, low-income areas, and former townships. The Water Act (1998) reinforced the usage of block tariffs, which incentivized high-end users to pay for the cost of new water sources, and for medium-end users to cover their own costs and those of the indigent users, who were in theory supposed to receive free allotted water daily. This block tariff system became somewhat problematic during the DZD, as water restrictions meant that the City couldn't reap its entire revenue from its wealthy residents. However, this problem only arose due to the lack of capital investment in the years preceding the crisis. While the block tariff system was meant to fund the Free Basic Water policy, it failed to recognize the deeply rooted infrastructural differences between wealthy areas and low-income areas. In informal settlements, a 'household' is not actually constituted by the amount of people that the CoCT prescribes; instead, an informal household often houses extended family members, backyard renters, and their neighbors who rely on them for services when

they are lacking. The informal household is always in flux, sheltering those in need and always looking for opportunities for income <sup>50</sup>and resources.



Inequality in South Africa isn't just between white and black; there are apartheid-era divisions between white, black, colored, and Indian communities that are still in place. This scene shows the divide between Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://unequalscenes.com/more-unequal-scenes>

<sup>51</sup> <https://unequalscenes.com/more-unequal-scenes>



Informal settlements line the edges of the formal section in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa.

The environmental and infrastructural differences between wealthy and poor neighborhoods in Cape Town mean that they cannot both be simultaneously addressed under a cost recovery system. The national government replaced the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 52 of 1951 (PISA), which authorized “the removal of ‘anyone who has entered an African location or village, or anyone who remains on land despite warning to depart’ ”<sup>52</sup> with the Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act 19 of 1998 (PIE Act), which ensured unlawful occupiers or informal settlement residents legal protections against arbitrary eviction<sup>53</sup>. The Apartheid state had made it legal and quite easy to carry out evictions. The 2022 Integrated Development Plan (IDP) defines unlawful land occupation as “a growing phenomenon in South Africa. It is driven by a shortage of well-located affordable housing, rapid urbanisation, low economic growth and the displacement of people, as well as organised groups exploiting the need for housing to generate cash by

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<sup>52</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> SERI, “Informal Settlements and Human Rights in South Africa”, 16.

carrying out unlawful occupations. The speed, scale and impact of unlawful occupations is increasing”<sup>54</sup>. The City wrote in their IDP that by July 2020, 73% (339 hectares) of state-owned and private land in Cape Town was unlawfully occupied.

Water governance is defined as the “set of political, social, economic, and administrative systems that formal and informally control decision-making around water resources development and management”<sup>55</sup>. Liberal ideas of good governance demonstrate a moralistic call for redressing environmental injustices, but the Cape Town water governance sphere has instead been described as using a neoliberal hydro-mentality to limit the scope of its mandate and required servicing.<sup>56</sup> While the post-1994 decentralization reforms intended to equip municipalities with democratic policies, instead local governments were left with the Apartheid-era infrastructure and spatial planning that could not absorb or accommodate continued influxes of people looking for new horizons. South Africa’s inter-provincial relationships can be precarious, particularly that of the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape, particularly as job-seeking migrants continue to arrive in Cape Town looking for employment and shelter.

Under Apartheid, the White Afrikaner government in power in Cape Town consolidated and reserved land, wealth, employment opportunities, and municipal services for White populations. As water activist and leader of African Water Commons Collective Faeza Meyer said “to see Apartheid, you must look underneath the city and look at the pipes, and see where they’re going”<sup>57</sup>. The Cape Flats, a formerly designated Black township area,

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<sup>54</sup> City of Cape Town, Integrated Development Plan, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 191.

<sup>57</sup> Faeza Mayer, 2019, University of Cape Town.

is physically characterized by being low-lying, marshy, silty wetland area, often not suitable for housing, which has been part of the City's ongoing rationale not to provide public housing in many areas there. The Cape Flats was where Black populations were forcibly relocated under Dutch and British colonization, and further entrenched by the more recent Apartheid government. Today, the Cape Flats suffer from high groundwater levels, and extremely limited water infrastructure. With regards specifically to stormwater drainage infrastructure, drains are often lacking or blocked by refuse and wastewater drainage is non-existent<sup>58</sup>. Sanitation conditions are also severely lacking, with portable toilets often locked and controlled by local gangs or wage-seekers.<sup>59</sup> This comes at a particular burden to women who are tasked with providing water to informal households, and must provide water both for the household, and for community toilets that require water for flushing. Due to social reproduction of women's roles as being tied to the household and overall highly constraining patriarchal attitudes toward women, women face often unsurvivable levels of gender-based violence. Women's daily decision-making revolves around their water availability, community and household needs, and the local conditions of safety or insafety. As such, their decision-making is highly constrained and constant vigilance over one's self and one's loved ones is needed, creating a particular emotional burden of fear and worry for women.

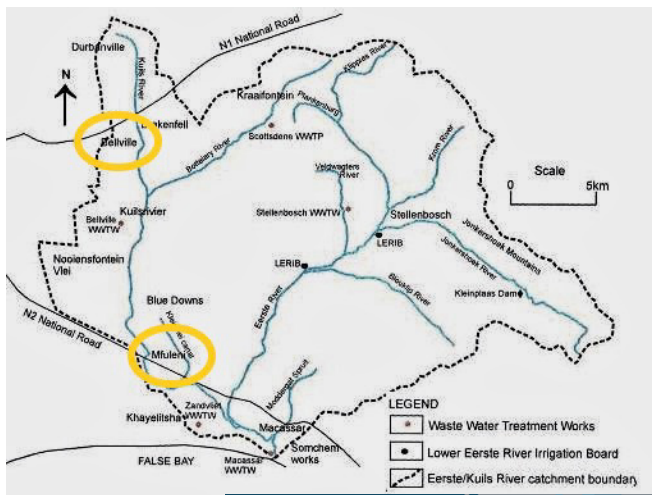
The Kuils River Catchment (KRC) is the area within which many of the informal settlements under-serviced by the City exist. The Kuils River extends from Bellville to its

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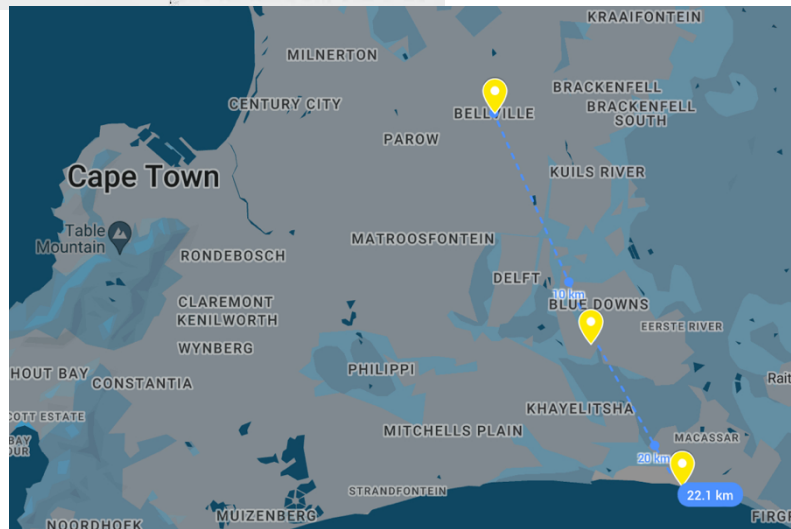
<sup>58</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 6.

<sup>59</sup> Siya Myeza, interview.

output in the Pacific Ocean and irrigates wetlands<sup>60</sup>, small-scale farms, and streams, all essential to household provisioning activities, self-subsistence farming, and the ecological health of the catchment area. On a river walk run by Environmental Monitoring Group, it was highly evident how turbidity, water quality, and ecosystem health was depleted as we entered Khayelitsha area. Due to abstraction of water for irrigation, housing developments, and chemical refineries, water availability for informal settlements is highly questionable, as toxic waste and harmful chemicals pollute the water, and poison residents<sup>61</sup>.



Maps demonstrating the extent of the Kuils River, from Bellville, through Mfuleni, and depositing past Macassar Waste Water Treatment Works.



<sup>60</sup> According to the South African National Water Act, Act No. 36 of 1998, a wetland is defined as “land which is transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or is periodically covered with shallow water”

<sup>61</sup> Mdunyelwa. “Hydro-politics in South Africa” 5.





The origination and starting point of the Kuils River in Bellville. There was abundant space for recreation, breeding area for birds and animals, and low levels of plastic or debris.





Further down the Kuils River, in the Mfuleni informal settlement. The water has stopped flowing, due to the large amount of debris and trash in the water, and the openness of the pipe exposes the water to contaminants, abstraction, and grazing animals.

Informal settlements often name themselves in accordance with the social crisis that brought them there, or inspired their struggle for access. For example, the informal settlement known as “COVID-19” cropped up during the COVID-19 pandemic on Driftsands Nature Reserve, owned by the province of the Western Cape, but specifically run by the agency of Cape Nature. Similarly, Marikana informal settlement, located in Philippi East informal area, was named after the Marikana massacre<sup>62</sup>. Both of these informal settlements have

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<sup>62</sup> Masiangoako, Thato, Kelebogile Khunou, and Alana Potter. “Fighting for water in South Africa: public participation, water rights claiming and strengthening governance.” *H2Open Journal*; 5 (1): 107. (2022). <https://doi.org/10.2166/h2oj.2022.023>

precarious and difficult relations with the City. The Marikana informal settlement experienced violent demolition of homes, unlawful evictions, and continuous visits from the Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU), the South African Police Service (SAPS), and the Cape Town Metropolitan Police Department. When they needed to provide their own supply, Marikana residents bought water from neighboring areas (R50 for 25liters - no small sum), paid for water connections to be installed, flowing from main lines to Marikana's peripheral placement, creating vulnerable infrastructure, and some residents accessed water from natural springs, vulnerable to contaminants, particularly due to the lack of proper toilets. The City continually called the Marikana residents "land invaders", even though this term was disapproved in the Constitutional Court for being judgmental, and held that "occupiers" would be more appropriate<sup>63</sup>. Ultimately, the Marikana land occupiers were taken to court, and after six years of legal battles, the City was ordered to purchase the properties on which Marikana exists and expropriate them from state-subsidized housing<sup>64</sup>. While the City continuously shirked responsibility for the lives and health outcomes of Marikana residents, the legal system recognized the possibility of expropriation as a way to help those without capital or property<sup>65</sup>. Although the lawsuit was settled, the City has failed to purchase the properties and therefore Marikana is still without secure access to services and right to life.

When I asked Executive Director Webster about land invasions, he responded by saying that if they rewarded newly invaded settlements, they would be encouraging illegal land invasion. He also described land invasions as opportunistic politics, linking them to

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<sup>63</sup> Masiangoako et al., "Fighting for water", 107

<sup>64</sup> Masiangoako et al., "Fighting for water", 107

<sup>65</sup> Masiangoako et al., "Fighting for water", 107

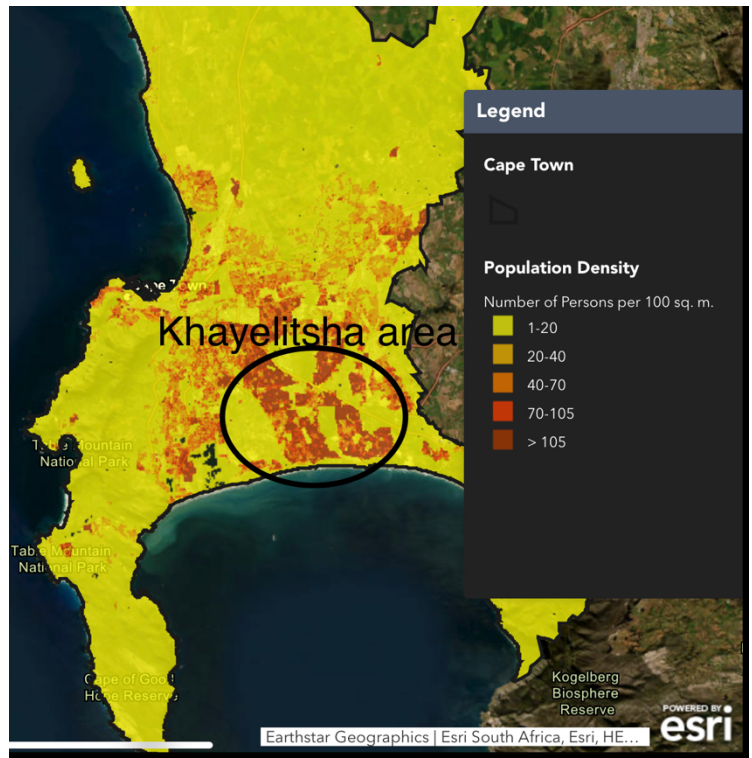
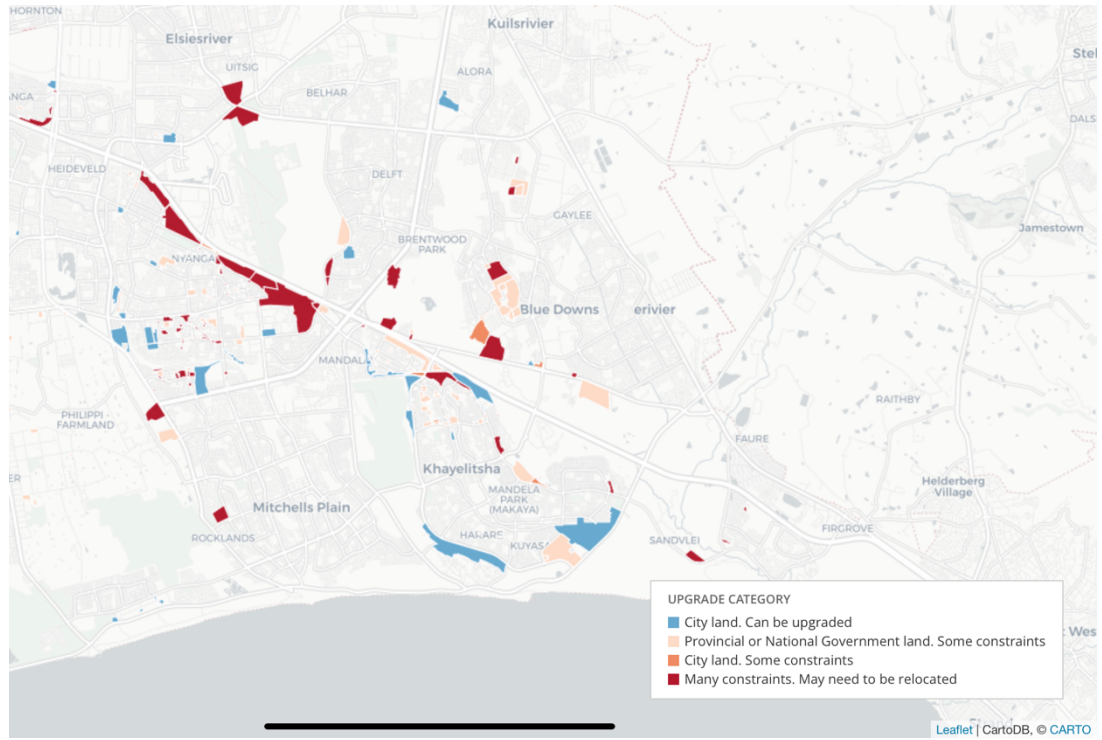
deliberate EFF political strategies. Director Webster also commented on the COVID-19 informal settlement, describing the 11,000 shacks that were built on a storm-water detention dam, which he had no choice but to remove and provide alternative housing for. He also elaborated on the difficulties of decentralization, and the shifting responsibilities between the national government, provincial government, and City of Cape Town. He commented,

**“ The complication for me is we have a dam on that piece of land, which is an important piece of stormwater retention plant so it provides drainage, protection facilities downstream of the Kuils River, so for Nyanga and Gugulethu. If that dam doesn’t function, then storm events will worsen people’s impacts down the stream. And of the 12,000 shacks, there’s a significant number on the dam wall and in the impounded area, which is impacting the functioning of the dam. So I have a responsibility to maintain the dam and make sure that our protection happens and I need the province to be able to move those people or do something with them in order to maintain the dam. And so now what the province wants is to give the land to the City.”** <sup>66</sup>

He sees his responsibility moreso to maintain the City’s infrastructure, rather than provide housing or servicing for the people without access.

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Webster, interview



<sup>67</sup> <https://www.esri-southafrica.com/coct-open-data-portal/>

<sup>68</sup> Cape Town City Viewer. <https://citymaps.capetown.gov.za/EGISViewer/>

## Day Zero Drought as an Example of Social Crisis

The Day Zero drought deepened the distrust between informal settlements and the City of Cape Town, due to the high burdens of water restrictions and cutoffs on those with minimal previous access. Trust is an essential part of democratic governance, particularly when it comes to the delivery of life-affirming services and resources like water, sanitation, and other services, at times when citizens are in dire need. During periods of high resource stress, difficult decisions must be made amid uncertain environmental conditions like drought and climate change, which make future resource security somewhat unknowable <sup>69</sup>.

Therefore, governments must rely on trust from its citizens that it will ask in their best interest in the face of crisis. However, the City has a long history of marginalizing its citizens as collateral damage for the economic opportunities of the City, particularly goals that invite tourists and support world-making goals of the City. For example, the 2010 World Cup, hosted in South Africa, was incentive to remove hundreds of “street people” to the Blikkiesdorp relocation camp<sup>70</sup>. A common rhetoric from Cape Town’s informal residents was that they have been living in Day Zero conditions, with water scarcity, with very little alarm and concern from the city government<sup>71</sup>. But, when water scarcity came at an *economic* cost to the City, and to its world reputation as a suitable travel destination, the City quickly moved to recuse itself as a water-scarce city. The direct cause of the Day Zero Drought, was a 3-year long drought starting in 2015, where the City of Cape Town

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<sup>69</sup> Eberhard, “Building Urban Resilience”, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Sacks, “Independent monitor report”.

<sup>71</sup> African Water Commons Collective meeting, August 3.

experienced both dry, hot summers and low-precipitation winters, particular in 2017 when Cape Town experienced record-breaking low rainfall <sup>72</sup>.

Although this record-low rainfall was estimated only to occur once every 311 years, the City of Cape had the technical expertise, environmental knowledge, and social awareness to implement water conservation and supply augmentation schemes much earlier than they did. For example, the City made specific decisions in the years leading up to the Day Zero drought not to augment its municipal water supply. A study of the WCWSS conducted in 2007, led by the national Department of Water Affairs, found that without any demand reduction, and a continued increase in water demand, the Western Cape would need to intervene by 2011 to continue to have its needed water supply <sup>73</sup>. However, instead of engaging in supply augmentation, following the recommendations of the national government, the City instead suggested further research on desalination schemes and abstraction of groundwater from the Table Mountain Aquifer, both supply-related initiatives but not to the extent or with the speed necessary to avoid the water shortages that stemmed from the 2015 - 2017 years of drought. A 2009 report noted that “a decision to fast track some of these [supply interventions] will need to be made by 2011 should climate change become a reality or should the [City] be less successful with [water demand management] than what is expected from the implementation of [its strategy].” <sup>74</sup> However, despite this urgent assertion for supply augmentation and successful studies that indicated that the Berg

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<sup>72</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Eberhard, “Building Urban Resilience”, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Eberhard, “Building Urban Resilience”, 12.

River-Voëlvlei Augmentation Scheme was the best option, it took the City two years to appoint a service provider to conduct the environmental impact assessment process <sup>75</sup>.

The period leading up to the drought was marked by slow decision-making, slow implementation of decisions, and ultimately, resulted in demand management and reduction being the only possible method of water conservation for the City. The City was self-aware enough to know that their slow decision-making, and reliance on its citizens to self-regulate was going to be controversial - the Deputy Mayor Neilsen commented “this wasn’t a popular political message”. The emotional temperature of the City officials in charge with managing water governance was heavily influenced by the fact that in the time in which the City of Cape Town was encouraged to increase its supply, there were years of heavy rainfall that actually caused the dams to overflow, specifically in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2014 <sup>76</sup>. But the City also had examples of drought and water scarcity intermixed, particularly in 2005 when the dams reached as low as 22% - a similar level seen in the DZD . The City government was managing both a 46% reduction in average dam inflows over the course of three years, but also public opinion about the City’s technocratic failures. At the DZD’s peak magnitude, residents were required to reduce their water usage to 50L per person per day, which is the minimum level of water usage to sustain health and safety levels as given by the WHO <sup>77</sup>.

Managing public opinion is one of the most obvious examples of how city officials are responsible both for the neoliberal, modern processes of disenfranchisement, but also the

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<sup>75</sup> Eberhard, “Building Urban Resilience”, 12.

<sup>76</sup> Eberhard, “Building Urban Resilience”, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Visser, M. And J. Bruhl.. “The Cape Town Drought - Lessons Learned About the Impact of Policy Instruments in Curbing Water Demand in a Time of Crisis”. Draft Working Paper, University of Cape Town (2019), 21.



historical inequities and wrongdoings of past Cape Town governments. However, the Democratic Alliance (DA) party continuously assumes a defensive stance against its citizenry, particularly through how it engages with informal settlement residents, or through the eyes of the DA: African National Congress (ANC) voting blocs. Simultaneously, informal settlement residents view the City as creating scarcity for their communities, resulting in state-constructed scarcity, and this viewpoint was incredibly deepened by the DZD. The fact that the City went on to win awards from the International Water Association for achieving a 55% reduction in water demand between 2015 and 2017, during the main years of the drought <sup>78</sup>, further deepens the sense that the City cares more about its appearance than its citizens. In informal settlements, residents feared that the CoCT was moving toward broader water privatization policies, particularly due to the imposition of water management devices (WMDs) in indigent households, in exchange for their free basic water allocation <sup>79</sup>. Many feared water management devices, rightfully so, because the technology for the WMDs was faulty and often overcharged indigent households, and left poor citizens with very few resources with high debts to the City, creating a system of debt insecurity for informal settlements. As a result, WMDs further pulled informal communities into the City's legalistic and neoliberal logic of governance, and further distanced the City from dealing directly with informal communities, as the City mostly subcontracts its water-related projects and activities, which impedes direct communication between the City and its residents <sup>80</sup>. WMDs are no longer a part of the City's current water provisioning, and were eliminated

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<sup>78</sup> Eberhard, "Building Urban Resilience", 23.

<sup>79</sup> Visser and Bruhl, "The Cape Town Drought", 15.

<sup>80</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 5.

from servicing policy in 2021 but have contributed to growing fears of water privatization, which Capetonians are well aware would benefit capitalist entities and not residents themselves. Fears of privatization are infantilized by the DA government, despite their highly pro-privatization manifesto that calls for “accelerated privatisation”, “real incentives for private sector involvement”, “commercialised municipal service”, “Public-Private Partnerships”, “Outsourcing” and even outright “Privatisation”, concluding that a “municipality may stand to benefit from relieving itself of certain responsibilities”<sup>81</sup>. Despite the DA’s economic stance being highly business friendly and market-oriented, and having led a chaotic program of water monitoring devices in informal settlements, the City simultaneously denies having any intention to privatize water<sup>82</sup>. The City is highly involved in local processes of capital accumulation and devalorization of real estate, particularly in area like Woodstock, CBD, and V&A Waterfront, for real estate developers to buy property, and raise prices, and create what Neil Smith calls “gentrification frontiers”<sup>83</sup>. These places are often connected to ideas of criminality, such as sites like notorious ‘problem buildings’, one of which being Senator Park in the CBD.

### The Democratic Authority and Neoliberal Governance

While the City of Cape Town accumulates awards for its good governance, effective service delivery, and efficient cost recovery, its citizenry is completely disconnected from

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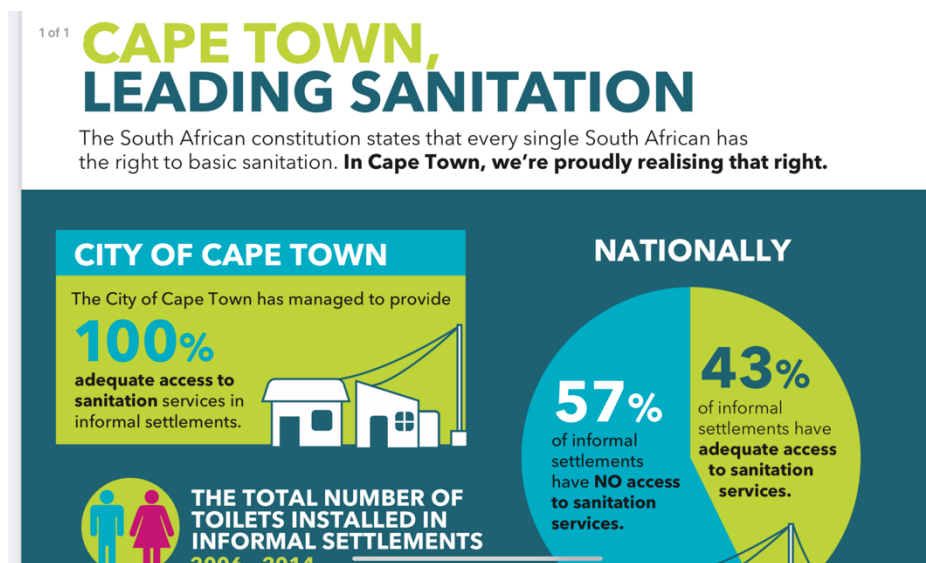
<sup>81</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 260

<sup>82</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 265

<sup>83</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 20.

these touted municipal services. In 2021, the City of Cape Town released an infographic, claiming that “100% of it’s City had access to adequate sanitation”<sup>84</sup>, grossly overstating the access to sanitation and delivery actually being lived in informal settlements like Khayelitsha, where approximately 17.5 average families are using a single portable toilet<sup>85</sup>.

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The City of Cape Town governance, and more specifically the City Council and executive Mayor, is dominated by the Democratic Alliance (DA) party. This party relies upon a Western-style form of governance and policy-making, utilizing principles of world-making, visual aesthetics of cleanliness and sanitation, and overall neoliberal economic

<sup>84</sup> City of Cape Town, “Cape Town, Leading Sanitation”, [https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Graphics%20and%20educational%20material/Cape%20Town%20Leading%20Sanitation%20\(PDF\).pdf](https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Graphics%20and%20educational%20material/Cape%20Town%20Leading%20Sanitation%20(PDF).pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Gonsalves, Gregg S., Kaplan Edward H, and David A. Paltiel. “Reducing Sexual Violence by Increasing the Supply of Toilets in Khayelitsha, South Africa: A Mathematical Model.” *PLOS One*. 10(4): e0122244. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0122244>

<sup>86</sup> City of Cape Town, “Cape Town, Leading Sanitation”

policies that can not adequately redress the trauma of Cape Town’s history. Neoliberal economic policies, espoused by the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, and IMF, some of the most significant advisors to the City of Cape Town, hinge on limited government expenditure for social services, and push municipalities, particularly those in the Global South, to use economic mechanisms to recover the City’s spending and costs. By the 1970s, amid global sanctions on trade with South Africa, the economy started to stagnate, culminating in the closing of the stock market and a series of bailouts by the IMF, drawing South Africa into an indebted relationship with the IMF. South Africa was heavily influenced by the Washington Consensus, and neoliberal economic reform in the 1990s, as the City looked to alleviate historical inequities with capitalist, market-oriented principles - geared toward bettering South Africa’s global economic reputation, but not its internal stratification<sup>87</sup>. Many of its civil servants were educated under capacity-building programmes funded by the World Bank, USAID, DFID, and UNDP<sup>88</sup>. The 1990s marked a shift from the 1980s concerns of “militaristic ‘securocrats’”<sup>89</sup>, and toward economic bureaucrats, or “econocrats”<sup>90</sup> from the Treasury and central bank<sup>91</sup>. They espoused ideas of cost recovery and privatization as mechanisms toward decreasing inequality, and focused on liberalizing Cape Town’s economy, which incentivized pro-market policies like the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategies. GEAR uses neoliberal logics like “willing seller, willing buyer” for important land redistribution reforms, which reflected the limited

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<sup>87</sup> Didier, Sophie, Marianne Morange and Elisabeth Peyroux. “The Adaptive Nature of Neoliberalism at the Local Scale: Fifteen Years of City Improvement Districts in Cape Town and Johannesburg”. *Antipode*, 45. (2013). DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.00987.x

<sup>88</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 240

<sup>89</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 108.

<sup>90</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 108.

<sup>91</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 108.

promises of democratization and post-Apartheid housing options<sup>92</sup>. The neoliberal American think-tank known as the Urban Foundation advised the South African government grant program called the Independent Development Trust, which used a World Bank poverty alleviation logic called a “less is more model”<sup>93</sup>.

Ongoing inter-political conflict and disagreement with the Democratic Alliance and the African National Congress has consequences for the people of Cape Town. For example, in the decision-making leading up to the Day Zero drought, the City of Cape Town government felt that they could not rely on the national government to help with supply augmentation, due to its constrained financial resources and political disagreement<sup>94</sup>. With regard to the DZD, the City accused the national Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) of not enforcing enough restrictions on the agricultural sector in 2016 and 2017, because the national government manages the Western Cape Water Supply System (WCWSS). Despite not having a legal mandate over the surface water and groundwater in the WCWSS, the CoCT assumed responsibility for solving the crisis, although at that point there was no possible option for supply augmentation, other than last-minute attempts to develop desalination schemes<sup>95</sup>. DWS eventually stepped in in early 2018 to enforce water restrictions on the agricultural sector, only when the crisis reached its peak magnitude<sup>96</sup>. Qualitative studies showed that while supply augmentation was a better overall form of climate preparedness, people were most influenced to reduce their water usage by the panic

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<sup>92</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 96.

<sup>93</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 115.

<sup>94</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 200

<sup>95</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 11.

<sup>96</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 7.

and chaos from Day Zero, as well as from social pressure related to how much water their neighbors were saving<sup>97</sup>. Decisions about water reductions was largely a class concern; in low-income households, tariffs were a stronger motivating factor, but in higher-income households, citizens were motivated by social pressures and ideas of civil duties<sup>98</sup>. Inter-political conflict is and will be problematic in South Africa due to the need for intergovernmental fiscal transfers to fund service delivery at the municipal level.

The City of Cape Town government utilizes neoliberal economic principles that are not geared toward benefitting Cape Town's poor. These economic principles are geared toward municipalities being as efficient with their expenditure as possible. However, when it comes to water-related efficiency: as water use becomes more efficient, the possibility for further reductions in use becomes more difficult. As a result, highly efficient water systems are vulnerable to drought and environmental shocks, and cannot quickly cut high-end users or institute restrictions. The UN, an institution that commonly espouses ideas of decentralization and municipal efficiency, even says "even with improved efficiency, it is likely that subsidies will continue to be important for achieving universal coverage. Because subsidies are most often linked to capital expenditures and those are most often focused on relatively well-off communities, the non-poor have often been the beneficiaries of subsidy interventions intended to reach the poor"<sup>99</sup>. This shows the paradoxical relationship of efficiency and government expenditure; governments must spend money on large capital investments to reduce the service cost of water for the consumer. However, this predicates

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<sup>97</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 8.

<sup>98</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, "Water governance", 8.

<sup>99</sup> UNESCO, "World Water", 6.

that governments are acting on behalf of the poor, which has not historically been the case in Cape Town, which requires an acknowledgement of the historical embeddedness of Apartheid and physical disconnection from servicing. The UN goes on to say that “If, to meet affordability and equity objectives, subsidies are to be delivered through water tariffs, then vouchers or cash distribution might be better than an increasing block tariff (IBT).”, which directly conflicts with Cape Town’s current model of cost recovery <sup>100</sup>. Cape Town’s current model for its block tariffs, is that its cost increases with its volumetric amount.

The DZD showed the CoCT will rely on its citizens for demand reduction in times of crisis, but while it strives for efficiency and limited subsidy, it is not adequately equipping its residents with resources to be good stewards of water conservation. The DZD also showed that on the user-end, the wealthy can leave the municipal service grid by choice and out of convenience, opting during the drought to buy large quantities of bottled water, install personal boreholes, and cut extravagant water-uses like swimming pools, car washing, or garden watering. But, asking poor residents to reduce their water consumption is extremely overburdensome, as many informal communities are already without consistent municipal service delivery and subsist everyday on drought-level water availability. Self-subsistence is a choice for wealthy communities, whereas in informal settlements, it is their exclusion from municipal mandate that requires them to find alternative sources of water.

The differences in income levels between wards results in highly burdensome work for ward councilors from low-income wards <sup>101</sup>. For example, in low-income wards, there is

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<sup>100</sup>Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 8.

<sup>101</sup>Naidoo, Vinothan. “Localising democracy on an uneven playing field: the roles of ward councillors in the City of Cape Town.”

*Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 24: 40 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.vi24.7065>

widespread discontent about service backlogs, and councilors can be financially or physically targeted. In recent years, there has been an increase in councilors being killed for local discontent <sup>102</sup>. The decentralized structure of the South African government meant that democratic participation is promoted in local ward spaces. Ward councilors feel increasingly disadvantaged in local governance due to the lack of access to information, resources, and documentation, particularly with service programmes - one of the main sources of discontent amongst low-income wards <sup>103</sup>. Local ward councillors also sometimes hesitate to work with activists because they feel their authority could be challenged around local issues like service delivery. Due to the managerial role that Cape Town assumes with regard to water servicing, it consequently centralizes and legitimizes the hierarchy of those with decision-making power, and those who are homogenized into the community. They become caught between obligations to employers and 'above' and their commitments to their community. The local government system also was intended to increase public participation, but it had pre-prescribed ideas about participation and a predetermined policy agenda, highly influenced by Western, liberal ideas about governance.

Today, there are limited spaces and opportunities for participation on municipal policies, and usually are seen at the ward level, where the local councilor must bear the brunt of complaints. The City continuously claims people are able to participate by commenting on their policies, rather than broad-based public discussion. After years of struggle against Apartheid, people are generally exhausted of participating in local politics and continuously

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<sup>102</sup> Naidoo, "Localising Democracy", 21.

<sup>103</sup> Naidoo, "Localising Democracy", 43.



fighting for representation; they are suffering from so-called “participatory fatigue”<sup>104</sup>. Similarly, after Apartheid, many communities that were previously heavily mobilized and united against Apartheid lost their communal identity and instead splintered as they vied for housing and services<sup>105</sup>. Today, the formal channels for public participation are not clear, highly inaccessible and increasingly technologically dependent, and limited in terms of genuine city engagement<sup>106</sup>. When I asked BWSD Executive Director Webster, he explained it as the government being clumsy and bad at dealing with community engagements, brushing over an essential part of local government. The prescribed form of public participation means that popular struggles and social movements become absorbed and re-formulated by the state, particularly by the groups who often try to avoid the state most. The paradox exists in Cape Town that the more people are disenfranchised and reproduce their lives without state support, they develop alternative strategies and means of connection. For example, people sometimes illegally connect to electrical wiring, or water pipes, but predominantly those who have no other options for receiving essential services<sup>107</sup>. These groups often become labeled as land invaders or land occupiers by the City of Cape Town, but as demonstrated in *Delivery as Dispossession* by Zachary Levinson, the City has differential treatment toward informal communities. Levinson argues that by delivering state housing, the state legitimized its ability to relocate, or in some cases just raze, Black and

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<sup>104</sup> Lemanski, Charlotte. “Houses without community: problems of community (in)capacity in Cape Town, South Africa”. University of Cape Town. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0956247808096119>, 407.

<sup>105</sup> Thabo Lusithi, Interview.

<sup>106</sup> Siya Myeza, interview.

<sup>107</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 26.

Coloured communities<sup>108</sup>. Levinson explains that the “formal rationality of the waiting list constrains residents to wait their turn for housing”<sup>109</sup>, rather than communities being able to freely relocate due to overcrowding, poor health and sanitation, and environmental hazards.

Through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) the South African government has delivered approximately four million homes since 1994, but the idea that the City is an effective distributor of housing is a bit of a falsehood, as the average waiting period for a home from the City is sixty years currently<sup>110</sup> Levinson demonstrates how in the case of the Siqualo informal settlement, which self-organized and identified as a fused, collective group, because they had dealt with the state previously and realized that they needed a strong ethos of demanding recognition and property. Levinson compares the treatment of the Siqualo informal settlement to that of Kapteinsklip, which alternatively was seen as individual families and a non-organized group of land occupiers; a group that the City was less interested and able to engage with on a diplomatic and negotiatory level<sup>111</sup>. The High Court saw Siqualo as a “legible collective”<sup>112</sup> and not “opportunists”<sup>113</sup>, which is sometimes how the courts and City characterized land occupations. The head of public housing in the City’s Department of Human Settlements described the problem by saying “We [are] paying for people,” . . . “You can imagine how they abuse the system. They will benefit from a house [when] they sell it or they rent it out, and they go and sit in an informal

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<sup>108</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 17

<sup>112</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 160.

<sup>113</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 62.

settlement.”<sup>114</sup> This commentary expressed often by the DA toward informal communities lacks consideration to the fact that acquiring an income is highly important to people, housing is still being circulated and provided, and often residents receive homes far from where they work and previously lived, making moving difficult. Levinson explains that because the Kapteinsklip informal settlement was on public land the Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU) and South African Police Service (SAPS) had no problem removing residents with rubber bullets and water cannons<sup>115</sup>.

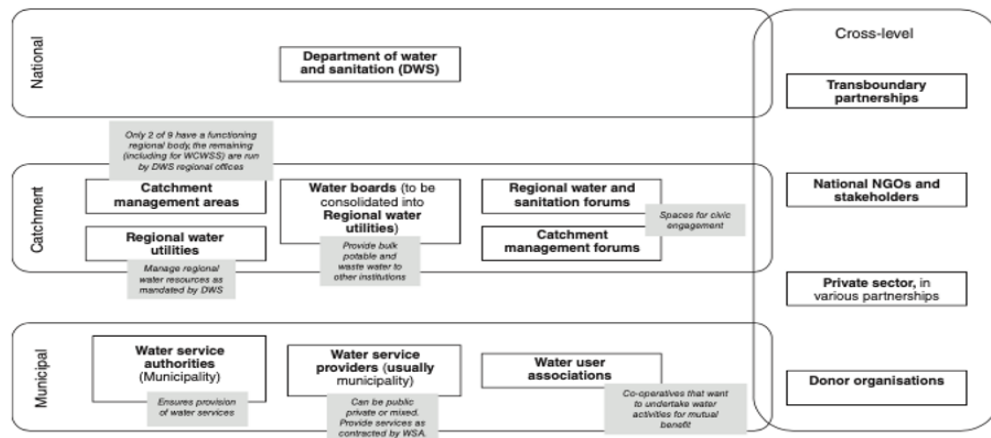
Within the City of Cape Town’s government, there are different departments delegated with managing the City’s services, the most relevant of which for water servicing being the City’s Bulk Water and Sanitation Department, and the Human Settlements Department. These two departments are significantly interconnected and interdependent. In my observations of the Cape Town City Council, Mayoral Committee, and the Bulk Water and Sanitation Department, which included attending meetings at the Civic Centre, interviewing city officials and councilors, it was clear that the legislative processes utilized legalistic and technocratic mechanisms for policy-making. As a result, the water governance space was devoid of compassion and consideration to the material realities that were being experienced by millions of Capetonians in its informal settlements. At the Bulk Water and Sanitation Portfolio Committee (BWSPC) meeting on November 3, 2022, the Chair, Ian Neilsen reminded councilors that the BWSPC must follow the Human Settlements policy on who is entitled to services, which differentiates between legal settlements and illegal land occupations. The history of land ownership in Cape Town however, and minimal post-

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<sup>114</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 66.

<sup>115</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 80.

Apartheid land repatriation, has resulted in extremely small legally occupiable spaces for poor Capetonians, particularly considering the large influx of economic migrants from the Eastern Cape<sup>116</sup>. However, the City government has an apathetic and ambivalent response to rural-urban migration, particularly that of the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape<sup>117</sup> Below is the political breakdown of the councilors on the BWSPC, and clearly shows the strong DA presence. City officials have described themselves as having “transformation fatigue” since 1994. Following the initial transition to democracy many civil servants took early retirement, and those who remained complained of “unbundling”, or the tedious process of municipal decentralization.



**FIGURE 2** Key agencies and organizations involved at different levels of water governance in South Africa. (Adapted from Beck et al., 2016 and Pengelly et al., 2017)

118

<sup>116</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, Prologue.

<sup>117</sup> Rodina, Lucy and Leila Harris. “Water Services, Lived Citizenship, and Notions of the State in Marginalised Urban Spaces: The case of Khayelitsha, South Africa”. *Water Alternatives* 9, no 2: 345, (2016).

<sup>118</sup> Enqvist and Ziervogel, “Water governance”, 6.

<b>WATER AND SANITATION Chairperson: Ald I Neilson – DA</b>	
Cllr G Peck	DA
Ald A J G Basson	DA
Cllr A M Benadie	DA
Cllr R Davids	DA
Ald C Jordaan	DA
Cllr C Kobeni	DA
Ald X Limberg	DA
Cllr D Nelson	DA
Cllr C B Punt	DA
<i>Vacant</i>	DA
Cllr C L Visser	DA
Cllr A Lansdowne	DA
Cllr L A Gungxe	ANC
Cllr T Mpengezi	ANC
Cllr S Nodliwa	ANC
Cllr L Mazwi	EFF
Cllr L Benga	GOOD
Cllr G P Marais	FF PLUS
<i>Vacant</i>	CCC
Cllr P Hendricks	PA
Cllr M Mabungani	ACDP
Cllr B B Maqungwana	UDM
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>
Committee Support: Melany Levendall Tel: 400-3542 Melany.Levendall@capetown.gov.za	

119

The responsibility of the City of Cape Town’s BWSD is formalized in its 2022/2023 Budget which states: “no monthly domestic basic free allocation is granted to consumers supplied outside the City’s area of jurisdiction”<sup>120</sup> As previously mentioned, through the decentralized structure of South Africa’s governance, the City is given its right and duty to service its citizens by its national government. But, the City must then determine by which department and through what mechanisms it will deliver these constitutionally enshrined services. In the case of Cape Town, the Human Settlements Department is responsible for writing policy related to who is legally entitled to South Africa’s public services, which

<sup>119</sup> City of Cape Town, <https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Forms,%20notices,%20tariffs%20and%20lists/MEMBERSHIP%20LIST%20-%20ALL%20COUNCIL%20COMMITTEES.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> City of Cape Town, Tariff Policy, 28.

immediately raises questions about citizenship, civil liberties and human rights, land ownership and access, and other ongoing questions about how to safely and sustainably live in Cape Town. The policy given by Human Settlements immediately limits the scope of people who are legally eligible for services and outlines the social factors that the CoCT deems as illegal, and non-legitimate. Those who are illegally occupying private or state land are considered to be land invaders and not within the legal provisioning of the BWSD. Human Settlements Mayoral Committee member Malusi Booi warned those looking for RDP or state housing to avoid “anti-social behavior”, including drug use, gang activity, or alternative sources of electrical/water connection <sup>121</sup>. Sometimes when water access is cut, people will illegally connect to running main pipes, and the state loses water and resources; therefore, informality needs to be recognized broadly and consistent access must be provided because people will continue to fight for their livelihoods by illegal connections instead of succumbing to thirst<sup>122</sup>.

The history of land ownership in Cape Town has created a geographic enigma for both people looking for opportunities and livelihoods, and for the policy-makers trying to alleviate Cape Town’s environmental and water-related problems. From 1994 to 2012, Cape Town’s population increased by 46% <sup>123</sup>, and today the BWSD serves 4.2 million people <sup>124</sup>. Overall, Cape Town’s legally recognized informal settlements constitute only 5% of total

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<sup>121</sup> Friedman, Barbara. “‘Anti-social behavior’ may exclude you from City’s rental homes – Malusi Booi”. 2020. [https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/389456/anti-social-behaviour-may-exclude-you-from-city-s-rental-homes-malusi-booi?fbclid=IwAR3V8o\\_Imp0Sg34ooACWkxRggL9xWDqc4W886moWIRL41HF0Kf3TiemHKcU](https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/389456/anti-social-behaviour-may-exclude-you-from-city-s-rental-homes-malusi-booi?fbclid=IwAR3V8o_Imp0Sg34ooACWkxRggL9xWDqc4W886moWIRL41HF0Kf3TiemHKcU)

<sup>122</sup> Siya Myeza, Interview

<sup>123</sup> Visser and Bruhl, “The Cape Town Drought”, 3.

<sup>124</sup> City of Cape Town, “Our Shared Water Future: Cape Town’s Water Strategy”, 2019, <https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/City%20strategies%2c%20plans%20and%20frameworks/Cape%20Town%20Water%20Strategy.pdf>, 59.

CoCT use <sup>125</sup>. In many ways, the CoCT is an active agent in maintaining and enabling scarcity, which was strongly noticed and protested during the DZD. This *state-constructed scarcity* is seen through the provisioning and prioritizing of private households and wineries in terms of maintaining old riparian water rights and ignoring the strong need for redistribution of resources and updating of water infrastructure. Generally but especially in times of scarcity, the state is seen as the most legitimate provider of limited resources and services. However, the legacies of Apartheid still exist physically in the pipes underneath the City, where the infrastructure has not been updated to reflect the optimism of democratic participation. The limited network of pipes heading out of the center of the City, and into the Cape Flats, are highly indicative of intentional disconnection from municipal services, and moreover, intentional suppression of Black and Coloured communities in the CBD. This is particularly related to the City of Cape Town's priorities, and for whom they are preparing and servicing the City for: tourists, wealthy consumers and investors, and moreover, those who produce capital and wealth for the City - not homeless, unhoused communities who wake up everyday in a city they are unwanted in.

The state formalizes itself and concretizes itself through its infrastructure, and differentiates itself from society through its mandates for governance, and what has been described as "human technologies of rule", particularly through the City's use of water management devices<sup>126</sup>. Through this state-constructed scarcity, where informal households were highly limited in the DZD and wealthy households were subjected to mostly social pressures to reduce water use rather than City-installed a management devices, reflects

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<sup>125</sup> City of Cape Town, "Our Shared Water Future", 21.

<sup>126</sup> Rodina and Harris, "Water Services", 340.

differential treatment of communities in Cape Town. Some scholars suggest that the CoCT has an interest in promoting scarcity for various reasons, including saving money, meeting demand, and promoting water conservation, and using this logic of resilience which is highly devoid of human compassion, to justify payment for water, minimal servicing, and ongoing cutoffs when there is so-called *water abuse*. Moreover, residents are experiencing scarcity, and seeing it as state-constructed scarcity, whether or not its intended by the government, and are reacting to it, because they see the government's formalization of water services as a way of commodifying a resource that should be free. This tension between the right to water, the right to life, and the right to reproduce oneself everyday, and the priorities of the CoCT directly conflict, because the City uses market-based, neoliberal logic for water governance. The Free Basic Water policy is constitutionally progressive, but in material reality, reproduces the same interests of transnational and foreign capital, rather than the poor.

Scarcity is both physically and environmentally real, but simultaneously constructed and facilitated by the state or municipality. The state has an interest in separating itself from the problem of scarcity, and recusing itself as a potential creator or participant in human-induced climate change, or environmental disasters like the DZD. Manufactured or state-constructed scarcity has become universalized or naturalized, despite it being a result of structural sources that are politically determined <sup>127</sup>. There is a history of resource scarcity in Cape Town, originally facilitated by colonizing Dutch and British envoys, but maintained and streamlined with capitalism by the Apartheid government. A declining resource base, created through capitalist extraction of South African resources, has created violent resource

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<sup>127</sup> T. F. Homer-Dixon, *"The Environment, Scarcity and Violence"*.



conflict and capture, where local power holders would maintain power by “pointing to resources in neighboring townships and informal settlements and mobilizing their communities to seize them”<sup>128</sup> Historically, the state has used to scarcity of essential resources to argue for its own legitimacy, arguing for the need to carefully allocate property and monitor its use, reinforcing the municipality as a benevolent entity, when in reality its influenced by power structures and social biases like other institutions <sup>129</sup>. Moreover, scarcity is used as a governing device and a guiding principle<sup>130</sup>, particularly since the 1990s when environmental issues became highly sensationalized, globalized, and securitized <sup>131</sup>. Swyngedouw (2009) explains that “true scarcity does not reside in the physical absence of water in most cases, but in the lack of monetary resources and political and economic clout” (58). Mehta furthers this by explaining that state-constructed scarcity legitimizes particular solutions, such as volumetric increases in water supply, rather than updating the infrastructural system. Volumetric logics imply that if there was more water, the problem would be alleviated, however state-constructed scarcity hinges on the racist, exclusionary existing infrastructure <sup>132</sup>. Women are able to overcome scarcity in many instances through social capital, finding alternative sources, and non-profit relationships, which reflects the importance of clout and capital, rather than the needed resource itself. If access was secure, these overburdensome provisioning activities would be lessened and women could experience relief in time, physiological health, and emotional well-being.

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<sup>128</sup> T. F. Homer-Dixon, *“The Environment, Scarcity and Violence”*, 98.

<sup>129</sup> Mehta, “Whose Scarcity”, 661.

<sup>130</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 187..

<sup>131</sup> T. F. Homer-Dixon, *“The Environment, Scarcity and Violence”*, 98.

<sup>132</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 191.

In 2011, an ANC front group called Mitchells Plain Housing Association (MPHA) pretended it was a contracted partner of the CoCT and mimicked the technocratic rationality of the state, and brought residents into prolonged violence with the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU)<sup>133</sup>. Residents said it reminded them of struggles with the Apartheid state, as they were hit with water cannons and fired at with rubber bullets. The same night police destroyed hundreds of structures the MPHA had just encouraged residents to set up in the Kapteinsklip informal settlement. As employment opportunities and housing options are limited, people try to control the scarce resources they can, leading to increased scarcity and opportunistic decision-making like that of the MPHA. In another informal settlement, Siqalo, a leader was offered a toilet-cleaning operation in nearby areas like Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha, enlisting them into the pay structure of the CoCT and leading to the leader having concentrated political power over Siqalo, due to his ties to the City<sup>134</sup>. As people compete over land and resources, their demand for housing access is subverted into an official land occupation movement, assuming an official organization structure, rather than individual groups with their own personal struggles.

The CoCT, and particularly the DA, has a responsibility to reflect on its involvement in maintaining hierarchical, de facto racist water access. At the end of Apartheid, and in the introduction of the National Water Act of 1998, land rights called *existing lawful uses* (ELUs) were created to maintain property rights sold under Apartheid system<sup>135</sup>. By 2002, 98% of South Africa's total water available had already been allocated under the ELU

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<sup>133</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 8.

<sup>134</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 110.

<sup>135</sup> Hellberg, "Scarcity", 196.

system, and approximately 62% was intended for agricultural use, and 27% for domestic and urban requirements <sup>136</sup>. The water infrastructure system that hasn't been significantly updated or improved since the end of Apartheid has been maintained through this out-dated, de facto racist ELU system. Although the need for supply augmentation was highly obvious under the DZD, in the City's Water Strategy, the City references how it should be the one to "manage the financial risk of future drought-imposed restrictions" because the City "has better access to credit and is better able to save than most residents" <sup>137</sup>. Township property owners have commented on exclusionary spatial planning policies by the City, criticizing the large upfront amount of money needed for compliance standards and official City approval, making it largely unaffordable for township residents.<sup>138</sup> Many cannot access payment holidays of up to three months on home loans provided by local banks because they are township property owners, shanty landlords, or backyard tenants <sup>139</sup>.

This was the case of many who opted to move to the eponymous COVID-19 settlement that formed during the pandemic and operate outside of the City's servicing mandate. Instead of supporting large-scale housing allocation for all, the City is concerned about "double-dipping", or people renting out their RDP housing to receive a recurring income. The City penalizes this form of rent-seeking, and believes that instead people must live in their legitimate housing, particularly so that the City can reap taxes and tariffs, track

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<sup>136</sup> Evans, Julia. "SA is staring down the barrel of a water security crisis predicated decades ago". Daily Maverick, (2022). <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-10-31-sa-is-staring-down-the-barrel-of-a-water-security-crisis-predicted-decades-ago-expert/>

<sup>137</sup> City of Cape Town, "Our Shared Water Future", 61.

<sup>138</sup> Nzo, Thina. "COVID-19 informal settlement delegitimises authority of the city of Cape Town", Daily Maverick, (2022) <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-06-29-covid-19-informal-settlement-delegitimises-authority-of-the-city-of-cape-town/>

<sup>139</sup> Nzo, "COVID-19 informal settlement", Daily Maverick.

citizens, and moreover, reinforce colonial modes of social organization, and disparage informal housing mechanisms for being disorganized or inhospitable to life - despite the communities that have continuously reproduced themselves without state support. The colonial logic of individual housing plots for nuclear families, seen in White neighborhoods with gated properties and legitimate titles and deeds to property, harkens back to the 1901 bubonic plague epidemic, when the City locked down over racial anxieties about space and sanitation <sup>140</sup>. It was during this epidemic that the first Black township, formerly Uitvlugt and now Ndabeni, was created.<sup>141</sup> Even then, squatters chose to live in camps in order to avoid state scrutiny and as a result by 1923, only 12% of the population was officially registered.

Cape Town's informal settlements are numerous, varying in racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious make-up and face differential treatment from the City itself based off of their own legal status and either inclusion, partial inclusion, or exclusion from the City's servicing mandate. The decentralized structure of South Africa has been described as "the offloading of unfunded mandates to local governments" <sup>142</sup>. The process of municipal decentralization has also promoted neoliberalization at the local level. Although the CoCT is highly involved in local politics, making it not entirely neoliberal and privatized, it also outsources much of its contracted work and instead, acts more as an oversight body rather than an actual service provider<sup>143</sup>. The City has evolved its various services into cost-counting business units that can be sold, and can attract foreign capital that is meant to upscale Cape Town's amenities. Although the CoCT uses neoliberal logic and economic

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<sup>140</sup> White, Alexandre. *Epidemic Orientalism*, Stanford University Press. 2023, 103.

<sup>141</sup> White, *Epidemic Orientalism*, 103.

<sup>142</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 140.

<sup>143</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 170

principles in its decision-making, it is not entirely neoliberal, because it insists on prescribing certain ways of living, and discourages self-provisioning, even when it could benefit economic growth in terms of less reliance on state support and ability to avoid interacting with its punitive mechanisms.

### Cape Town's World City Aspirations

Despite the need to improve water infrastructure in these areas, the CoCT is majorly focused on economic development and uplift through world-facing, tourism-focused initiatives. On the forefront of the department's website, Executive Director Webster proclaims that "the Water and Sanitation Department's vision is to be a beacon in Africa through the progressive realisation of Cape Town as a water sensitive city" <sup>144</sup>. The City of Cape Town aspires to be a World City, the entry point to Africa for non-African wealthy tourists, and simultaneously a "water sensitive city". These aspirations are united under the common theme that the CoCT is highly concerned about its global perception, and as a result, highly prioritizes the interests of foreign investors, tourists looking for Western amenities, and overall, not its own citizens. In describing its servicing standards for Informal Settlements, it says the CoCT will provide one shared toilet to a maximum of five householders and one tap to a maximum of twenty five households <sup>145</sup>. It states that it cannot

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<sup>144</sup> City of Cape Town,

<https://www.capetown.gov.za/Departments/Water%20and%20Sanitation%20Department>

<sup>145</sup> City of Cape Town "Water and Sanitation Services in Informal Settlements",

<https://www.capetown.gov.za/Family%20and%20home/residential-utility-services/residential-water-and-sanitation-services/water-and-sanitation-services-in-informal-settlements>

install flush toilets in areas that are “vulnerable to flooding, on unstable ground (eg former solid waste disposal sites), on private land, or so densely settled that there is no room for water infrastructure” - which effectively describes all informal settlements outside of Cape Town. It claims that every week toilets are inspected by City Monitoring Evaluation Teams, to “ensure that contractors perform these duties according to their contractual agreements”<sup>146</sup>. In my conversations with Executive Director Webster, I asked about inspections and projects being derailed due to crime concerns. He explained that thirty to forty thousand meters couldn’t be read due to safety issues, and hijacked projects – specifying that it was an accountability issue on the behalf of contracting companies, and that the City needed SAPS accompaniment to areas like Nyanga, Manenberg, Lavender Hell, etc<sup>147</sup>. A community research project (CORECT) found that it’s twice as common for the informal resident to rely on social capital and local neighborhood resources rather than the CoCT<sup>148</sup>. This same project also found that 39% of queried residents believe that water-related problems can be solved by working within the City’s laws and requirements, due to financial constraints and exclusion from the City’s mandate<sup>149</sup>.

The DA is both deeply committed to improving Cape Town but also lacks self-awareness and often times is overly defensive toward its citizens. The DA can be extremely insensitive toward the dire economic circumstances that a majority of its citizenry lives in.

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<sup>146</sup> City of Cape Town “Water and Sanitation Services in Informal Settlements”, <https://www.capetown.gov.za/Family%20and%20home/residential-utility-services/residential-water-and-sanitation-services/water-and-sanitation-services-in-informal-settlements>

<sup>147</sup> Michael Webster, Interview.

<sup>148</sup> Environmental Monitoring Group. “Community Resilience in Cape Town (CORECT) project A Transdisciplinary Research Project on Water Issues in Low-Income Areas”, A12. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a7859a10abd0477ecb31301/t/62e255f93da4a96d715eb881/1659000345086/The+Sensemaker+Project+-+CORECT+online.pdf>

<sup>149</sup> Environmental Monitoring Group, “Community Resilience”, 09.

For example, when the DZD was officially alleviated, based off of Capetonians collective efforts and demand reductions, the CoCT announced it was increasing its water tariffs. The claim that Cape Town is working toward being a “water sensitive city”, but its mandate excludes much of its residents, is backwards and offensive to Capetonians. A similar initiative is that of the idea of “resilience”, an approach adopted by the CoCT, but analysis of Cape Town’s budgets show that its financial resources are considerably constrained and need diversifying <sup>150</sup>. In the City Council’s delegation of new responsibilities, the BWSPC was tasked with specifically finding new sources of funding to increase resilience against future shocks, showing the increasing awareness by the DA of its own limits <sup>151</sup>. Resilience, as a modern approach to governance that overemphasizes ecosystem resilience and weather-related hazards, but overlooks human resilience and the inequity of access that melees municipalities like Cape Town; a place where the large proportion of the population relies on the City for basic services <sup>152</sup>. Resilience is also an approach that is prescribed by global governance organizations like the UN, that at times have overly dominated Global South municipalities with Western modes of governance and economic ideologies, rather than relying on local or indigenous forms of knowledge and self-organization, that use synergistic logic <sup>153</sup>.

The City of Cape Town government is largely focused on expanding its image as a world-class destination, appealing directly to wealthy tourists, foreign investors, and Western

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<sup>150</sup> Simpson, Nicholas P., Kayleen J. Simpson, Clifford D. Shearing and Cirolia, Liza Rose. “Municipal finance and resilience lessons for urban infrastructure management: a case study from the Cape Town drought”. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*. (2019), 260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2019.1642203>

<sup>151</sup> Simpson et al., “Municipal Finance”, 260.

<sup>152</sup> Simpson et al., “Municipal Finance”, 260.

<sup>153</sup> Simpson et al., “Municipal Finance”, 260.

institutions. In its recent Water Strategy, the City states its goal to make Cape Town “a world-class city for our citizens”, immediately demonstrating its obsession with being world-class. The City uses *neoliberal hydro-mentality*, which is based off ideas that water access and infrastructure are evidence of modernity<sup>154</sup>. Neoliberal hydro-mentality uses market-based solutions alongside a moral provocation toward guaranteeing human and environmental rights, and a belief that the market coincides with these priorities, although it often does not<sup>155</sup>. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City was challenged similarly to the DZD, due to high social demands and financial and environmental constraints. The national government of South Africa accepted a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), called the Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, of which a significant portion was siphoned through corruption<sup>156</sup>. Employment decreased by 18% from February 2020 to April 2020, of which women accounted for two-thirds of those who lost their jobs, demonstrating the ease at which Black and Coloured women are summoned and dismissed from the capitalist economy. Robtel Neajai Pailey describes the IMF’s and World Bank’s involvement as “white gaze of development that informs global development initiatives”, and the CoCT government is ideologically aligned with Eurocentric beliefs about proper municipal governance<sup>157</sup>. This coincides with the dominant model of urban spatial planning in Cape Town being “largely driven by, and for the benefit of, private property developers and elite suburban residents”.<sup>158</sup> “Though the City of Cape Town boasts about it’s

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<sup>154</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 191.

<sup>155</sup> Hellberg, “Scarcity”, 191.

<sup>156</sup> Phiro “The South African Pandemic”

<sup>157</sup> Phiro “The South African Pandemic”

<sup>158</sup> Nzo, “COVID-19 informal settlement”, Daily Maverick



administration's record of clean financial audits for many years, the City government has struggled to reconcile clean governance with spatial justice as a developmental outcome"<sup>159</sup>. Social housing, through the RDP allocation, has historically been the lowest priority of the City of Cape Town's development agenda - opting instead for large-scale investments like World Cup stadiums, expanded airport terminals, and the multi-use Convention Centre<sup>160</sup>.

Cape Town is on a DA-led mission to becoming a World City, or at least a city of "world-class" amenities, restaurants, and services. One of the main impediments to this vision is the extremely visually obvious inequality and high levels of poverty, which the City attempts to solve through removals of houseless persons in the CBD<sup>161</sup>, investing in walls, berms, and trees alongside the N2 blocking tourists from seeing informal settlements on their way from the airport to the CBD, and through an emphasis on Cape Town being the essential starting point, or entry point, for a foreign traveler visiting the continent of Africa. Rather than building pan-African alliances, the City has attempted to separate and distinguish itself from other African countries, and Western stereotypes of Africa itself. For example, the City calls itself the "entry point to Africa", and builds on colonial logic of Africa being an uncivilized, disorganized, or unsafe place for Europeans, or non-Africans. There is an element of South African national exceptionalism that creates an othering, polarizing dynamic between South Africa, and the rest of the African continent. The CoCT uses neoliberal logics like outsourcing the state to private contractors, foreign advisors, and non-South African entities, relying on Western sources of capital and finance.

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<sup>159</sup> Nzo, "COVID-19 informal settlement", Daily Maverick

<sup>160</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 150.

<sup>161</sup> Nzo, "COVID-19 informal settlement", Daily Maverick

Viewing basic services as a revenue stream, rather than a public health issue, and utilizing a cost-recovery fiscal framework, results in funding gaps, and shows the limits of decentralized service provisioning. South African exceptionalism is even seen on the micro community level scale, through xenophobia in informal settlements and blaming of migrants for creating messes, overusing facilities, or not using South African ways of water management. These xenophobia attitudes stem from overall state-constructed resource scarcity, and tense competition for securing basic needs, and the means to reproducing one's life, and Apartheid-era legacies of infra-racial blaming and infighting. Zachary Levinson explains how the informal settlements located closest to the N2 highway are the first to go. When so-called poo protestors dumped containers of human waste on the departure zone of Cape Town International Airport, they were immediately removed with uproar and disgust, when open defecation occurs daily in informal settlements nearby.

The idea of a “world city” is based on an analytical hierarchical, ranking one city on top of another based off of narrow economic criteria, that forwards the idea that world city status is necessary and inevitable due to globalization<sup>162</sup>. Some of the criteria include: a need for spatial concentration, a rise of a producer service economy, a dense information loop, informal economies, income inequality and employment insecurity<sup>163</sup>. Based on these requirements, Cape Town qualifies as a so-called world city. Cape Town is predominantly a service-oriented economy, with finance equating to a third of its gross value added, and its strongest economic growth, amongst the highest in the country, is attributed to personal and

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<sup>162</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 98

<sup>163</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 100

producer services<sup>164</sup>. However, these services are predominately available to wealthy residents. The CBD is primarily reserved for capital-producing private sector, that coincide geographically with City Improvement Districts. Foreign investors, such as film studios like Dreamworks, choose to operate in Cape Town due to low production costs, and often don't choose local job seekers for employment, and film studios like "Film City" only produces approximately three million rand per year in filming fees<sup>165</sup>. Cape Town sells itself as a low-cost destination with OECD-level facilities and amenities. It attempts to give off the first-world reputation of other coastal cities like Sydney, and LA, while being as cheap as options like Bombay and Delhi<sup>166</sup>. Tourism is the industry the CoCT has focused predominantly on since the end of Apartheid, particularly in terms of convenient urban infrastructure like highways, and leisure amenities. Gaining World City status comes at a cost to informal settlements, and under the Cities Alliance initiative "cities without slums", the City eradicated settlements without providing any alternative accommodation. These mass clearances were justified through global aspirations of world city status, and results in highly differential treatment of people, based off of non-South African standards and predominantly Western or capitalist hierarchies.

The qualification of a world city also relies on connectivity and relationships with global governance organizations and international NGOs like the UN, Red Cross, IMF, World Bank, etc. Cape Town's relationships with Western capitalist think tanks like the Urban Foundation in the years immediately post-Apartheid pushed forward neoliberal ideas

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<sup>164</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 98

<sup>165</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome* 33

<sup>166</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 102

about municipal organization, sanitation requirements, and policing of so-called appropriate behavior or use of public spaces. The Urban Foundation was so influential that it dominated the National Housing Forum (NHF), and produced the Housing White Paper in 1994, which outlined the plan for RDP housing, and through which the Urban Foundation kept the idea of fully inclusive public housing policies off the table<sup>167</sup>. This logic was seen in City Improvement Districts, a South African iteration of North American “Business Improvement Districts”, City Improvement Districts (CCIDs) are defined by the South African state as “a geographic area within which property owners agree to pay for certain services supplementary to those supplied by governmental institutions and which will enhance the physical and social environment of the area.”<sup>168</sup> The main areas the CCIDs focus on are Safety & Security, Social Development, and Urban Management, and Communications. CCIDs are public-private partnerships where wealthy companies and business groups can pay extra in municipal fees to fight the “crime and grime scenario” that the CoCT seeks to remove from its reputation<sup>169</sup>. This harkens neoliberal logics like the Broken Windows Theory, originally demonstrated in the US, which was the idea that if a municipality can clear any physical evidence of poverty, crime, violence, gang activity, or very literally broken windows, it can attract wealthier individuals and uplift the city<sup>170</sup>. Through CCIDs, the CoCT gives municipal decision-making over to private stakeholders who can make their own choices about the visual aesthetic of their area. While capitalism permeates the rural

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<sup>167</sup> Levinson, *Delivery as Dispossession*, 51.

<sup>168</sup> Cape Town CCID, <https://www.capetownccid.org/about-ccid>

<sup>169</sup> Cape Town CCID, <https://www.capetownccid.org/about-ccid>

<sup>170</sup> Liu, Jingyan, Jialin Snow Wu, and Tianting Che. “Understanding Perceived Environment Quality in Affecting Tourists’ Environmentally Responsible Behaviours: A Broken Windows Theory Perspective.” *Tourism management perspectives* 31 (2019): 237.

hinterland and periphery, today it is predominantly focused on urban growth and accumulation for capital. Therefore, the “overarching goal of neoliberal urban policy experiments [being] to mobilize city space as an arena for both market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption”<sup>171</sup>. While CCIDs are presented as co-beneficial partnerships for Capetonians, in actuality they allow the City and national government to shirk responsibility for financing local service delivery, and undermines the role of public finance. Even the South African Cities Network says that CCIDs “may entail the effective privatization of public space.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Brenner, Neil and Nik Theodore. “Cities and the Geographies of “Actually Existing Neoliberalism”.” *Antipode* 34 (2002): 34

<sup>172</sup> SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES NETWORK. “A South African Urban Renewal Overview” (2003). [www.sacities.net](http://www.sacities.net), 25.



Cape Town City Improvement Districts, predominantly in the CBD.

Although Apartheid has ended, there exists a renewed racialization of Cape Town.

Cape Town is more attractive to the White transnational elite than other South African cities like Johannesburg and Durban, and is seen to be a city reserved for White people by Black professionals<sup>174</sup>. However, the City has become increasingly concentrated by Black African men in search of employment, both from within South Africa and outside. The focus on South Africa's cities, rather than rural interior, is in part due to neoliberalization of the country's economy, and also Apartheid legacies of urban accumulation. Class and race are

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.cityimprovement.co.za>

<sup>174</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 100.

undeniably linked in South Africa, and increased capital extraction exacerbates the racialized inequality that so-often characterizes Cape Town. The neoliberal face of governance today casts a multicultural, egalitarian image on its website and in its rhetoric, but the racist infrastructure is not permeated by rhetoric of good governance. However, Cape Town relies on Black African male labor, predominantly cheaper migrant labor. As David Macdonald explains “although Cape Town needs cheap African labour to build and sustain its world city status it does this by turning its back on the very labour and cultural connections it relies on, focusing instead on a homogenized vision of Western global urban practices and design.”<sup>175</sup>. Cape Town intentionally de-Africanizes its CBD and prioritizes whiter capital interests instead. The City has always tried to organize its informal settlements in ways that obscure the Black population from the tourist or White purview, but still simultaneously draw labor from these areas. The informal settlement called KTC was established as an emergency camp in 1959, and formalized through infrastructure - the litmus test of a recognized informal settlement today by the CoCT. Under Apartheid provisioning laws, settlements were either emergency or transit areas, rather than legally recognized settlements. The City needed to service its informal settlements for them to be “legal”; Anne Makhulu explains that “ ‘legals’ who remained [after the 1951 Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act] were duly accommodated in ‘site-and-service schemes’”. This logic is still seen today, in terms of servicing as a means of legitimizing or recognizing certain informal settlements, and disregarding others.

The CoCT water servicing policies are overly-punitive, given that water access is such a determinant of life and health. For example, according to the City’s 2022/2023

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<sup>175</sup> Macdonald, *World City Syndrome*, 165.

budget: “domestic consumers who fail to pay and customers (indigent properties as well as backyard units) identified as water abusers due to continued inefficient use of water shall, after due process, have their water connections restricted to 200 liters per day for the property by a flow-limiting Device at the sole discretion of the City”<sup>176</sup> Further, “consumers who reconnect illegally, after having been disconnected or flow-restricted for non-payment, shall forfeit the right to basic water until such time as the outstanding debt has been paid in full and will be liable for full disconnection / reconnection charges surrounding the illegal re-connection<sup>177</sup>”. Therefore, citizens subject themselves to further fees and charges for water-related debts, and enter into a legal relationship with the City that informal settlement residents often try to avoid. Residents have expressed wanting to avoid interacting with the state, particularly its police apparatus and legal system, recalling memories of the Apartheid state’s oppressive brutality. To many informal settlement residents, the legacies of Apartheid exist in punitive City policies whereby the City withholds essential services like water and sanitation, that have life-or-death level consequences for residents.

One of the major reasons for the discord between the City and its informal settlement residents is due to lack of trust on both sides; lack of trust on the residents side that their government is acting in their best interest and lack of trust on the City’s side. In order for government’s to provide services, they need trust from citizens that they are using their expenditure efficiently and ethically, but the public viewpoint is not geared toward trusting the City currently. Recent events like the DZD and COVID-19 relocations has continued to push residents further from the defensive stance of the DA, and further to more self-

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<sup>176</sup> City of Cape Town, Tariff Policy, 22.

<sup>177</sup> City of Cape Town, Tariff Policy, 22.



subsistence lifestyles, and anti-state positionalities. The City has acknowledged the general lack of trust often, but it is sometimes a means to shirk blame to former, more brutal Apartheid government, or even past Mayors who were more disparaging rhetorically of informal communities. Executive Director of the BWSM Michael Webster commented that the common perception of the CoCT government is that of incompetence and corruption, and he explained that once that narrative was there, it is highly difficult to undo it<sup>178</sup>. He also explained that broad-based healthy economic debate and dialogue never developed because anything not-left was considered “immoral, racist, and Apartheid-like”<sup>179</sup>. The current DA is increasingly savvy about its use of language, as the Department of Human Settlements decided they would no longer use terms like “recognized” and “unrecognized”, while Director Webster says that people don’t care about language – they care about whether they’re receiving services.

After studying Cape Town’s water governance system, it is clear that the City is apathetic toward its informal residents, and truly doesn’t consider many of them to be rightful recipients of basic services. However, the City continuously deepens distrust and resentment with informal communities, and publishes antagonizing statistics such as seen below. The idea that 100% of informal settlements have access to adequate health and sanitation is laughable, let alone any. Non-profit organizations and community groups continuously challenge these claims. In 2018, the City claimed to have installed 100 communal taps in Marikana informal settlement, but when the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) investigated through its Informal Settlement Action

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<sup>178</sup> Michael Webster, interview.

<sup>179</sup> Michael Webster, interview.

Research, it found only 50 to 60 taps, and water failed to flow from at least one of every five<sup>180</sup>. Even if 100 communal taps had been properly installed, it would have resulted in a ratio of 600 people to 1 tap. It is evident that there is a need for a developmental paradigm shift within the CoCT, to include so called “land occupiers”, homeless citizens, undocumented migrants, and other service-dependent groups within its mandate and even with lawful treatment and rights. Despite the City’s claims that they are non-Capetonians and non-deserving, Cape Town’s informal residents are highly deserving of municipal servicing, because they are suffering from living in a City that cares more about its relationships with White commercial farmers, foreign investors, and tourists - for whom access to services is always granted.

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<sup>180</sup> Masiangoako et al., “Fighting for water”, 107

## **Chapter 2: Women Working as Municipal Infrastructure to Maintain Household Stability through Secure Water Access amid Crisis**

A major part of Cape Town's water infrastructure and governance system is largely unrecognized, despite its extreme importance: women of informal settlements. Water scarcity is a female burden worldwide, as women around the world are tasked with procuring water, treating it, and raising alarms when its quality is questionable. In the face of limited municipal servicing, women become environmental whistleblowers and essential workers, communicating with other women about leaks, pathogens, and chemicals in their water, creating a system of knowledge production and sharing about their very limited informal infrastructure. Female knowledge and labor is essential in times of scarcity, and has been accumulated through *zabalaza*. The end of Apartheid was liberatory for Black women particularly, and as Pumla Gqola explains, in the immediate aftermath of South African liberation in April 1994, rape-charge statistics rose, because women felt they were more likely to be believed. They were optimistic that national freedom would trickle down through the criminal justice system and grant them access to health care and recognition. However, today, opportunities for women to participate in local democratic spaces are highly limited due to patriarchal social reproduction of women's assumed roles as household caretakers and child-rearers, and the highly difficult environmental and social burdens associated with these roles.

Cape Town's informal settlements are highly unsafe environments for many, particularly women and children, as they face extreme rates of gender-based violence and

limited physical mobility. While the CoCT claims that it provides some water and sanitation services to informal areas, the actual everyday labor that is required on behalf of female community caretakers demonstrates an extreme lack of care from the City. The everyday violence and difficult sanitary and health conditions are widely-known, highly visible, and publicized by local media sources, NGOs, and communities rallying for improved servicing and accountability of the CoCT. The issues of sexual violence and socio-economic marginalization are highly socially visible and known, but are not politically addressed and are acknowledged through occasional statistics. Women do find ways to overcome their social and familial burdens, particularly by relying on social capital, environmental knowledge, and community support to reproduce themselves and loved ones around them.

The literature on women's care labor reflects a growing trend of municipalities needing excessive female labor for household stability so that cities can draw labor from informal areas, without acknowledging, compensating, or attempting to ease these gendered burdens. Social reproduction theory, theorized at length in Tithi Bhattacharya's 2017 *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, centers the idea that "human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole"<sup>181</sup>. This theory attempts to visible the invisible work and labor that happens hidden from public politics, and instead is kept private to the household, and is institutionalized by free market thinking policy-makers. Bhattacharya seeks to create a theory that can explain the processes by which accumulation happens, and particularly the daily reproductive care labor that occurs in private spaces like households, largely by women. Social reproduction theory (SRT) explains

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<sup>181</sup> Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, 7.

that private household labor is of what Bhattacharya calls use value, instead of exchange value like products or services, and that our understanding of capitalism is incomplete if we believe its effects end at the of the working day<sup>182</sup>. The reproduction of labor power happens largely within the familial household, and are majorly done by women, who work to reproduce labor power because the capital-labor relationship has produced a system by which people must work for subsistence<sup>183</sup>. It is no coincidence that the most widely-available employment option for Black and Coloured women is domestic work; 1 in 3 Black employed women work as domestic workers or caretakers in wealthy neighborhoods<sup>184</sup><sup>185</sup>. So, the reproductive care labor that these women must do everyday at home, is reproduced within these predominantly White households, further burdening Black and Coloured women to care for others.

The daily burden of reproductive work not only saps women's time and energy, but confines them to their very existence and relationships<sup>186</sup>. In Cape Town, the emotional burden of caring for others in the face of daily occurrences of gender-based violence is incredibly exhausting and painful. But, they must continue to labor everyday to continue to reproduce their own lives and the lives of those who rely on them. Research conducted by the Southern African Gender Research on Urbanization, Planning, Housing and Everyday Life

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<sup>182</sup> Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, 18.

<sup>184</sup> Domestic workers are defined as "workers employed who perform work in or for a household or households to provide services mainly for the consumption by the members of the family or household" by Western Cape Provincial Economic Review and Outlook (2022/2023).

<sup>185</sup> Dinkelman, Taryn and Vimal Ranchhod. "Evidence on the impact of minimum wage laws in an informal sector: Domestic workers in South Africa". *Journal of Development Economics* 99 (2012): 28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2011.12.006>

<sup>186</sup> Benya, Asanda. "The invisible hands: women in Marikana". *Review of African Political Economy*, 42:146, (2015): 545-560, DOI: 10.1080/03056244.2015.1087394

(GRUPHEL) shows that women often negotiate their citizenship and relationship with the state through the status' of their dependents<sup>187</sup>. These intimate familial relationships take priority in women's activities, as women work to maintain some normalcy and stability, in order to both biologically and socially reproduce themselves, through new generations of children. To do this, women are heavily reliant on social networks and connections, to local NGOs that are trusted and resourced, to local knowledge holders and those with alternative solutions; these solutions have arisen out of a "culture of survival in South Africa", that Black and Coloured South African citizens have been subjected to since the early days of Dutch colonization<sup>188</sup>. A *triple-role framework* shows how women adopt **reproductive** roles like childcare, **productive** roles like informal or formal work, and **community** roles like water provisioning and sharing<sup>189</sup>.

In Cape Town's informal settlements, women work tirelessly to maintain stability and normalcy in their homes, amid high rates of gender-based violence, water scarcity, and exclusion from democratic participation. Women are counted on as "shock absorbers" in times of crisis<sup>190</sup>, as shown in the DZD when women labored to protest WMDs, found alternative sources of supply and made extremely difficult daily decisions about what to do with their daily allotment of 50L of water, made available in 2L buckets. These decisions included choosing between bathing, flushing toilets, drinking, boiling water for cooking and

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<sup>187</sup> Oldfield, Sophie, Netsai S. Matshaka, Elaine Salo and Anna Schlyter. "In bodies and homes: Gendering citizenship in Southern African cities". *Urban Issiviv*: 37 – 51. (2019). 10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2019-30-supplement-003

<sup>188</sup> Oldfield et al., "Gendering citizenship", 46.

<sup>189</sup> UN Women. "Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change Resistance", [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/06/ETM\\_G\\_CCR\\_1%20Module%203.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/06/ETM_G_CCR_1%20Module%203.pdf), 136

<sup>190</sup> Benya, "The invisible hands", 546.

cleaning, watering gardens, and sharing with others - survival-level decisions one could not easily make without forgoing other essential activities. Water is the key determinant of health and life outcomes in Cape Town, and will be the definitive issue of Global South municipalities facing anthropogenic climate change, specifically those with large peripherally disconnected informal settlements. During the DZD, the number one cause of death related to water scarcity was child diarrhea, as limited potable water supply for informal settlements led to increase in contaminants.<sup>191</sup> A secure and easily available water supply is also an enabling device for women's days, as time spent provisioning water for the household can be highly constraining. Moreover, the claims that "water is life" cannot be understated, as it is the strongest determinant of health outcomes, particularly related to women's physical safety.

Extremely high rates of gender-based violence has resulted in highly unsafe physical environment for women and children in informal settlements, particularly complicated and worsened by sanitation and water-related scarcities. Sociologists have theorized about South Africa's patriarchal society and its connections to high rates of gender-based violence. Patriarchy is a "social system in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property and linked to resource scarcity and insafety"<sup>192</sup> Gender-based violence is not only the instances of sexual violence alone, but also structural gender-based violence, which is an outcome "of the unequal and exclusionary South African economy"<sup>193</sup>. This is shown through "exploitation

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<sup>191</sup> Omotayo, Olagunju, K. O., Omotoso, A. B., Ogunniyi, A. I., Otekunrin, O. A., & Daud, A. S. (2021). Clean water, sanitation and under-five children diarrhea incidence: Empirical evidence from the South Africa's General Household Survey. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research International*, 28(44), 63150–63162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-15182-w>

<sup>192</sup> Republic South Africa. "National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide". (2020), 13.

<sup>193</sup> Republic South Africa. "National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide". (2020), 23.

of labour, undervaluing of unpaid work, under-funded social protection, unequal pay for equal work, inflexible labour policies, the high costs of living, unsafe and unhealthy working environments, inhumane working hours, poor regulation of the minimum wage and precarious jobs impacting particularly on women”<sup>194</sup>. The National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide explains that “violence has been part of the South African social context for decades, rooted in historical apartheid policies and underpinned by high levels of inequality and poverty, racism, unequal gender power relations, and hostility to sexual and gender diversity. All of this has resulted in deep levels of collective trauma that is demonstrated in daily interactions across all social spheres as attested by the excessive homicide and crime rates”<sup>195</sup>. Women are highly aware of infamous stories of violence and murder, and although these stories make the news briefly, they are continuously replaced by new stories of GBV and femicide. The story of Sinxolo Mafevuka, found dead in a communal toilet in Khayelitsha in March 2016, left many deeply saddened and aware of the costs of being a female water provider.

While police fail to penetrate gang-related GBV, the infrastructural and environment conditions in Khayelitsha’s informal settlements limit access for police and emergency vehicles regardless. In many informal areas there are only dirt and sand paths, and some main roads. The Social Justice Coalition has sought to make areas like RR section visible to the public through politics of legibility to name and shame the state into responding to the obvious low levels of sanitation<sup>196</sup>. The national government has rhetorically politicized

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<sup>194</sup> Republic South Africa. “National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide”. (2020), 23.

<sup>195</sup> Republic South Africa. “National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide”. (2020), 24.

<sup>196</sup> Robins, Steven. “The 2011 Toilet Wars in South Africa: Justice and Transition between the Exceptional and the Everyday after Apart”. *Development and Change* 45(3): 487. (2014). DOI:



gender-based violence, but this year's past Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence revealed the lack of progress since original promises were made by Police Minister Bheki Cele in August 2020<sup>197</sup>. This material consequences of the lack of state provisioning for rape and sexual assault care was seen when non-profit advocacy group SA Women Fight Back found that out of thirty-five Western Cape police stations, only seven had sufficient supplies (pediatric rape kits, adult rape kits, and buccal sample kits). The City's tedious relationship with the national government results in distrust and cooperation between these levels of government, resulting in the CoCT needing to function independently often. The City needs to take accountability for the lack of sexual health material provided at police stations, and provide consistent funding to important organizations like the Cape Town Rape Crisis Trust, which gives free examinations and counseling to victims<sup>198</sup>.

Some sociologists like Pumla Gqola have theorized that high rates of sexual violence is connected to Apartheid policies. Under Apartheid, masculinity and violence became linked, where patriarchy was a source of power for Black and Coloured men emasculated and humiliated by the Apartheid state. While there is no ubiquitous explanation for high levels of GBV and sexual violence seen in South Africa, it is clear that women are highly prone to violence from men, who are also excluded from state recognition and inclusion in their own ways<sup>199</sup>. National documents have put forward similar claims stating that "apartheid policies promoting migration patterns destabilized families and directly influenced family structures.

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<https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12091>

<sup>197</sup> Davis, Rebecca and Nonkululeko Njilo, "Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence makes promises, promises, and more promises. Daily Maverick. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-11-06-presidential-summit-on-gender-based-violence-makes-promises-promises-and-more-promises/>

<sup>198</sup> Cape Town Rape Crisis Trust. <https://rapecrisis.org.za>

<sup>199</sup> Gqola, Pumla. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. 50

It has been suggested that where men are unable to maintain masculine superiority, they are more likely to use violence to exert power”. Today, patriarchal culture continues to perpetuate ongoing violence at women and children, and is also connected to resource scarcity as a means of controlling movement in informal settlements. In informal settlements, limited services like standpipes, toilets, pipes, electricity lines are often controlled and monitored by local power holders, sometimes related to gangs or individuals seeking rent for services or control<sup>200</sup>. While scholar Gayatri Spivak refutes the possibility of a political voice being able to exist in extremely oppressive conditions, women in Cape Town’s informal settlements enter the water governance space to protest and politicize their lives.

Patriarchy is embedded in the South African state through “private patriarchies”, or the privatization of the domestic sphere, and domestic household<sup>201</sup>. When women in Khayelitsha were interviewed about their personal experiences with domestic abuse, they majorly maintained that involving the police is inappropriate because domestic abuse is a private household issue <sup>202</sup>. Further, women will tolerate abuse in order to maintain a male, fatherly presence for their children, and the women do not want to be responsible for sending their children’s father to prison <sup>203</sup>. This is an essential dimension of the social reproduction responsibilities that women hold in places like Khayelitsha; women take on abuse to maintain familial and household stability, influenced strongly by patriarchal norms about women’s roles. For example, women commented that because their mothers also endured

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<sup>200</sup> SERI, “Informal Settlements and Human Rights in South Africa”, 16.

<sup>201</sup> Nyamu-Musembi, Celestine. “Addressing Formal and Substantive Citizenship Gender Justice in Sub-Saharan Africa”. *South African Regional Poverty Network*. [https://sarpn.org/documents/d0002823/Formal\\_substantive\\_citizenship\\_Nyamu-Musembi.pdf](https://sarpn.org/documents/d0002823/Formal_substantive_citizenship_Nyamu-Musembi.pdf), 4.

<sup>202</sup> Mogstad et al., “Policing the private”, 9.

<sup>203</sup> Mogstad et al., “Policing the private”, 9.

domestic violence, they felt non-special, or non-deserving of support or state intervention <sup>204</sup>. Women commented that they'd be highly unlikely to call the police and involve the state because police commonly utilize patriarchal attitudes when dealing with GBV and domestic abuse, and have said that violence is a family matter. Police intervention really only becomes a factor when victims identify their abuse as 'crime-worthy'. This is a distinctly female and motherly reasoning guided by a moral and emotional orientation toward relationship maintenance and stability. The CoCT needs to adjust laws and policing practices to consider the fact that women include their children in their decisions, which comes at an opportunity cost to their own health and time, instead of penalizing them for this behavior and relegating them to the pain inside the domain of the private household. Roshila Nair writes about the dichotomy between public and private space, and the silent suffering of many South African women:

Let's say it loud  
About the other day  
How we were talking  
About that Comrade X  
Who went home  
And gave his wage  
A blue eye,  
After we'd all clapped  
An hour before

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<sup>204</sup> Mogstad et al., "Policing the private", 9.

For the liberation

Speech he gave

With such conviction <sup>205</sup>

High rates of GBV and sexual violence, and overall patriarchal relegation of women to the household, has not been a priority of the national South African government, or the CoCT. In the City's most recent IDP, released in 2022, gender-based violence was mentioned only three times, with recognition that it is a prevalent issue, but was not mainstreamed as an essential issue for the City government. There was passive discussion of the extra burden of childcare, but not how to lift, minimize, or reallocate this social burden <sup>206</sup>. During Apartheid, women's issues took a backseat to the greater struggle for Black liberation from White hegemony and oppression, because their male comrades saw it as divisive <sup>207</sup>. Today, the rhetoric about women's issues as being tangentially important is ongoing. Male voices often drown out women's complaints, and amplify their own struggles - claiming that gendered roles have difficult effects for men too. However, when it comes to water provisioning, the role is predominantly a woman's job, and the empirics show the oppressive nature in which men control movement around informal settlements, and hold social power. Rape, or sexual violence, is used as a weapon against women, and can be in tandem with social humiliation; a linkage particularly seen under the Apartheid system. Pumla Gqola says that "rape is not a moment but a language" <sup>208</sup> and "in the end, patriarchy produces a

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<sup>205</sup> Nair, Roshila. 2001.

<sup>206</sup> City of Cape Town, "Integrated Development Plan"

<sup>207</sup> Meer, Shamim. Commodification of Feminism Talk.

<sup>208</sup> Gqola, *Rape*, 25.

condition of women's unease in their bodies"<sup>209</sup>. It also has caused highly predatory and exploitative social relations like that of sexual relationships that have arisen in areas like RR Section and Nyanga, between young girls and local men, often gangsters, to secure protection from sexual assault<sup>210</sup>.

My conversations with **Ndileka Matume**, a rape crisis counselor from Green Park informal settlement, were informative about these relationships. Ndileka works as an auxiliary social work through a program subsidized by the the Western Cape's Department of Social Development. Ndileka focuses on local children who are vulnerable, neglected, or lack familial care<sup>211</sup>. Ndileka, 38 years old, has lived in the Green Park informal settlement her whole life, and our interview takes place in the home she has lived in for the past 31 years. She touches upon sexual violence she experienced in the home we sit in, and the attempted rape her daughter experienced in the same space, years later. The home has been upgraded, including multiple taps and a toilet, more rooms have been added on, but Ndileka insists her family must move, for her children's safety and futures. She has two children, one boy and one girl, both pre-teens. There is both a formal and informal section of Green Park, which is typical of many of the former townships surrounding Cape Town's CBD, but Ndileka lives in the informal section.

I first met Ndileka and started our working relationship when we met as comrades heading to Polokwane, Limpopo for the South African Water Caucus. Ndileka was representing the Western Cape Water Caucus, alongside two other provincial representatives

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<sup>209</sup> Gqola, *Rape*, 39

<sup>210</sup> Robins, "The 2011 Toilet Wars", 493.

<sup>211</sup> Ndileka Matume, Interview.

from the Western Cape. I was asked to come to the conference by my coworkers who were organizing their Bi-Annual General Meeting, and tasked to write minutes, but also reciprocally given the opportunity to meet inspiring and passionate individuals representing their provinces. Ndileka and I quickly started to bond, and through a budding friendship, and activist comradeship, I started to get to know her and the numerous structural hurdles she had overcome to participate in the water governance sphere.

In Ndileka's neighborhood, there is relatively generous spacing in between houses, with yards demarcated by homemade fencing, and a clean dirt road, resembling the typical planning of a formal housing development. The homes have been expanded over time from one-room dwellings to four or five room homes, which Ndileka proudly told me about before I visited her home. Green Park informal settlement benefits from several electricity lines, as well as TV satellites, and compared to surrounding informal settlements, is less densely populated and benefits from being located in between the Driftsands Nature Reserve, and the Kuils River Freeway.



The geographical seclusion, from the more bustling and densely populated parts of Khayelitsha, gives Green Park a sense of suburban calm – a peace that is constantly negotiated and brokered by its residents with the chronic spontaneity of chaos in Cape Town, which Ndileka and I discuss at length. The social crisis that is gender-based violence and the perpetuation of rape culture, however, has forced the South African government to employ women like Ndileka to serve as crisis counselors in their community. Ndileka has been trained to recognize various signs of a child suffering from abuse or neglect, and her high level of social knowledge and community involvement, built up over the 31 years Ndileka has lived in her current home and through her involvement with the nearby Church and locally active NGOs. Ndileka references to herself as one of those people who just knows everyone and everything, and because of her high educational attainment, she is an esteemed member of the community. In Ndileka’s free time, when she is not being a single mother to

her two children and a concerned caretaker to her nieces and nephews who live down the road, she works with the Western Cape Water Caucus (WCWC) on advocating for equitable service delivery in the under-served and de facto segregated parts of Cape Town. Her involvement with the WCWC was how we originally met, when I was invited to join at the national-level South African Water Caucus (SAWC) Bi-Annual General Meeting in Polokwane, Limpopo from October 26 – 29, 2022. At the conference, Ndileka was representing the interests of her province and local constituents, particularly the women who like her were tasked everyday with procuring and delivering water to their households.



Ndileka (middle) presenting at the South African Water Caucus

I was able to observe Ndileka’s activism in action, as she flew across the country and left her job, kids, and responsibilities behind to protest the state-constructed scarcity that plagues South Africa.



Although Green Park is recognized by the City of Cape Town, and receives marginal service delivery, this new settlement, named “COVID-19”, has been dubbed as illegal by the City, and its residents have been called “land invaders” or illegal occupiers. Ndileka notes that since their arrival, water availability has decreased (running out sooner than it should, water pressure and temperature low) because the City’s free basic water allotment for indigent households was not prepared to support COVID-19’s additional water needs. The City of Cape Town’s Water and Sanitation department mandate only includes legal land occupiers, and as a result, communities like COVID-19 are legally excluded from receiving water and sanitation services. Ndileka benefits from her family’s 31-year long history of living in Green Park, in terms of legal recognition from the City but also social capital. Ndileka’s lifelong responsibility of procuring water for her family, necessitated by the gendered societal expectations of women as water providers for the household, has trained her to become a water expert for her community, and an environmental whistleblower when her community needs her. When she noticed chlorine particles in her water supply, she communicated with her neighbors about it, and identified it as an environmental hazard. Daily environmental and water monitoring has become a requirement for Ndileka to protect her community from health risks.

The relative household infrastructural security Ndileka enjoys does not insulate her from the gender-based violence rampant in Cape Town, and South Africa at large. She shares harrowing stories of violence she experienced in her childhood home, which befell her daughter in the same home decades later. She talks about how her family must move into a better neighborhood, for the sake of her children’s future. The illusion of peace that I perceived, due to Green Park’s organized layout and lower population density, was more-so

evidence of the adaptive capacities of Capetonian single mothers and families, rather than real social protection. Green Park's close proximity to densely-populated Delft, right across the Kuils River Freeway, influences the security of Ndileka's community. Many of the victims of sexual abuse she works with experienced their assault during their walking commutes to and from school, often crossing major roads and walking through densely populated intersections. We discuss her daughter's fear of walking to school through crowded intersections on Fundraising Days, where local boys throw paint at passersby, recently resulting in serious burns for one schoolchild. Ndileka also discusses a rape victim's fear of encountering his perpetrator on his way home or to school, which sadly became reality one day, where his assaulter attempted to drown him and kill him for coming forward about his rape. The peacefulness of Ndileka's home, so much so that the mutual comrade we shared fell asleep on her couch for the entire hour we spoke, is due to Ndileka's lifelong strength and commitment to social cohesiveness. She is well-respected and well-known in her community, and she evidences why having social capital is an imperative for females amidst the high rates of gender-based violence.

When I asked Ndileka, "What do you see as the responsibility around water provisioning. Who does that decision-making fall upon around water use in the household and going to get water from the tap?", she responded:

*"Because my community is so small and it's a close community. Obviously it is a woman's duty but because the taps are not far from the houses, so it is a woman's duty but not that much as other communities. Maybe those women are single and do not have a man at the*

*house, so they have to fetch water but You don't need to put a bucket on your head, because it's not far where you come from."*

When I asked Ndileka, " Is it hard to separate yourself from what you hear?, she responded:

*"It's very sad when they share stories, I even cry with them. I mustn't show my weakness in front of them, I need to be strong so that they can be strong. So it's not easy so I always put my foot in their shoes, so it's really not easy. But then when I leave the site, I leave it at the site. I do follow-up and do assist where I can and follow up how they feel and how they are now. It's not easy, it's really not easy and you need to be strong because when they share their stories – yo, I also cry when they share their stories."*

Ndileka opened up to me about stories that demonstrate the intersection between gender-based violence and poor water infrastructure, that limits the physical mobility of people, particularly women and children. Ndileka told me:

*" For instance, in the case of the boy who has been raped, he was raped by someone within his community but his mother is drinking and she doesn't care whether it's day or night, or what time it is, she'll get drunk. And if you go to the home, you wouldn't say it's a normal person who stays here [referring to the dirtiness of the house].*

*So, I intervene in the case. Even when the boy was raped, it was just two boys sleeping at home. The mother was not there. So when that one came to rape him, he took him home from his bed on Wednesday night and was raping him until Thursday morning. So when I asked where was your mother, the mother doesn't even know what happened to him or where he is. So I have to look for the mother in order for her to give the statement*

*and when I found her, she was surprised with what happened. I told her that if you don't open the case now, I'll open the case against you for not attending to what happened to your child because it's your responsibility, so she was forced to open the statement. So she didn't want to go to court, so I took the statement and went to the social worker in the police station, so he came and took the boy to the hospital to do all the testing stuff. Since then, we must make sure the child is in court. For almost a month, the rapist wasn't arrested.*

*For the one who has been raped it is difficult for him to go to school because he needs to go across the bridge and that one is waiting for him on the bridge, to say "why did you tell them what happened?". So the other day, it was a rainy day and the other side, there's a field where they play netball. It looks like a dam when it rains, so the one who has been raped was just walking with his friends and the rapist, who hasn't been arrested yet, he went to catch him to say "why did you tell them that". He couldn't be arrested because there was no evidence. The one who had been raped started running to escape him, and he ended up in that water and he caught him there, he drowned him there and he sit on his head underwater. There were other kids coming around and beat this one, so he stood up from the other one to save this one. I called the police again and when I went to the case investigator's offices, she tell me that she couldn't find the perpetrator, and she couldn't get any assistance from the community and she's a woman and she can't drive or walk alone and she only has a car from 9 am to 4 pm, and after those hours she's not available. Remember the child can't go to school because the perpetrator is still chasing him so I had to take action and tell him that this case is delayed and this child is falling*

*behind in school and he's a slow learner already and now it's a month and he can't go to school, so I will take responsibility; give me something so that I can say this child needs to be arrested. That was when I was still working in Delft and when I would go to work I would see this boy on the street, next to the main road, so I see this one but the police can't catch him – how? So I said give me something so if I see this boy, because the police cannot stop and search in Delft, so I can stop and say arrest that one. So that really exactly happened. So I was coming from school, I saw the police was coming and the boy passing me, and I don't know what makes him not to act because he knew already that I am on his case. The way he was looking at me, I saw that one day he might stab me because the way he is acting now. So luckily that day I chased him on the street, so we meet at the corner but I saw he wanted to do something but he holding back again. I just passed him, didn't take over him, I just passed and as I was going, I saw the police man was coming so I told them why I am stopping them and I give them the paper that was in my bag. So they ask where is this boy, and I said there is the boy. Luckily, he was crossing in front of this way, so they just waited for him to cross, and he crossed and that's how they catch him. So until now he stayed in jail – from 2019.*

*We didn't leave the boy because the boy was raped and stuff. We took him to the counseling, they take him to Stellenbosch to the counselors and doctors there. They counsel him, they do everything. But because now the family of the perpetrator were bribing the mother because they know she's a drunkard so they want to give her money, buy alcohol for her, for her to close to the case, so the perpetrator can come out. I said to the mother, it's fine if you want to do that but then think about your baby's future, think*

*about the future of the child. What if that one – because it's been three years that he was in jail – what he will do when he come back? And if you do that, the case was closed, there won't be any chance to open a case against this boy.*

*So since then, I took the boy because even the brother now, of this perpetrator, started to threaten to do all these things to the boy. So we took the boy to the children's home in Khayelitsha. The boy is with the boys. I don't know what happened to the mother because the mother is drinking a lot. I don't know if they bribe her or not. She came to me – the boy had stayed there for four months, and she came to me in the fourth month and say to me that she can't sleep, she always have bad dream about the boy, and saying that the boy might not be happy where he is, he might be bullied where he is. So she wants her baby back. So she went to court and told the magistrate that this boy needs to go. So they end up bringing the boy back and he's dirty, even though he's in school, he's dirty and he's a gangster. Sometimes he doesn't go to school, the mother doesn't even care if he go or not, so I say this to say that as much as there is gender-based violence in South Africa, some of the women are taking part of it.*

*I get worried when the women doesn't see the children's future like that. I find that some kids do get abused at home, but they say don't say it, don't tell anyone. If you say this we won't have any place to stay so don't tell anyone about. So the kids are going through a lot because of us as the women trying to hide the things that are happened. Things are coming up and people are saying this is gender based violence, but how did it start? So, I'm saying that it is a wrong thing that is happening in South Africa but I so*

*wish that us a women can also have a way of seeing it and addressing it in our community and with our kids because it start with us. So that's how it all started.*

Ndileka details the extreme psychological and emotional burden and labor of her work in this story, showing that it was her unending fight to find the perpetrator and simultaneously report him to the police, that ultimately ended with the perpetrator's arrest. Ndileka continued to look for the boy, even though she knows she could be killed for her work. The importance and power of money can also be seen, as the mother was bribed to both keep quiet, and to close the case.

Ndileka tells me how her daughter chose to stay home from school on Fundraising Days, which Ndileka says used to be fun when she was a kid, where they would dress up in an elderly person's clothes, but have become dangerous now. Her daughter said that men in Delft – predominantly a Coloured area – were throwing paint, causing burned skin, eggs, and carried razor blades in between their fingers to cut passerby. However, when she attempted to stay home from school to avoid violence, she was confronted with GBV in her own home. Ndileka explains that,

*“There's this guy who used to come to me. He's not my boyfriend but he's someone I know. I felt sympathy for that type of person, he's not working, he doesn't have a place to stay, doesn't have food to eat. So whenever I had jobs I always ask him can you put this door for me, so if there's a job for him, we always ask him. That day he came, and my daughter was at home with her friend. They were both here watching TV, and she was cleaning. They said this man came and sat in the chair like he was watching TV as well. So this friend go to tell her mother that he is here, so the mother came looking and when*

*she went, my daughter went to clean her room. So when she was busy in that room, the man stood up and went to the room, and he tried to rape her but she fought back to him so he couldn't. So that time she was fighting to him, that boy who was her friend, came also so when the boy was coming, he closed the door. That one inside was also fighting to him so he couldn't rape her because the one outside was busy screaming, banging the door, calling people because he saw what was happening inside. So he ended up leaving my daughter and went to run after this boy. So since then, I always felt like I don't know if I have the anger because I don't want the kids to be abused or molested like that, so since then I told myself you know what I don't want this to happen to any child. And I was there helping her go through the trauma, and she even sometimes wrote some suicidal letters, because she said they were laughing at her and try to make fun of her. So that's why I don't want anything to happen to the kids, rather it happen to an old person because you have your power instead of doing it with a child like that."*

Everyday, Ndileka must choose to leave her household and her children to produce a living wage and to help other vulnerable children in her community, particularly those who lack strong parental support like her children have. She must leave her children knowing that potential violence could befall them, but she relies on constant communication with her family to support her – two of Ndileka's sisters and mother live on her street.

When I asked Ndileka about gender-based violence, and what her thoughts are on why it is a

factor of life in South Africa, she explained,

*"I won't say there is something that is needing the men to do the rape. I wouldn't say it's because of unemployment, poverty, patriarchy, all that stuff, because I grew up in the same*



*situation my daughter was in. I also experienced that from my father. My father was staying with us, my mom, my two sisters, and I was the elder girl. My mom was at the back and it happened that my father left the bed with my mom, came to molest me, in my own space. So I wouldn't say it was because of alcohol or patriarchy or poverty, it's just a mindset of a human, that leads a person to do those things. He wasn't drunk, he had a woman, he had a wife, he had a family, he was working so I fail to understand what makes him to do what he did. So that's why I'm saying in some cases it might be alcohol stuff, but in some case it might not, but it's a peoples mindset to want to do what he is doing. Because even rich people can do that so I wouldn't say it's poverty or unemployment.”*

Ndileka says that it's not normal to go two or three days without hearing of someone being raped, and I asked her what environmental factors put women in more proximity to GBV. She elaborates,

*“The only thing that could be dangerous for us here is the toilets, the sanitation, because not everyone has it and you find that if you don't give your neighbor access, then they have to go at the back to the bushes and that's where it is getting dangerous. So when it comes to the water, it is a safe thing. But what is unsafe is the color of the water and the quality of the water. Sometimes it come brown or dirty, with white chlorine things sometimes, but sometimes it doesn't even come up.*

*Toilets – there's really not enough and the City says one bucket must be used by five households. So imagine how many people per household – maybe 6 or 7. So that's the only issue we have with safety.”*

She explains that she, her sisters, and many others in Green Park Informal Settlement have taps in their yards, and even though Ndileka says water provisioning is a woman's job, she says in Green Park it's much easier than in other areas because of this close proximity. Ndileka also demonstrates the environmental knowledge she's accrued living in Green Park – vernacular of environmental hazards like chlorine, chemicals, and other signs of poor water quality. Her ability to recognize these factors and alert them to other community members, and potentially forward complaints to the councilor and City, is essential to the health of her community.

Ndileka's work as a rape crisis counselor has shown her the tedious social relationships young girls enter into to guarantee themselves access to toilets and water. Ndileka explains that girls often date old men to get affection, basic needs, and even a sense of belonging. Ndileka explains that it gives girls a sense of protection and social clout, a characteristic essential in Cape Town's informal settlements. However, these tedious social relationships, hinging on sexual violence, pedophilia, and resource control, force women and children to sacrifice sexual wellbeing and personal autonomy, for basic resources. This continuously demonstrates the survivalist lengths people will go to to achieve access to water and sanitation – an extreme length that needs to be recognized and cared about by the CoCT.

Women and girls daily activities are highly affected by fears of violence. Due to the securitized nature of portable toilets in informal settlements, where toilets are locked and controlled, women and girls often must discretely and carefully find places to go to the bathroom. Sometimes, they choose to go in a wetland or a river to leave the informal settlement and find privacy, but they can also be followed or cornered, so this also can be a risk. Open defecation is somewhat of a problem, but is more often seen in the form of

defecating in plastic bags and throwing them in rivers or streams, or going to the bathroom in buckets, to avoid needing to leave the home at night for safety reasons. Exposed fecal matter has adverse health risks, particularly as people rely on open or semi-open defecation long-term. Local pedestrians transit is more common among women than men in Khayelitsha and other informal settlements in Cape Town, due to the time women spend walking to get water and go to the toilets <sup>212</sup>. The urgency often involved in needing a bathroom, subject to biological uncertainties and imperatives, requires nearby access to private, safe, and clean toilets, however in places like Mfuleni, Blue Downs, Burundi, and Nyanga, toilets are highly limited and securitized. Estimations of toilet access in Khayelitsha's informal settlements purport that on average 17.5 families can be using a single toilet<sup>213</sup>, or up to 70 people depending on family size <sup>214</sup>. Compared to daily activities like walking to shops and bus stops, where women often travel together, in daylight, and on a more routine schedule, trips to the bathroom are often into the bush, in darkness, or even subjected to shame or judgment, especially when it comes to menstrual activities. Toilets are often in disrepair or in extreme unhygienic conditions, and reaching a better toilet might required a more circuitous route through passageways and alleyways, that are often dark and full of unknowable risks.

Load-shedding, or state-controlled power blackouts due to a state energy crisis, exacerbates these risks as it plunges women and children further into darkness, and away from electrical resources like telephones and lights. Load-shedding is acute evidence of the national South African government's failures to divest from coal power, and invest in diverse

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<sup>212</sup> Gonsalves et al, "Reducing Sexual Violence", 2.

<sup>213</sup> Gonsalves et al, "Reducing Sexual Violence", 3.

<sup>214</sup> Gonsalves et al, "Reducing Sexual Violence", 5.

and sustainable energy sources, and the City of Cape Town is reliant upon Eskom, the nationalized energy company. Corruption, cronyism, and White monopoly power has continued to separate South African people from state services, and moreover, the means of production, and subjected them to extreme economic and social crisis, shown through hours long blackouts, several times a day. This can be seen as *passive infrastructural violence*, which refers to the negative costs and outcomes of infrastructure interventions, showing how violence is both physical and psychological<sup>215</sup>.

Comfort and ease of access to toilets is an essential part of female empowerment, and gender equality. Particularly related to menstruation, women can be shamed or judged for vaginal bleeding, and what is seen as “non-modesty”. Women experience a broad range of biological and physiological needs, especially considering the pervasiveness of postpartum bleeding, miscarriages, urinary tract infections, stress urinary incontinence, and other vaginal bleeding disorders like uterine fibroids and endometriosis<sup>216</sup>. Long bathroom lines can cause increased stress and social conflict, and venturing near railroad tracks or fields can vulnerabilize them to violence. Women have an elevated need for the bathroom compared to their male counterparts, and limited access results in women reducing their intake of food or liquid to avoid needing to go to the bathroom. This can have adverse health effects through dehydration, urinary tract infections, chronic constipation, and overall stress and anxiety. Sometimes, women and girls will stay home from school, or other activities, to avoid the anxiety of needing to find a safe toilet, whereas men and boys can more easily and sanitarily

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<sup>215</sup> Kumar, Ashok, Nitin Singh, Sarah Cooper, Anna Mdee and Shivani Singhal. “Infrastructural Violence: Five Axes of Inequities in Water Supply in Delhi, India”. *Frontiers in Water*. (2021). 10.3389/frwa.2021.727368

<sup>216</sup> Gonsalves et al, “Reducing Sexual Violence”, 10.

urinate in public with less social stigma and taboo, which is connected to female oppression and marginalization<sup>217</sup>.

To avoid being seen, women and girls wake up early, before dawn, to bury or dispose of menstrual waste as discretely as possible, sometimes in toilets which can lead to clogs, but they have also expressed being afraid to stain the toilet with blood, which has led to littering and increased ground refuse<sup>218</sup>. Qqola explains that “there is no way to tell who can choose to rape, even though women and girls are often told that they can protect themselves by staying away from certain places and kinds of men”.<sup>219</sup> Sibongile Buthelezi, water and sanitation advocate, commented that we must see sanitation through a gendered lens, and because men predominantly design and construct sanitation facilities, they overlook women’s need for privacy and dignity in bathroom trips. Buthelezi further commented that women often change clothes after using or emptying urine diversion dehydration toilets (UDDTs), because there’s a social stigma that these toilets bring negative smell and embarrassment onto the user.<sup>220</sup> The City’s Informal Settlements Matrix shows that a quarter of the City’s informal settlements are older than twenty years, however 73% of all toilet technologies provided to informal settlements are through temporary infrastructure, like porta-potty’s (portable toilets), buckets, chemical and container toilets<sup>221</sup>. Chemical toilets are short-term solutions that have become permanent through lack of replacement, and must be serviced and

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<sup>217</sup> Gonsalves et al, “Reducing Sexual Violence”, 10.

<sup>218</sup> Gonsalves et al, “Reducing Sexual Violence”, 9.

<sup>219</sup> Gqola, *Rape*, 3.

<sup>220</sup> Buthelezi, Sibongile. Women in Sanitation Seminar on zoom.

<sup>221</sup> Notyawala, Axolile. “South Africa has a draft sanitation policy at last”. *GroundUp*. (2016). <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/south-africa-has-sanitation-policy-last/>

emptied regularly to remain usable<sup>222</sup>, however as demonstrated by Executive Director Webster in his previous comments, are not routinely successful. As the Chair of the BWSPC Ian Neilsen reminded his councilors on November 3, providing sanitation is highly expensive due to operating costs and if you provide water, you must provide sanitation as well. These comments were highly interesting because they were aware of the life-reproducing needs of informal settlements, but continuously relying on financial logic to recuse responsibility.

The procurement of alternative sources of water, and subsequent transportation of water from standpipes, communal taps, or neighbor's homes via buckets, has resulted in a system whereby women function as municipal infrastructure, in the absence of proper servicing. Women's bodies become vehicles of essential services, meanwhile their minds are educated by the struggle for water access. Over time, women have become attuned to contaminants, shortages, and leaks, and use social capital and local knowledge to overcome these impediments to their days. The opportunity costs of being a woman in an informal settlement are incredibly high, as one must worry about their family's water access, food access, health, safety, and other socio-economic strifes. Women work together as environmental whistleblowers, and attempt to enter the democratic water governance space to have their concerns heard. However, many women have found that their complaints were ignored, their area was not eligible for municipal servicing, or they had to find an alternative solution. For example, when children were becoming sick en masse with diarrhea, doctors from Mfuleni local clinic found that there was widespread dysentery, which is caused by bacteria in a polluted water supply<sup>223</sup>. Subsistence agriculture, and small-scale farming seen

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<sup>222</sup> SERI, "Informal Settlements and Human Rights in South Africa", 9.

<sup>223</sup> Mdunyelwa. "Hydro-politics in South Africa", 19.

in Khayelitsha area informal settlements, are also vectors for health concerns, because cows and goats that people use for milk and meat drink from polluted streams and graze amongst trash.

Home is “more than just a shelter”; it’s a “zone of personal intimacy and familial security”<sup>224</sup>. Women, are often told to “stay at home”<sup>225</sup> to stay safe from sexual violence, and the continuous assertion of the home as the woman’s place relegates them to the private sphere, and away from political purview and public conversation. Through social capital and generational knowledge exchange, women and children learn highly specific and practical on-the-ground spatial and environmental knowledge, about where to go to the bathroom safely, where to walk to avoid male attention, and how to stay safe amid dangerous conditions. WhatsApp is one of the most useful pieces of technology for women and children to use to communicate with neighbors, family members, and loved ones, staying up to date on nearby crime, violence, broken pipes, or water shortages.

Mama Lulama is a well-known and well-respected community caretaker in Nyanga, where she lives in the formal section. She has social capital for several reasons, including her involvement with the community, being a local landowner, and owning a plot of land in nearby Gugulethu, where she has an organic garden. She uses agroecological principles, and hosts gardening workshops for interested community members, where she, along with several other women, teach how to plant and produce crops, and even gives out seedlings to those who want to start their own gardens. Nyanga is notorious for its gang violence and crime rates. Director Webster specifically cites Nyanga as the most unsafe neighborhood in

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<sup>224</sup> SERI, “Informal Settlements and Human Rights in South Africa”, 17.

<sup>225</sup> Gqola, *Rape*, 74.

South Africa<sup>226</sup>. My ability to interview Mama Lulama was guaranteed by ensuring that we had a male in the car with us as we drove through the heavily trafficked downtown area of Nyanga, nearby the police station and bus depot. I was advised not to linger near the police station, as it is sometimes targeted by local gangsters for its arms and weapons cache. The chaos of Nyanga is unsettling, and as we waited to pick up our male comrade, which I was told would make leering men “think twice” before mugging and attacking us, we were approached by several groups of men, surrounding our vehicle. They were deterred by my comrade, but their predation left me wondering how Mama Lulama, and other women, felt everyday. Nearby areas like Mfuleni suffer from similar socioeconomic issues, but have a more upbeat feel, whereas Nyanga’s high crime rates produce an eerie uncertainty about your safety. Once I was within Mama’s Lulama’s home, and her watchful eye, I felt like the opportunistic men I had just encountered couldn’t touch me. When I showed up at Mama Lulama’s home in Nyanga, Cape Town, she was holding a small child. I asked whose child it was and she said that it was her deceased sister’s grandchild, and the mother had left the child at her doorstep the day before. The mother had been given a work opportunity, and had

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<sup>226</sup> Michael Webster, interview.



no choice but to leave her child with someone else, and Mama Lulama was her primary option, due to her notoriety as a caring woman and caretaker to many who are not her direct family. She explained that she was annoyed that the woman had just left the child, but that of course she would take care of him because the mother needed to work. Mama Lulama's acceptance of her role as a caretaker to many comes at a cost to her.

Mama Lulama on November 17, with the child who had been left in her care



The opportunity cost of taking care of a child, on top of her responsibilities as a mother, grandmother, landowner, homeowner, and various non-profit engagements, results in an extra burden of unpaid care labor, of which she has no choice but to accept. Her caretaking and commitment to helping others exemplifies the conditions in which the Cape Town economy functions. Her voluntary labor produces a surplus of labor for which the

government and powers at be benefit, extracting free labor to produce capital accumulation. The Cape Town economy relies heavily on women like Mama Lulama, to maintain normalcy and stability in harrowingly unstable and chaotic areas like Nyanga. Mama Lulama thanked me for asking her about gender-based violence, and for giving her the opportunity to speak about the fear she lives with as a woman in Nyanga. She discusses how mistreated women are, and how she hears crying and screaming at night. This is not atypical of Cape Town; when I was out late at night in middle-class areas like Observatory, I could hear women screaming as well, let alone in much more unsafe areas like Nyanga. Mama Lulama discusses her own fear for her own safety, and how many women rely up on her caretaking labor, and how they couldn't survive without her, and the other women who allow mothers to work by taking care of their children. She discusses how when she heard a child being assaulted in her passage, she phoned the police but they didn't come, so she instead had to call her neighbors, and use local vigilantism to save the child. Mama Lulama puts herself at risk for the benefit of local children, and her selflessness is representative of the daily lifesaving work women do in Cape Town's informal settlements. Without women like Mama Lulama, there would be no structural support for mothers and children, as there is not free after school care, which Mama Lulama decided to rectify herself and start a child care center.

Mama Lulama's comments indicate the constrained nature with which women have to make decisions. They choose to stay with their abusive husbands or partners, in order to maintain income for their children's livelihoods and futures. They have to leave their children with other women, in order to work and provide an income for their children. She emphasizes that women have to help each other and she says that you can't pretend not to know someone or not hear their cries for help, because it will be you tomorrow. Similarly,

she mentions that when her neighbor needed water, she was frustrated but she knew that eventually she would need water as well, or another resource. Communal support is essential in Nyanga.

Mama Lulama discusses some of the provincial differences and similarities, between the Eastern Cape and Cape Town's water and land issues. She mentions the Day Zero drought, when she questioned whether or not she should move to the Eastern Cape, but the lack of resources in the Eastern Cape kept her from moving. The wealth and financial resources available in Cape Town, although not redistributed intentionally to Black and Coloured informal settlement residents, keep women like Mama Lulama in unsafe neighborhoods, because of the **prospect** of employment opportunities, and the marginal flow of non-profit and NGO resources.

Mama Lulama comments on a day where she had no water, and there was no communication or acknowledgement from the City of Cape Town about the lack of water in her area. She called Siya, who works at Environmental Monitoring Group, a well-funded NGO that works closely with communities affected by lack of water availability, and asks him to speak to the City. She knows that Siya has relationships and better bargaining power with the City, and they might better respond to his inquiries, rather than a multitude of water complaints from informal settlement residents. This shows the relationships and social clout that Capetonians have to accumulate and use in order to secure water access, and to even communicate with the City. She mentions when she tried to go to Subcouncil 14, to discuss how they shut off communal taps at public clinics and libraries in the Nyanga area, and they told her that there was no one to speak to her. She says with an exasperated sigh:

*“Yo, The Municipality. I had a garden here in the clinic. They were saying I can’t take water. I stand in my garden because I love my garden and I stand in my gate, and they ask me how much water are you going to use and I say I don’t know! It was like hey how much water and I can’t answer this question, because I don’t know how much I use per day. I went to Subcouncil 14 also, to say hey I’m struggling with water here, there’s no taps. They took the taps since before COVID, they took the taps out of the clinics, the outside taps. They took them out, before COVID.*

I asked Mama Lulama:” So it wasn’t a COVID issue?” And she responded:

*“No! It was not a COVID issue. They took them off from Day Zero, they took off the taps from the clinics, from the libraries, all the municipality things outside, there’s no water. You must go to their kitchens to take water there, because yes I understand we are short of water, there’s no water but you can’t stop the kids from studying at the library. Where are they going to get water there? They are stressed, they are feeling like drinking water every in time. They have to go ask them in the kitchen, and there’s no water in the library. I don’t understand. We are not happy in this world, because they are always putting us aside for this; “No we can’t”. You can’t say wait. The women are struggling everyday and there’s no change. I started to do the after care because I was seeing the problem of the kids. The women are having to go to work. They have to go to work and leave the child. I stopped working and then I was thinking of these kids because the mothers are complaining when I ask them, they say that they have no money and are not earning money to Pay for someone for the aftercare, so I decided to put these kids in this house. I put them here, and they were sharing everything and it was getting full here because they*

*want to be safe and I'm helping them with their homeworks, until the principal decided that I must go the school and help them there. I was helping them there and they were finishing roundabout 6pm, and then they tired and then they go home. Everyone's home at that time so they are safe. As women we have to think for each other, yes this is not my child but I have to take this child because she has to be safe and someone has to look after the child. That's us. That's us we can't run away from our problems.*

I said, "You can't forget if there's a child at your door", referencing the child sitting on her lap as we speak. She assertively responds, "*Not a woman. Not us.*"

I continued to ask Mama Lulama about her engagements with the City: "You mentioned Subcouncil 14 and how you went to go talk with them about how they removed the taps at libraries. What was your experience like going there, how did it go? Were you listened to and able to speak openly about your issue? How was that experience working with the City of Cape Town?" She responded:

*"Working with the City of Cape Town – eish<sup>227</sup>! There are people there you can talk to. But what I'm telling you, I belong to Subcouncil 14, Subcouncil 13 or 15 now, they changed it. It's not Subcouncil 14 anymore. You go there and find that the Chairperson is there. They just say can I help you? Yes I am looking for someone I can talk to about land or space. They say no he's not there. I say I always ask him questions, is no one in his office? They say yes there is someone, but why she doesn't say there is someone! They're letting me go out with saying that there is no one in that office. Now I have to ask do you want to tell me there's no one in that office and I sound rude to her also, because I'm*

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<sup>227</sup> [eish = expressive phrase to show frustration]

*forcing her to say something that she doesn't want to tell me. It's not easy, the City of Cape Town yeah, it's not working. But I see the new Mayor, it's like I never see him not even on TV but I feel like he's trying to do the best. He's trying to do the best even though there's no money. The municipalities complain about this, that there's no money. We don't know about Cape Town, what's happened but I can see that there is the progress since he gets in.*

*I can see that there is a progress but about the land. If they can just give us the land, especially farmers because now you hear that there is people grabbing land somewhere and now you're crazy, because you can go and grab land, which is not right! If they can just give us land and appreciate also what we're doing as communities, because we're cleaning the schools right now. The way I was cleaning that school because I have to get a bigger space. It was like I was cleaning a football field, it was never used as a garden. But today, if you can take a turn and look there, the people of Gugulethu they don't want me there. But your work here this garden never been like this. Same as the clinic, long time ago, when we finished the clinic, doing the garden there, they said they want their land. That's why we had to move, you understand. The problem is the land because I don't belong in Gugulethu but my garden is in Gugulethu, they chasing me away now there because the land is clean, it's beautiful, they see that this is a beautiful garden and they say "where are you from". I'm from KTC Nyanga, but why You come and do the garden here, this is Gugulethu, But it's already done! If the land can be available for the farmers*

*I'm telling you we can make better even us.*

I responded by asking, "You mentioned the Day Zero drought and the heavy water restrictions implemented during the drought. There's mixed opinions and perceptions around

that drought, and some people say that it was a myth, some people accuse the City of over exaggerating the drought to introduce water restrictions. Some people don't trust the city and think it was an effort to privatize or put in water metering devices, so I'm wondering what your thoughts are on trusting the City. Did you feel that the City was trustworthy in their decision-making?"

*"Yes, we were not sure about that. We were scared also and I wanted to move from Cape Town because I was scared. Must I go back to Eastern Cape? But it's worse there because you are drinking from the dam, there, which is not clean. I was so scared because now we have to think twice when is this Day Zero? When is it going to come? Because when they were still announcing that, Day Zero is going to come, what was the meaning of this Day Zero? It was scary. Even that Day Zero Makes us save water, no matter what was going on there [motions in the direction of Cape Town CBD] between the city and the politicians and whatever, but the Day Zero to me was that it was educating to use water carefully because I had a bucket – 20 L bucket of water there. Yeah it was something that we learn about water, it was Day Zero but we learned to save water. That time there was children which were coming into my house but now I have to stop them to put a bucket there, and if the bucket is finished then, there is no matter water for you. There's no more water. Because I can't go take water again because there's no water. They were learning from that. No matter what they were calling it, it was something to learn about how to use water in your house."*

I asked "Do you have a water meter – was one installed?"

*“Yes, I have a meter but I didn’t change it because they said I must sign for it and didn’t want to because I had lots of kids in this and I didn’t want to sign for this water because it’s going to stop my water. Even my neighbors, they always have no water, and I had a tap outside there, there’s a gate there, and at night they’d always come and get water from me because there is no water for them. I started to fight with them and I thought no I mustn’t fight because they’ve got no water and they are my neighbors. If I’ve got water, there is something that I don’t have that will make me go there – tomorrow I won’t have sugar or whatever, I have to help them they are my neighbors. Even this year, there was a day with no water. We phoned Siya and said Siya please ask the City for us because there was nothing announced for water. But in my house there was water and I don’t know how it happened and then I called my neighbor and said I have water I don’t know why and then we started getting buckets. And people saw her coming and now that day people started selling water for the others. Wow selling people water. They were coming for coffee, please can you make my coffee because I couldn’t take my tablets this morning. Now they’ve got tablets on their hands and they have to take their tablets.”*

I commented, “So through word of mouth, people start flocking to the water source.”, to which she replied:

*“They were fighting. They were fighting. The kids they were in the front and the elders in the back of the line, and they said you are a kid you can’t be in the front. I said no no no don’t do that. Ask if you can come in front of her and not to fight about her. I said in my house there’s nothing like that, and you have to ask her, if she doesn’t want to move she doesn’t have to move.”*



I asked “is it often that you’re using all of your daily allotted amount of water?”

*“Me in the house, I don’t use all of it. But my neighbors are using a lot, because there’s an informal settlement there, and they always going and getting water there. But they are fighting with those people there, they say “you don’t do your washing here, you stay in your brick houses, go and do your washing in your house.””*

I followed up with “Why do they go there, because there’s a communal standpipe?”

*“Yes, there’s a pipe for the community.”*

“And they have an issue with their water, so they go there?”

*“Yes yes.”*

I then asked, “Thinking about the women you support and the women who rely on you, how much do you worry about their safety and your own safety, in regard to gender-based violence in Nyanga?” She responded:

*“Thank you for this question, Julia. The women are not safe, the women are not safe. That’s why I’m saying we have to be here in this world, no matter what we have to be here, with our children also. They have to be here with their children, because what I can see everyday is screaming, screaming, screaming of children, especially in our townships, every night, every weekend, the women are beaten, and are killed. It’s something which we have ourselves to educate. We have to educate ourselves because the little knowledge I know I have to share with my neighbor. Let’s have a group, WhatsApp group for whoever is crying at night. Let’s form a group and say do you hear this crying, this noise. Do you*

*hear this child? There was a child who was almost raped in this passage here [motions to reference to street outside her home] but I don't sleep when I hear that noise especially of this children walking up and down. She was from Newcastle Road, whereby she was taken by the man coming to rape her here, but I was scared because I don't know if he has a gun and I just put the light on and the man said "switch that light off". Now I switch my light off but I phone the police, you understand, and the police doesn't come. So I phone my neighbors, and say there's something happening here and I said we can't go, because we're scared. Fortunately, my neighbor told his son and his son went out and he saw the girl with the man. The women are not safe in this country at all, and our government justice is also weak for us. Our justice is always thinking of a human being, when you have to sentence them, whatever they doing to the women, he knows that he's sentencing a human being, which maybe they think they still need that man tomorrow. They don't need the women because they are killing the women, but they when they sentence the man, they know that he's coming out again and do the same thing. That's why they sentence so many years so that they are, and then come back again to the same thing. You hear everyday on the TV, the same person that was killing the people, is the same person who was sentenced the other year. He did this before. We are in danger in this country. We are in danger, with our kids also, we are not safe. We are not safe. I'm not safe, even me, I always lock here because someone can just come in. Two weeks ago, my son was sleeping in the day and someone came in and he grabbed the kettle and remote control, because my son thought he was safe in the house. They took the kettle but my neighbor was doing the washing, and he saw he had the kettle, and he started shouting and the others came and see him and he dropped the kettle and ran away. We have to be safe, and help each other. That's the main*

*thing, we have to help each other. Don't say I don't know this one, you have to make a noise because it's going to be you tomorrow.*



The passageway where Mama Lulama heard a girl crying and being assaulted.

The structural hurdles Mama Lulama has to overcome to engage with the City seem insurmountable, but women like Mama Lulama have been educated through struggle not to be deterred by municipal neglect. Mama Lulama engages with local non-profits who try to fill in the gap left by municipal shortcomings, particularly organizations like Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), Food Dialogues, and the Western Cape Water Caucus. Her life-long residency in Cape Town, approximately 70 years, have shown Mama Lulama the well-intentioned organizations that work to redistribute resources democratically and retributively. Through my relationship with Mama Lulama, I was able to watch her engage in these spaces, and she was always one of the most lively and active voices in the room. I watched as she spoke at a community forum on food sovereignty and proper nutrition called *Food*

*Dialogues*, where she greeted everyone with warmth and genuine concern, and made them laugh with her outspoken rhetoric. Mama Lulama goes out of her way to engage in community spaces, despite the physical immobilities and difficulties of navigating Cape Town's informal settlements. At every community space I went to, I saw her speaking passionately and inclusively about the City's future.

Mama Lulama (far right) speaking at a meeting of community activists participating in Environmental Monitoring Group's Integrated Community Environment Programmes (ICEP) meeting on November 10, 2022



Mama Lulama (yellow hat) at the Food Dialogues meeting on October 21, 2022



Mama Lulama also touches upon an important element of Cape Town's former townships. Due to the constrained political economy of Cape Town, with limited resources and employment opportunities for its poorest residents, there are sometimes violent and tense relationships between neighborhoods and wards. For example, Mama Lulama's garden and plot of land is in Gugulethu, nearby her home in Nyanga, but people in Gugulethu resent Mama Lulama for having land where she is not from. They tell her to go back to Nyanga, and she is aware of their resentment of her. Constructed scarcity is producing social conflict and community resentment, although their resentment should be directed at the municipality, but instead results in animosity and division.



Mama Lulama's plot of land in Gugulethu and a young schoolboy watches through the fence. She is well-known by the children who pass by her garden on their way home from the primary school on whose land the garden is located. Small agroecological gardens are often located on unused land at schools in informal settlements, connecting to their water.



Map showing the close proximity between Nyanga and Gugulethu, but Mama Lulama is associated with being from Nyanga, and often feels unwelcome in Gugulethu.

Environmental scarcity and intentional disconnection of informal settlements from City services, both under Apartheid and today through neoliberal economic restructuring, has



resulted in “culture of survival”<sup>228</sup>. Women have become environmental whistleblowers, water knowledge holders, and *community caretakers* through their unending labor for their communities<sup>229</sup>. My work with women with experiential environmental knowledge and social clout shows that women continue to struggle and labor, as community caretakers by continuously engaging with the City. Abdou Maliqalim Simone explains how women’s labor becomes an unpaid vehicle for municipal services that are severely lacking and overburdensome onto the female body and mind<sup>230</sup>. Further, humans can become infrastructure to the state itself; infrastructure is commonly understood as highways, pipes, wires, etc., but people and their knowledge of alternative solutions can also become another form of human infrastructure <sup>231</sup>.

Water requires a synergistic, trustable relationship between landowner or cultivator, and those who reside on their land, particularly due to the usage of riparian water rights, where land ownership is intrinsically linked to water access. Reciprocal relationships between those share the land and its resources rely on trust and good will, but state policies, particularly existing lawful use principles that maintain Apartheid land maldistribution, interfere with people’s ability to develop their own forms of resilience and stability. As Lyla Mehta explains, the state should be building on local community’s environmental coping strategies, groundwater management, and agroecological principles because they have been developed over generations and centuries of struggle with the environment, due to natural

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<sup>228</sup> Oldfield et al., “Gendering citizenship”, 46.

<sup>229</sup> Sou, G., Risha, A.N., Sims, C., and Ziervogel, G. (2022). *Everyday Stories of Climate Change*. RMIT University and The University of Manchester.

<sup>230</sup> Simone, Abdou Maliqalim. “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg.” *Public Culture* 16: no.3 (2004): 407 – 429. [muse.jhu.edu/article/173743](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/173743).

<sup>231</sup> Simone, “People as infrastructure”, 220.

hazards like floods, droughts, storms, etc. However, state policies center the City as the legitimate distributor and regulator of water access, and often tout environmental rights, evading the financial interest the City has in maintaining scarcity. The lack of trust between the City and informal communities and deliberate exclusion from formal democratic participation has resulted in informal communities resorting to protest. Through protest, communities must confront the state, and state violence, with immense bravery, and at a high opportunity cost for themselves.

The CoCT is involved in social reproduction and patriarchal hegemony through state policies that prioritize male inclusion, and sideline female issues. For example, the City's housing allocation policy, called *Housing Schemes Contracted by a Local Authority*, requires that the housing subsidy is given to those who are either: a married male man, a single person with dependents residing permanently with the applicant, and a married female who is also the breadwinner of the family<sup>232</sup>. These highly gendered requirements for housing provisioning worsens female dependence on men and requires the woman to be married, with dependents, and a breadwinner simultaneously. Women-state relationships are also embedded in social and public infrastructure, whereby women receive signals about their citizenship, and unimportance to the City itself. Ideas of infrastructural citizenship explain how on an everyday basis citizens are reminded of their inclusion, exclusion, or importance through municipal infrastructure. "Infrastructure is a space where expectations from both state and citizens confront each other, and the relationship between both actors is shaped

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<sup>232</sup> Williams, Rafieka. "City of Cape Town Ordered To Change Housing Policy Deemed Discriminatory against Women". (2022). *Independent Online*. <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/city-of-cape-town-ordered-to-change-housing-policy-deemed-discriminatory-against-women-4d39ced3-942c-43a1-9724-7bba9c03726d>

through this” process <sup>233</sup>. Men and women interact with the state differently, due to their different biological needs. Women have often been used as surplus labor and unpaid care labor, and under Apartheid, women were allowed to move out of townships for domestic work, but only through costly permits, gaining extra revenue for the municipality since 1913<sup>234</sup>. Many women who first arrived in Cape Town stayed in single rooms with ten to fifteen single men, with limited privacy and increased demand for women’s labor like communal cooking and washing clothes for male workers. Women have continuously provided the extra labor needed to subsidize life itself, particularly in informal areas with very little state-provided social reproduction labor.

Masculine authority and local power holders determine the daily material conditions and health and safety outcomes for women and children. “Men are the gatekeepers of current gender orders and are potential resisters of change, and if we do not effectively reach men and boys, many of our efforts will be thwarted or simply ignored. Involving men, by contrast, can generate a broader consensus on issues which have previously been marginalised as being of interest to women only – sexual and reproductive health, for example.” <sup>235</sup>

It’s important to note that in Cape Town, many women work as domestic workers. The South African Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) has shown how domestic workers were exploited under Apartheid, whereby wealthy neighborhoods procured labor from the informal periphery, and was formalized under the Masters and

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<sup>233</sup> Georgi, Neele, Sibongile Buthelezi and Paula Meth. “Gendered Infrastructural Citizenship: Shared Sanitation Facilities in Quarry Road West Informal Settlement, Durban, South Africa”. *Urban Forum*, 452.

<sup>234</sup> Makhulu, *Making Freedom*, 44.

<sup>235</sup> Kaufman, M. “Transforming our interventions for gender equality by addressing and involving men and boys: A framework for analysis and action.”, 20.

Servants Act <sup>236</sup>. New standards for domestic worker have been adopted under Convention 189 in 2011 at the 100th Labor Conference of the ILO<sup>237</sup>, which attempts to regulate work in the private sphere of the household, by providing clear information on terms and conditions of employment, minimum wage, and limiting hours of work <sup>238</sup>. Regulating the private sphere of work within wealthy neighborhoods is difficult, and today, SADSAWU is focused on regulating the private recruitment agencies in Cape Town that recruit women from rural areas or foreign nationals<sup>239</sup>, and pocket most of these women's wages and only give them a marginal amount <sup>240</sup>. Migrant women often experience higher rates of unemployment compared to local women, because of job reservation policies <sup>241</sup>. This shows that although the end of Apartheid has heralded new possibilities for civil liberties, the capitalist machine of procuring tenuous labor from informal settlements for social reproduction is still very much active. Scholarship has shown that the introduction of the first minimum wage in South Africa in 2002 is contributing to market formalization of domestic work and mainly resulted in a doubling of formal contracts for workers but no significant reduction in hours of work or increase in wages <sup>242</sup>. In the domestic work sector, the boundaries between employer and employee are not well-defined, <sup>243</sup> which creates a work environment with limited bargaining

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<sup>236</sup> SADSAWU (<http://www.sadsawu.com/about-us.html>)

<sup>237</sup> ILO = International Labor Organization

<sup>238</sup> SADSAWU (<http://www.sadsawu.com/about-us.html>)

<sup>239</sup> Although private recruitment agencies exploit lack of legal status to provide less clear terms and conditions of employment, the majority of domestic workers in South Africa are not foreigners, unlike many Latin American and Middle Eastern countries,

<sup>240</sup> SADSAWU (<http://www.sadsawu.com/about-us.html>)

<sup>241</sup> Benya, "The invisible hands", 551.

<sup>242</sup> Dinkelman and Ranchhod, "Evidence on the impact", 41.

<sup>243</sup> De Villiers, B., & Taylor, M. (2019). "Promoting a positive work experience for South African domestic workers." *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 17, no. 2 [10.4102/sajhrm.v17i0.1206](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v17i0.1206)

power for the domestic worker .<sup>244</sup> The ILO considers the domestic work sector to be ‘informal’, and this definition marginalizes the arduous and essential work of domestic workers <sup>245</sup>. SADSAWU challenges this narrative by stating “domestic work is decent work” <sup>246</sup>, and more than that, it is essential labor that enables all workers, irregardless of race, to leave their homes and enter the labour market. Women’s care labor is an enabling device for Cape Town’s entire economy, supplementing the care labor that is not understood or recognized by the municipality itself. There are many factors causing the need for domestic work in Cape Town, particularly the insufficiency of state care provisioning for children, elderly, and the infirm, and an increased feminization of the work force <sup>247</sup>. There is a high need for caretakers in Cape Town and in a study conducted by Blaauw and Bothma (2010), it was found that the percentage of domestic workers performing childcare duties in South Africa almost doubled in the period 2001 (8%) to 2006 (14%), which showed an increased number of mothers and female heads of household entering the market <sup>248</sup>.

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<sup>244</sup> Marais, C., and van Wyk, C. “Future directiveness within the South African domestic workers’ work-life cycle: Considering exit strategies”. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 15(1), 1–14. (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2015.10>

<sup>245</sup> Marais and Van Wyk, “Future Directiveness”, 7.

<sup>246</sup> SADSAWU (<http://www.sadsawu.com/about-us.html>)

<sup>247</sup> De Villiers and Taylor, “Promoting a positive work”, 3.

<sup>248</sup> De Villiers and Taylor, “Promoting a positive work”, 3.

## **Conclusion**

Women's amiable interpersonal relationships, environmental knowledge, and social capital helps them overcome the extreme environmental and social hurdles in their daily lives. The culture of survival and struggle in informal settlements is highly juxtaposed to the ease at which tourists, wealthy residents, and serviced areas receive water resources. For the City of Cape Town to truly be a "water sensitive city", it needs a sustainable and inclusive mandate that both recognizes the unevenness of the City and demonstrates a genuine prioritization of helping women of informal settlements. Cape Town is a case study of how developing cities will need to integrate and recognize their surrounding urban areas, as they cannot function without the informal settlements they draw domestic labor and capital from. Although gender-based violence has become increasingly publicized in South Africa, women remain highly unsafe when they venture to the bathroom or to get water. In times of social and environmental crisis, the City will assume that women will labor to reproduce their households, as the City continues to focus on demand reduction rather than supply augmentation. While the free basic right to water is constitutionalized, it is not actualized in material reality.

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