

Editorial: Body Politics and the Gendered Crafting of Citizenship

Sophie Oldfield, Elaine Salo and Ann Schlyter

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

and discourses.

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

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

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

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

Gender, body politics and crafting citizenship

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

Compellingly she argues that:

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

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

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

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

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

Ethnography, the everyday and the politics of knowledge production

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

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

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

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

(Nagar et al., 2002: 275)

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

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

research into these contexts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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