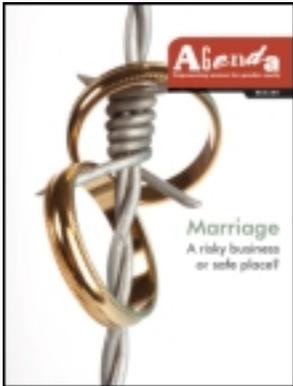


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Women's organisations and the struggle for water and sanitation services in Chatsworth and Inanda, Durban: The Westcliff Flats Residents Association and the Didiyela Women's Group

Shauna Mottiar, Orlean Naidoo and Dudu Khumalo

abstract

Struggles for the right to basic water and sanitation in Chatsworth and Inanda, Durban, have largely been undertaken by civil society organisations lead by women and comprising mainly female membership. This *Perspective*, following a typology put forward by Rachel Einwohner, Jocelyn Hollander and Toska Olson (2000), examines the way in which two of these organisations namely the Westcliff Flats Residents Association and the Didiyela Women's Group are gendered pertaining to composition, goals, tactics, identities and attributions. In terms of composition, it considers how movement issues may attract larger numbers of female as opposed to male members. In terms of goals it considers movement objectives and the level of attempts to transform gender hierarchies or differentiation. With regards to tactics the way protest is framed is examined including anything from demonstrations and picketing, to the signs and symbols employed by movement protestors. With regards to identities it is questioned whether movement actors include cultural meanings about gender into their identities and whether they use these identities to lay claim to certain issues. A review of attributions centres on the ways that meanings are attributed to movements by those outside of the movement, including its opponents, and whether stereotypes about gender alter responses towards the movements they are attributed to. In adopting this typology for analysis, the writers attempt to add some insight into the extent that approaches and techniques employed by women's organisations have been successful in securing the right to basic water and sanitation.

keywords

Gender, social movements, women's organisations, water, sanitation

Introduction

In their article entitled 'Engendering social movements: Cultural images and movement dynamics', Rachel Einwohner, Jocelyn Hollander and Toska Olson (2000) develop a typology of the ways social movements are gendered. Their typology moves beyond the gendered composition or goals of a movement and considers how movement strategies, identities

and attributions may be gendered and how this affects the movement and its outcomes. This *Perspective* seeks to apply the typology to the Westcliff Flats Residents Association (WFRA), Chatsworth, and the Didiyela Women's Group (DWG), Inanda, in order to understand whether gender is an explanatory factor in the emergence, nature and outcomes of social movements (Taylor, 1999) in the Durban areas

of Chatsworth and Inanda. Following a research methods section, the *Perspective* is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the typology put forward by Einwohner *et al* within definitions of gender and social movements. The second part profiles the two organisations under consideration within understandings of social movements and community-based organisations in South Africa. The third part applies the Einwohner *et al* typology to the WFRA and the DWG, considering how it can deepen understandings of the way in which gender influences social protest in Chatsworth and Inanda. In conclusion, the extent to which approaches and techniques employed by the organisations under study have been successful in securing the right to basic water and sanitation are considered.

Methods

A qualitative approach was identified as the most appropriate way to apply the Einwohner *et al* typology to the case study organisations. The study employed purposive convenience sampling to recruit respondents. Members of both organisations were briefed about the study during a regular organisation meeting in November 2010 and female members who were willing, were asked to remain behind after the meeting in order to complete questionnaires pertaining to organisation composition, goals, tactics, identities and attributions. Members were informed about the academic nature of the study and its focus on gender and respondents were assured of anonymity. The target number of questionnaires was ten per case study, 20 in total. The questionnaires adopted a semi-structured format, ensuring that while all respondents were asked the same questions in the same sequence there was room for them to express their own perspectives. Only seven WFRA members and six DWG members completed questionnaires, however, bringing the total number of completed questionnaires to 13. In addition to the membership sample, the organisation leaders both also completed questionnaires which included sections on organisational aspects of the WFRA and DWG. Despite two of the authors being leaders of the case study organisations, ethnographic methods were not employed in order to centre the findings more firmly within the experience of female members as representative of the

case study organisations. Given that the research gathered was drawn from within the organisations under study and not from external organisations, other members of civil society or government, any conclusions with regards identities and attributions are acknowledged as being limited.

Gender and social movements

‘Gender’ refers to the “social and cultural interpretations and expectations that are associated with sex yet that go beyond biological characteristics” (Einwohner *et al*, 2000:682). Furthermore, gender operates at the levels of an individual characteristic, a social activity, as group level expectations and patterns of behaviour and as a broader system of hierarchy (Einwohner *et al*, 2000). ‘Social movements’ have been described as:

“forms of collective action with a high degree of popular participation, which use non-institutional channels, and which formulate their demands while simultaneously finding forms of action to express them, thus establishing themselves as collective subjects, that is as a group or social category” (Jelin, 1986 quoted in Ballard *et al*, 2005: 617).

The typology formulated by Einwohner *et al* (2000) proposes five ways in which social movements could be gendered. The first is in terms of composition. In this sense movements focused on issues that directly affect women such as the right to abortion which may well attract larger numbers of female, as opposed to male members. Movements that deal with issues not directly affecting women per se but that for some reason attract more women than men are another case. Examples of such issues include animal rights and peace activism (Einwohner *et al*, 2000). When considering composition the typology also considers that social images associated with sex and pre-existing mobilisation may influence the gendering of movements. The second way a movement may be gendered according to the typology, is in terms of goals. These goals may attempt to change gender hierarchies or differentiation. Examples would include the women’s movement seeking political and social change in terms of gender (Einwohner *et al*, 2000). The third way a movement may be gendered is in terms of

tactics. This would refer to the ways protest would be framed and would include anything from demonstrations and picketing to the signs and symbols employed by movement protestors. Examples of the way tactics would be gendered include female activists handing out gifts of flowers and home-baked goods associating the action with traditional understandings of femininity or of female activists banging on pots in protest thus invoking the concept of women as providers and nourishers (Einwohner *et al*, 2000). The fourth way the typology understands a movement may be gendered is in terms of identities. Movement actors therefore include cultural meanings about gender into their identities and use these identities to lay claim to certain issues. Examples of this include peace movements using feminine or maternal images to advocate for peace (Einwohner *et al*, 2000). The fifth way a movement may be gendered is in terms of attributions. This refers to meanings attributed to movements by those outside of the movement including its opponents. In this sense:

“movements are gendered to the extent that opponents and other third parties evaluate them in terms of gender...these evaluations may either hamper or facilitate protest efforts” (Einwohner *et al*, 2000:688).

Examples of gendered attributions include opponent responses to American women animal rights activists as ‘stupid housewives’ and Argentinean politicians failing to take members of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo seriously when they began a series of demonstrations against the military government on account of the fact that they were just “crazy women” who posed no real threat to the regime (Einwohner *et al*, 2000:689). Stereotypes about gender may, therefore, delay and even alter responses towards the movements they are attributed to.

The Westcliff Flats Residents Association and the Didiyela Women’s Group

Within the literature on contemporary civil society in South Africa it is argued that social movements and survivalist community-based organisations are products of government’s adoption of neo-liberal economic policies resulting, among other things, in mass water

and electricity cut-offs, home repossessions and rent evictions (Habib, 2005). A survey conducted in 2002 indicated that some ten million water and electricity cut-offs for non-payment had been recorded and that two million people were evicted from their homes (McDonald & Pape, 2002). The WFRA and the DWG, as civil society formations in their respective communities, act as mechanisms for contesting and engaging the state and also enable poor and marginalised communities to survive on a day to day basis (Habib, 2005).

Both the WFRA and the DWG are examples of this. The WFRA formed part of the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF), a social movement orientated around the working class urban areas of the Durban (eThekweni) Municipality, namely Bayview and Westcliff in the Indian township of Chatsworth. The CCF reflected the reactions of working-class people to the government economic policies resulting in evictions and water and electricity disconnections owing to non-payment at a local level (Dwyer, 2004). A survey conducted in 1999 of the Bayview and Westcliff areas indicated that out of the 504 families living there, 75 per cent lived below the poverty line, 58 per cent were unemployed and 42 per cent dependent on welfare grants (Dwyer, 2004:9). The DWG serves a community of women in Umzinyathi under the Qadi Tribal Authority, Inanda falling under the Durban (eThekweni) Municipality, Ward 3. Of the 5 284 households in Ward 3, 2 531 are traditional and while electricity services are provided to 74 per cent of formal households, dwelling/yard water is only provided to 27 per cent of households and flushing toilets to 7 per cent. Non-economically active people represent 46 per cent of the residents (*Durban Government Media Gazette*, 2007: 8 - statistics drawn from 2001 census).

The WFRA is a community-based organisation. It was established in 1998 in response to housing evictions, electricity and water cut-offs and rising rental costs. The WFRA advocates and lobbies for policy change to make basic services affordable and accessible and also acts to educate and empower the community it serves with regards to rights to services and the responsibilities of local authorities. It is a highly structured organisation with leadership constituted by a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer elected by the members. It also has eight working committee members and running costs are generally funded by the

membership. It holds regular weekly meetings which are typically attended by a 100 members. Eighty five per cent of WFRA members are women.

The DWG is a community-based organisation. It was established in 2008 as a way to collect money to purchase food and pay school fees for the children of members. The organisation soon began to address issues of service delivery however, especially with regards to sanitation in rural areas. The DWG consists of 28 members all of whom are women and range from young mothers to older women. Leadership consists of four office bearers: a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. Regular meetings are held and are open to all. The DWG has no formal funding but members contribute whatever they are able towards running costs and community projects spearheaded by the organisation.

WFRA and DWG composition and goals

Compositionally the WFRA is dominated by female members but deals with issues that do not affect women only. Members described it as a 'community' organisation and not a 'women's' organisation. The fact that membership seems to have attracted larger numbers of women than men is attributed to the fact that men are "too lazy" (Anonymous Respondent 1, WFRA, November 2010) to attend meetings and don't care to undertake the trying work of the organisation. Members interviewed indicated that women are 'stronger' than men, if not physically then mentally. Women are also more committed to achieving the goals of the organisation, with regards, for example, to accessing running water in their homes because they are the primary child carers. Women are further seen as having a greater sense of commitment to the 'community' and therefore to issues affecting the community² than men. The high number of female members was also attributed to the fact that large numbers of women are unemployed and can therefore commit time to the organisation's activities and many women in the community are single and are forced to fight their own battles. Most (female) members argued that male membership is important for the organisation, given that the problem of access to basic water,

for example, is an issue that affects both sexes alike and that men should be involved in issues that affect the community as a whole. Members also pointed out that sometimes 'physical' work is carried out within the ambit of organisational duties and able men would aid this aspect of activity. This was however distinguishable from some members who argued that additional male members would make the organisation 'stronger' as an entity.

The DWG is, as implied, a women's organisation composed of only female members. Most members are fairly direct about the fact that the organisation is better off without any male members – to quote one of the members:

"We think there should be no men at all because they complicate things that are (already) complicated...especially when it comes to toilet issues" (Anonymous Respondent 1, DWG, November 2010).

The physical presence of men was also seen as a barrier to the workings of the organisation limiting decision-making process:

"What happens is that where there are men, we automatically become subordinates and we are forced to listen to what they say. Also it is very difficult to find good men. Those who support us do not want to get involved. Those who get involved are called bad names" (Anonymous Respondent 1, DWG, November 2010).

In terms of increasing or supplementing membership it was argued that more younger women should join the organisation to relieve the burden on the older women. The DWG is viewed by its members as being an organisation that deals with issues pertaining specifically to women. In this sense, sanitation is firmly in the 'female' terrain as it is women who have to deal with the complication of non-flushing toilets for use by children and the elderly. This is challenging as the non-flushing or urine diversion system requires that urine be separated from faeces and that sand or ash be used to cover excrement immediately after use of the toilet facility. It is also women who have to empty and clean these toilets.

Goals of both the WFRA and the DWG are less oriented towards influencing gendered compositions and more closely focused on

dealing with basic issues of survival, such as access to basic water and sanitation facilities for the communities involved.

The goals of the WFRA were informed in the late 1990s when the maintenance grant to 'Indian' people was cut by one third to reach the African population who had been excluded under apartheid. The pressure on households was also increased by an increase in Chatsworth rentals, electricity and water tariffs, forcing people into evictions, arrears and disconnection of services for non-payment. The WFRA has been part of a long struggle to advocate at local government level for better living conditions and affordable services to the Chatsworth poor.

With particular reference to water services, the WFRA advocacy has moved from moratoriums on disconnections, cancellation of arrears, the demand for less complicated water bills and reviews of tariff increases, to the call for access to free basic water as entrenched in the country's constitutional socio-economic rights obligations and resisting the water 'trickler' (limiter) system (Naidoo, 2010). Most members interviewed also stressed that organisation goals are linked to the pursuit of an overall betterment of the community.

The WFRA has been part of a long struggle to advocate at local government level for better living conditions and affordable services to the Chatsworth poor

The goals of the DWG are to achieve more productive levels of participation with local authorities regarding choices around sanitation options for households in the community. The urine diversion system of sanitation was adopted for traditional homesteads in Inanda because the provision of waterborne sewerage infrastructure to newly incorporated rural areas would be too costly and the limited volume of free water per month would not sustain flushing toilets, making the case for dry sanitation (Khumalo, 2010). Members of the DWG see one of their main goals as being able to influence municipal policy regarding sanitation in their community. The organisation also advocates for municipal services in terms of disposing of

waste, in order to reduce the burden on women who maintain and clean the toilets.

WFRA and DWG tactics, identities and attributions

Tactics employed by the WFRA do not fit within conventionally gendered norms, in that they are not framed within traditional understandings of femininity that are frequently very narrow and call for women's subordination, rather than organisation to oppose their oppression. In the case of the WFRA, the gender tactics reflect a challenge to narrow meanings of gender identity. Female members have consistently utilised tactics traditionally associated with the male domain. Tactics that have included physically removing municipal disconnectors from flats, replacing pipes, modifying the water 'trickler' system and reconnecting the water supply, were carried out as a matter of course by female members. The tactics employed in fact played a large role in forcing the municipality to engage with the Westcliff community, given that the attempts to remove services for non-payment were rendered futile. Other tactics employed by the WFRA included a High Court action against the municipality on the grounds of a South African citizen's socio-economic right to a supply of basic water. This court action occurred in 2000 with the WFRA and Thulisile Christina Manquele, a Westcliff flat dweller, as applicants. The applicants argued that Manquele had the right to a basic water supply and so should not have suffered a water disconnection for non-payment. The action was unsuccessful, however, as the court ruled that the disconnection was a credit control mechanism. The organisation also employs basic methods of protest, such as marching and serving petitions on local authorities, as well as organising defiance campaigns. The DWG has a smaller range of tactical responses and its stress on peaceful means may have some bearing on tactics traditionally preferred by women. These include submitting memos to the local ward councillor who is designated to represent the community's issues within the local government system. The organisation also seeks to directly engage with municipal or traditional authorities by formally requesting meetings. The formal requests for meetings do

not always yield results, an example given being when a report prepared by municipal attendees for 'higher structures' failed to reflect the needs of the Inanda community with regards sanitation even though they were clearly articulated at the meeting. DWG leadership pointed to the tactic employed by Ma Lilian Ngoyi, leading women in a march against the pass laws, as an example for the DWG. This is because it is a peaceful rather than violent manner of protest.

The main gendered identities emerging from the WFRA that members use to lay claim to their gender interests include the role of mothers acting in the interests of their children and of women being more concerned with community issues than men:

"(I am a) mother, I will fight tooth and nail to protect my family. I will picket daily to achieve what will make my community a safe place" (Anonymous Respondent 2, WFRA, November 2010).

A dominant identity that emerges for the WFRA, is the strength and capability of women who have taken on roles traditionally associated with men's skills in the gender segregation of work, to resolve the problems in the community.

Gendered identities within the DWG centre on the burdens placed on women as a result of the gender division of labour performed in the household as the mothers and carers in a patriarchal environment. Furthermore members of the organisation see themselves as having selfless qualities which are not shared by men. In reference to the community garden initiative spearheaded by the organisation a member stated, "Our men do not do gardening, they only do it if they are going to be paid" (Anonymous Respondent 3, DWG, November 2010). DWG members also see themselves as persistent by virtue of being women in the effort to improve sanitation:

"Men take issues easy, and they still believe that the person who has more power or in the higher structures will come to them and tell them what to do and what to wait for. We women do not believe in such but we keep nagging, as they say. And we want details, more details" (Anonymous Respondent 1, DWG, November 2010).

Meanings attributed to the WFRA, to the extent that third parties evaluate its members in terms

of gender, are conflicted with regards men in the community. Some of the members believed that men acknowledge and respect the work carried out by the organisation and that men view the women members of the organisation as 'strong' and 'competitive'. Views from leadership quarters differed somewhat with the view that men in the community can be 'disrespectful' towards women and that they view women as 'weak', and by implication ineffective. In terms of attributions from local government quarters, some members argued that local politicians and officials "see us as a threat because we speak our minds" (Anonymous Respondent 2, WFRA, November 2010). Other members stressed that that there was a respect for the organisation from municipal authorities following the building of a working relationship which did not exist at the outset of the struggle.

Attributions linked with DWG members from men in the community and local government authorities suggest that the organisation is significantly evaluated in terms of gender, and that it hampers participation and engagement. Members stated that men in their community for the most part consider them "stubborn" and women who "do not have enough work to do in the home" (Anonymous Respondent 2, DWG, November 2010). Municipal authorities have been known to dismiss DWG members with "*umhlaba wamadoda lona ayikho into eningayenza* (this is a man's world, there is nothing you can do)" (Anonymous Respondent 3, DWG, November 2010). Traditional authorities seem ambivalent towards the DWG. A member stated, "They do not care except that they say we are teaching our children to be stubborn" (Anonymous Respondent 3, DWG, November 2010). Despite this perception, however, the view from the leadership quarter is that the *Inkosi* (chief) and *Izinduna* (headman) view DWG leaders as strong women with valid objectives. Very often engagements are carried out with the *Inkosi* through his wife, suggesting that the DWG, being a women's organisation, is seen as best being dealt with by a woman within the (albeit unofficial) traditional ambit.

Discussion

Applying the Einwohner *et al* typology to the WFRA and the DWG adds some insight into the way tactics, identities and attributions may affect the workings of the organisations,

whether positively or negatively. In the case of the WFRA, tactics traditionally associated with masculine identity, involving plumbing skills, were undertaken by women in resistance to cut-offs of the water supply for non-payment. This played a vital role in paving the way for engagement with the municipality. Arguably, municipal efforts to disconnect water supplies and consequently to force payment for services were shown to be futile. The relationship between the WFRA and the municipality has, therefore, evolved to one of engagement, rather than conflict, leading to an ongoing upgrading of water services in Chatsworth with new meters being installed, accumulated arrears written off and the delivery of free water under the Free Basic Water policy. The WFRA's success in this regard echoes other research carried out in the Durban area relating to the success of women's organisations and women's struggles. A study by Caroline Skinner (2009) centred on the Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU) showed that it was an "articulate group of female...traders" (Skinner, 2009:104) that created the context for the Warwick Junction Project improving the environment and infrastructure for informal traders. The study shows how SEWU, through negotiations with the city council, fought, won and formalised a space for traditional medicine traders, and successfully lobbied to entrench the livelihood of cardboard collectors.

Inappropriate technologies and systems introduce demands on women in which they are required to perform additional labour

In terms of identities, members of both the WFRA and the DWG seem to understand part of their strength as organisations as being linked with their being female. In the case of the WFRA, women are seen to be both mentally and physically strong, responsible for children and concerned with community as a whole. Likewise, DWG members see women as concerned with the well-being of the community but also bearing the responsibility for children and the elderly in a selfless way and being more persistent. These qualities are framed as necessary in continuing struggles for water and sanitation services especially when juxtaposed with the 'laziness' and 'not caring to do anything for free' male

attributes highlighted. This coincides with the 'triple role' of women highlighted in feminist debates (Moser, 1993:27) whereby women play not only a 'reproductive' as well as 'productive' role but also a 'community managing' role. The 'community managing' role comprises activities undertaken "primarily by women at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role" to "ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption, such as water, health care and education", this work is "voluntary unpaid work, undertaken in 'free time' " (Moser, 1993:34). The 'community managing' role is contrasted with the 'community politics' role undertaken by men at the community level where "organising at the formal political level" is "usually paid work, either directly or indirectly, through wages or increases in status and power" (Moser, 1993:34).

In the case of the DWG, it seems that attributions and being framed a 'women's' organisation has significant impact on how seriously organisation goals are viewed by local authorities as the municipality has not taken their demands very seriously, despite the demand for better sanitation for the community as a whole. This may have some bearing on the fact that the DWG has made no progress advocating for alternative forms of sanitation beyond the urine diversion system. Meetings with the municipality failed to record the views of DWG members adequately. Instead municipal officials have continued their campaign to popularise the urine diversion system of sanitation in affected areas. This reflects how consultation with women in communities on sanitation system is critical, and that position reflects how inappropriate technologies and systems introduce demands on women in which they are required to perform additional labour, which is not taken into consideration.

Patriarchy is ever present in South African society and may appear under the guise of "culture" and "tradition", perpetuating the unequal division of labour and women's subordination (Bentley, 2004:247). Furthermore within debates around inequality and the feminisation of poverty, attributions associated with the DWG reflect the way in which women are marginalised in terms of the ability to participate in public life and decision making (Bentley, 2004).

Conclusion

The WFRA and the DWG both reflect the way in which gender can affect a movement's processes. In the case of the WFRA, tactics traditionally associated with the masculine were adopted and successfully utilised by female members, forcing the municipality to abandon its aggressive techniques of cost recovery for water services in favour of community engagement and the provision of free water. In the case of the DWG, attributions of being a female organisation hampered the ability of its members to participate meaningfully at the local level. This was evident in the way the organisation's input regarding alternative forms of sanitation were not implemented by local authorities. The WFRA and DWG are both examples of the role played by social movements advocating for rights to water and sanitation in Durban and the particular challenges faced by female led organisations with regards local level service delivery, accountability and participation.

Notes

1. Acknowledgements are due to the leadership of both organisations who took time out of their busy schedules to engage in this discussion and also to members of the organisations for participating in the questionnaire phase. The views expressed in this *Perspective* are those of the authors and not of the Centre for Civil Society, the Westcliff Flats Residents Association or the Didiyela Women's Group.
2. For the purposes of this *Perspective* the term 'community' is used to refer to the members of the WFRA and the DWG, as well as the respective flat dwellers and homestead dwellers they advocate for.

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perspective



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