

Gender and Citizenship in a South African Township: A case study of the WFRA

Most South Africans expected their demands for decent housing, quality education, running water, electricity, and jobs to be met when the ANC came to power in 1994. After all, the ANC's election manifesto had promised that it would build a million homes, provide running water to a million families, and electrify two million homes within five years of assuming power. At the same time the South African Constitution, adopted in 1996, secured social and economic rights, including food, water, health care, and housing, and guaranteed civil and political rights (see Andrews 2006). While the post-apartheid period has witnessed the dismantling of the legal edifice of apartheid, social, economic and spatial inequalities persist, and have even deepened. The frustrated aspirations of large numbers of South Africans are evident in ongoing service delivery protests and xenophobic attacks across townships. As Conca (2005) has observed, the struggles for electricity, public health, clean water, housing and jobs by the poor majority constitute the 'most consequential form of social activism in South Africa today.'

These struggles are examined as they have played out in Westcliff, Chatsworth, a predominantly 'Indian' township south of Durban, where the Westcliff Flat Residents Association (WFRA) was formed in 1998 to coordinate the struggle for housing, electricity, and water. Based on in-depth interviews, this paper examines the ways in which members have responded to the effects of the state's social and economic policies over the past two decades, and how they are attempting to access power and resources. The focus is on the strategies that the group has employed to negotiate power vis-à-vis the state and other social movements and the outcomes of that engagement. More broadly, this study assesses the impact of civil society organizations and the meanings of citizenship in present-day South Africa.

The making of an 'Indian' township

Chatsworth was created in the 1960s to accommodate Indians as part of apartheid South Africa's Group Areas model which sought to divide the population racially and geographically. Millions of Black people were moved into residential areas long distances from major urban centres. Chatsworth was home to well over 400,000 Indians by the time apartheid ended, and it remains the site of the largest urban concentration of Indians in South Africa, though an increasing number of African people are now legally recognized residents of the township. Many of the original inhabitants came from the Magazine Barracks in central Durban, which housed the city's poorly paid municipal workers, and from the shacks of Cato Manor. While most parts of Chatsworth comprised of single-level houses, small, poorly constructed, two and three-storey 'flats' were built on the fringes of the township in Bayview, Westcliff, and Crossmoor to accommodate the very poor.

Many of the township dwellers had found work in the clothing and textile industries in nearby Jacobs and Mobeni where they subsisted on meagre incomes. Grievances around the 'housing question' were channelled through the Chatsworth Housing Action Committee (CHAC), which was closely associated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s. During the apartheid period, civics were dominated by middle class activists whose focus was on the political struggle at the expense of 'bread and butter' issues confronting working class people. The post-1994 period witnessed trade liberalization and a programme of privatization of state-owned enterprises. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a people-oriented strategy that required the government to play an active role in restructuring the economy to alleviate poverty, create employment, and provide basic service delivery to the masses (See Gelb, 2006), gave way in 1996 to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic programme which called for cuts in government expenditure, limited wage increases, foreign investment, and privatization of services such as water and electricity (Terreblanche 1999).

Coupled with this was the demise of the clothing, textile, footwear, and leather industries in the 1990s. Formal employment in the clothing and textile sectors nationally fell from 228,053 to 142,863 in the first

decade of non-racial rule (see Vlok 2006). In KwaZulu Natal, official employment in the clothing sector fell from 45,000 in 1990 to 19,000 in 2000. The number of firms registered with the Bargaining Council dropped from 425 to 186. There were at least 236 employers not registered with the Natal Clothing Manufacturer's Association (NCMA) in 2000, with 16,000 employees working for them. Large numbers of workers in Chatsworth, as in other parts of the country, were either unemployed, underemployed, or obtained work at considerably lower wages in clothing firms that had de-registered with the industry's Bargaining Council (Fakude 2000). Orlean Naidoo, a local activist, observed that in Westcliff, 'most of the people were actually from the textile and leather industry. They worked there all their lives and with that collapsing after the new government came to power, lots of people became unemployed.' Lower wages, longer working hours, and loss of social benefits, which resulted from the casualisation of labour, was accompanied by cuts in child support grants and social maintenance (see Visser, 2004). The result, as Dolly Pillay reflected, is that 'it's hard if you don't work, even if you work, by the time you see to power, you see to your water, you see to your bread and milk, you don't have no money. People like us don't have a lot of money. Whatever we got, we use it for the house. We got no money for freedom. There is no freedom.'

Dolly herself had worked in the clothing industry. She moved into Westcliff when the first flats were built in 1963. She was ten years old at the time and had lived in a tin shack in Clairwood. Her father worked for Natal Cotton and Wool Mills and her mother was a machinist at a local blanket factory. At fifteen, Dolly left school and took up employment in a clothing company, using her elder sister's identity documents as she was under age. She subsequently joined a shoe factory. This was her last fulltime position. Her husband, who was unemployed most of the time, died at the age of 48. Dolly brought up the children almost single-handedly. When the shoe factory shut down in the mid-1990s, Dolly survived by making plastic flowers which she sold by going from door-to-door in Merebank, which she regarded as affluent relative to Chatsworth. Dolly and many others like her 'had a hard time, like when we don't have money to pay our lights, they used to come and cut our lights and all that.' Their inability to pay for basic services brought the residents of Westcliff into conflict with the state. This was replicated across the country.

The Westcliff Flat Residents Association (WFRA)

The local eThekweni Council responded to the non-payment of rentals and water and electricity charges by serving eviction notices on those in arrears shortly after the 1998 local government elections. Angry and desperate flat residents in Bayview, Crossmoor, and Westcliff responded by organising themselves into civic associations. In Westcliff, Orlean and Pinky Naidoo rallied members of the community and they established the WFRA, which forms the subject of this study, to resist evictions, rental increases, and water and electricity cuts. On 4 July 1998, disgruntled tenants marched to the local municipal offices in Arena Park and demanded a meeting with the Director of Housing. According to Orlean, it was 'the first time anybody in South Africa started marching against Council evictions. We marched, all three communities [Bayview, Westcliff, Crossmoor]. We put a big show that day, a very successful show.' This was followed by a mass march to the Durban City Hall in August (*Post Natal*, 12 August 1998). Three factors have been crucial to the endurance of the WFRA: leadership, national and international exposure, and place/identity.

Orlean's leadership has been important. She was born in Clairwood in 1961 and moved to Chatsworth as a child, where she lived in an 'ownership' home as opposed to the flats. A bright student, she dropped out of school in her matric year to marry present husband Pinky. Struggling on Pinky's meagre wages was a humbling experience for Orlean:

Let me just say I never ever understood politics. I was never involved because we were brought up in a conservative home. We didn't care about what happened outside because my father had a house, car and we had a business going. We didn't even worry about the neighbours. When I married my husband I understood what it is to be poor. I started to understand a different kind of life altogether.

Once their youngest child enrolled at school, Orlean joined Beacon Sweets in 1989, and worked for the company for fourteen years until she suffered a spinal injury. At Beacon Sweets she was marked out as an 'instigator' by management because 'I used to stand up for the workers.' She was elected a union representative by the majority African workforce and defended workers' rights robustly.

Orlean and Pinky moved into a flat in Westcliff in 1996 and witnessed firsthand the extreme poverty. Their neighbour Vassie Munien's husband 'disappeared' for long periods and she survived on 'handouts' from neighbours. Facing eviction, Vassie 'took an overdose and almost died.' Shaken, Orlean decided that 'something needs to be done because there are more and more women in the community like that.' Together with other women, they organised a divorce for Vassie and transferred the flat to her name. But Vassie was soon in debt again. According to Orlean, ...

... the cycle was ongoing. We found that everybody who had a problem was really having difficulty coming out of it. This happened in about 1997/1998. Then the government decided to chop the child maintenance grant to parents in single-headed households. It was about R300 per child. So if a household was getting R900 a month that was chopped by one third. The same month they decided to increase rental tariffs by 10 per cent so that made it even more difficult. We started to understand the community, that there were more female-headed households than male-headed households. That was when we thought it is really a problem and we need to start organising in the community for better living conditions and affordable services to the poor.

Orlean and the WFRA received a boost when the Concerned Citizen's Group (CCG) entered the fray. Shortly before the June 1999 national elections, ANC-aligned Indian activists, led by Fatima Meer, formed the CCG because they were concerned at the dwindling support for the ANC among Indians. Meer's presence was a boost for the WFRA and other civic associations in the area, as one interviewee observed:

[She] was a powerful articulator of the peoples' interest that would not narrowly be seen as parochial or even racist because this was a mainly Indian community. Because of her legitimacy in the liberation movement, she could articulate those struggles on a broader platform and give it legitimacy. [She] brought her own political experiences to play by telling people how they needed to organise across racial grounds, and give them access to the media; the media became interested in the story precisely because Fatima Meer was interested in it (Ramjattan 2008: 105).

Meer was an inspirational figure for Orlean:

She really empowered me, you know. I never understood how powerful a woman could be [until] Fatima Meer's coming here. She was never scared to tell people how it was. I was going with them to meetings and understanding how forceful you can be using your rights. Women need to understand their rights and think this is your right, and stand up and defend it. I learnt that women have a very, very critical role to play.

The support of the CCG would prove important when Council began using strong arm tactics to carry out evictions and service cut-offs because it was able to call on the services of lawyers to mount legal challenges to state policy, attract media attention, and provide tactical advice.

The first evictions

Savatri Chetty and Jenny Pillay were amongst the first to receive eviction notices in Westcliff. Savatri was born at the Magazine Barracks in 1960 and moved to Westcliff when she was four. Her father had died, and she and her five siblings were sent to live with her paternal uncle while her biological mother went to live with her family in Pinetown. Savatri's uncle struggled to bring up eight children in all. Savatri left school in grade eleven in 1977, married shortly thereafter, and had two children. She lost her husband in 1984, remarried in 1987 and had two more children. Her second husband died in 2006.

Despite domestic abuse, economic hardship meant that she had to stay in the marriage. Savatri has been working from the age of seventeen. She held low-paying jobs in the clothing industry such as service hand, sorter, and packer in the despatch until she was retrenched when the clothing sector began to shed jobs in the mid-1990s. She worked as a casual hand in the laundry at Chatsmed Hospital for a while but when the hospital outsourced its laundry facility, Savatri found herself without a job once again. She got casual work with an NGO called Coast Care. On the Durban beachfront she 'used to pick up litters, push the wheelbarrow, to sweep the pavings, scoop sand with the spade. We had a heavy [difficult] job.' Even that ended in 2006. When not in formal employment, she 'used to do washing, clean people's house to just earn that few rands to support my kids.'

Despite her lifelong struggle on the margins, Savatri's world was turned upside on 15 September 1998:

That morning the caretaker came and told me I'm going to be evicted. I was so shocked, I didn't know what to do. I was owing quite a bit because I was not working.... The only option I had was to go and see Pinky. I told him, "Pinky, you know what, I'm going to be evicted." He told me not to worry. So I put two locks on my gate and my daughter-in-law's mother came. She also put another lock and she left. I was out of the building. When this court messenger and his team were there to evict me, they want to know where the person from the house is. The people said, "she's not here, she went to town. She's a single parent, she can't make it." I was watching from the other side. They brought the dogs and they wanted to teargas. That's the time Pinky, Orlean and the whole family surrounded my house. Pinky's big son said to them that it will never happen. They can't evict me because, being a single parent and with no income, how would they expect me to pay my rent? They tried to get in but they couldn't make it because he told [them] he will set alight the flat ... they put tyres and all. They were teargassing. It was very bad, it was very serious. All [the community] were there – they surrounded the flat. *The Rising Sun* and the newspapers were there to find out what was going on. I had to get a court interdict. Orlean had to help me. She took me to the lawyer's office, got the interdict and it was stayed for the day, so the next day again we had to go and sort this problem out. So I was not evicted. It was a terrible thing. And, from then on, there was no such thing as eviction.

Orlean remembers that day as historic: 'It was the best experience for me, even though I was slightly ripped by the dog and stuff like that, saving the first eviction in this community, knowing that that woman would be there tomorrow was what made me feel good. And that took women to stand together to do it...'

Vanessa was born in Clairwood and moved to Arena Park, Chatsworth, when she was three. Her mother was a machinist at a clothing factory while her father worked as a truck driver. Vanessa was forced to drop out of school in her matric year in the late 1980s when her father lost his job. She met her future husband Jason at the shoe factory where they worked. She stayed at home after the birth of her daughter in 1989 but they found it difficult to get by when Jason became a casualty of the collapsing footwear industry. Vanessa too was unable to find permanent work, and took on a series of casual jobs. The family moved to Wescliff in August 1999 to live with her uncle, who was in rental arrears. Vanessa visited the Rent Office and arranged to pay off the arrears 'slowly but surely and everything.' However, the Council sent a letter of eviction. The local politician promised to resolve the matter but two days before she was to be evicted, he left her 'in the lurch. He says, "I can't do anything about it."' A neighbour advised her to find 'this person by the name of Pinky and his wife, and explain the situation. We went looking. It was the day before the eviction and it was gone already about 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening. Believe you me, they said, "why did we come so last minute?", but they never refused to help me. They said, "don't worry, go home and we'll sort it out.'" On the morning of 9 February 2000, as Vanessa

... came out of the bath, and then the next minute, my husband and them saying, come see outside, there's so much of blackjacks with guns and everything coming up to the house. We didn't know what to do. Now people were telling us, lock the door, stay inside, and don't open it. We got so scared. They came with the sheriff of the court. They said they want to take out our things. By then, when you look out of the window there's a whole lot of people that's standing there and they're making a noise

with this guards. I'm getting scared. What to do? How do I react? I'm phoning person to person. Then I saw Pinky [who] said, "your'll just stay there, nobody's going to move your'll." I tell you, Pinky rallied with everybody in this community, and they stood and fought the security guards. They threw teargas, they teared us, my neighbour was sjambokked, he had marks because he refused to move away from the door and there was so much of chaos happening. With all that, they still broke our gate, they broke our door, they came into the house, they removed us out of the house - physically removed us out of the house, they removed everything out of the house. By then, Professor Fatima Meer came, the newspapers, the SAPS, and she made everybody sit on the road. I didn't know Professor Meer because I'm new in the community. She had just come out of hospital at that time. And, with all that, she was there. Professor Meer said we will not stand for this barbaric ways, what the Council is doing to us. And, by the end of that day, my eviction was stayed. We were taken back and put into the house. The community helped us to take our things and put it back into the house and, you know, to this very day I've never left. I've seen with my own eyes the difference the organisation makes within this community.

The Council announced that it would stand 'firm' on its policy of evicting 'illegal tenants and rent defaulters' and would not tolerate 'lawlessness and anarchy.' It refused to have anything to do with the CCG. This led Meer to reflect that 'the heroes of the liberation struggle were simply debt collectors now, not representatives of the people' (Desai 47). With assistance from the CCG, the civics applied for an interdict to prevent the Council from carrying out evictions. When the matter went to court on 22 February 2000, lawyers argued successfully that the constitution guaranteed a right to shelter and access to water and nutrition, and that the state had to provide alternative accommodation before it could evict anyone (Desai 66-67). At a meeting of the Housing Committee on 12 June 2000, councillors proposed that residents be compelled to sign acknowledgement of past debt forms, and be relocated arbitrarily. By the end of 2001, however, Council declared a moratorium on its evictions policy, citing the Grootboom Constitutional Court ruling (Desai, 2000: 56).

Water cut-offs

After the 1999 national elections, the ANC controlled Durban City Council intensified its cost-recovery measures against residents in service delivery arrears. While public sector water service delivery has been commercialized in South Africa, access to water is regulated by local authorities through the Durban Metro Water Services. Though the six kilolitres of water that all South Africans are entitled to is insufficient for most families, Council employed measures such as the use of private security personnel and technical devices like tamper-proof electricity boxes and water flow restrictors to curb illegal service consumption by poor people. The irony in this struggle was that many of the Council's officials were former civic activists, such as then Deputy-Mayor Trevor Bonhomme and Housing Director Vidhu Vadalankar, who had been members of the Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC) in the 1980s, an organisation that fought against the apartheid government's housing policies. Christina Manqele was one of the first persons to experience this harsh policy.

Christina Manqele was born in Zululand in 1964. She dropped out of school in standard seven 'because we were ten children and it's not enough money to go....' The family moved to Kwa Mashu where Christina came under the influence of an ANC cell in the area, whose members included Andrew Zondo, who would be hanged in 1985 for a bombing in Amanzimtoti. Poverty had already politicised her. 'I grew up like a slave. I never grow up nice life,' she said. While attempting to go into exile Christina's group was intercepted. Angry, they petrol bombed the home of the *impimpi* (spy) for 'telling' on them. She was sentenced to three years imprisonment but released after two. Prison life was difficult but she picked up the threads of her life. She married Bongane Manqele and they had three children. This was at the height of the political troubles between the ANC and IPF and Bongane 'disappeared', ending what she described as a difficult marriage. She never heard from him again. She had two more children.

Christina worked for almost a decade at the Golden Hours School for Special Needs Children in Cato Manor. When the boarding school closed down in the early 1990s she got a job at Perma Products in Pinetown, a company that produced plastic moulds. During this period, she moved into Chatsworth when she was given a house in Westcliff. The first African resident in the area, she was initially subjected to racial abuse but this eventually dissipated. She became very ill but it took two years for doctors to diagnose that she had cancer of the spleen. Still in her thirties she had to leave work and walked the three kilometers to and from the local state hospital. Due to recurrent internal bleeding, her spleen was removed. Christina, unemployed and ill, was taking care of seven children – her four surviving biological children, the year old daughter of her sister Nomusa, the seven year old son of her divorced brother, and the seven year old son of a relative when her electricity was cut in August 1999 and water in early 2000.

For a while she relied on neighbours, leaking pipes, and a nearby polluted stream for water subsequently found to be unfit for human consumption. With the help of neighbours, so called ‘struggle plumbers’, she illegally reconnected her water. Council officials eventually caught her on the act and charged her. Neighbours told a desperate Christina to call Orlean whom she had never met. Orlean arrived with members of the CCG who comforted her, ‘you won’t go jail. They really shocked. They cry tears inside because [when] they saw my condition, they saw one child got the fits ... Xolani starting fits in front of Fatima Meer. They ask, “where you get water?” I show them the river. They cry...’ The CCG made an urgent application to get her water reconnected, which the High Court granted on 8 March 2000. Racial barriers were broken for Christina who felt that she had ‘another mother now. I’m not feeling now I’m African because I see they are warm, because me, I quiet there. They fighting for me there, fighting, they telling until magistrate understand.’ It was CCG strategy to use the law to clear space for political activism. Potentially illegal actions were put on trial by linking them to socio-economic rights contained in the constitution and in this way hoping to legitimise them.

Christina was back in court on 28 June 2000 in what was a test case for water disconnections countrywide. Advocate Maurice Pillemer SC framed the question of access to water as a fundamental socio-economic right. He argued that Council had acted in contravention of the Water Services Act 1997 which required it to take Christina’s personal circumstances into account. Advocate Malcolm Wallis, for Council, argued that the regulations for ‘basic water supply’ had not been finalized at national level and were therefore not enforceable. Further, Christina was ‘undisciplined’ and would not pay her bill and that Council had no way to police her usage. The constitutional challenge, Pillemer argued, was that Christina and her children had a right to ‘sufficient’ water. ‘Sufficient water,’ he added, was ‘more than no water at all.’ Council had acted illegally in cutting off the six kilolitres of water per month that all South Africans were entitled to and which was provided without charge even to rich South Africans (*Sunday Tribune*, 2 July 2000). Judge Vivienne Niles-Duner reserved judgment, forcing Council to stop the thousands of disconnections planned for each month. On 1 March 2001, the judge upheld Council’s right to disconnect water. While not commenting on whether the quantity was adequate, she recognised the policy of supplying households with six cubic metres of water per month without any charge as an attempt to provide its consumers with a basic water supply. Disconnection was a credit control mechanism. The constitutional litigation route adopted by social protestors did not have the desired outcome in this instance for the law buttressed market relations (Desai, 2000: 55).

We shall return to the housing and service delivery question later in this paper.

Exposure: Local, National, International

While the focus of the WFRA was on local issues, it was not a parochial organisation. The residents of Westcliff, and Orlean in particular, transcended their local base by linking their struggles with other civic organisations in Durban and across the country, and sometimes internationally. The WFRA was a member of the Concerned Citizen’s Forum (CCF) which brought together community organizations from various parts of Durban, and an affiliate of the Social Movements Indaba (SMI). Shortly after they

took their problems to court, residents in Hammarsdale, Umkomaas, Phoenix, and Wentworth, who were facing similar problems, contacted activists in Chatsworth for advice. The organisations met with academics, community activists, and students on Saturday mornings at the then Natal Technikon and the University of Natal (UND) during 2001 and 2002 to discuss common problems and strategies (Dwyer 2004: 11). The CCF was not a formally constituted membership-based organisation but a loosely formed network of organizations facing similar problems, this collaboration eventually petered out.

There were marches to the offices of the City Council; extensive media coverage; and participation in international events such as the World Conference Against Racism in Durban (2001) and Jubilee 2000 Coalition's demands for the debts of the world's poorest countries to be written off. Globalisation, understood here as the processes facilitating the rapid movement of people, information, goods, and ideas across national boundaries, has resulted in an unprecedented increase in 'numbers, activity, and visibility of international initiatives by civil society actors on a variety of issues, at least in part linked to the rapid expansion of globalization of communication, transportation, and production' over the past few decades (Brown et al, 2000:3). The presence of international organizations and activists in South Africa has allowed locals to link their struggles to broader issues.

The WFRA hosted an Untouchables group from Calcutta in 2001. International writers such as Naomi Klein and Arundhati Roy (Women's Day, August 2003) visited Hammarsdale and Chatsworth respectively. Orlean formed links with the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) and became exposed to wider struggles. For example, in 2008 she attended the World Social Forum in Nairobi. This provided an opportunity for transnational exchanges as she came into contact with activists from all over Africa: 'understanding that people have to live off a dollar a day was something for me. But we also stood up there in the stadium and fought for the Kenyan people to be allowed into the World Social Forum. I was a part of that protest. That experience was really good for me.'

The group has become the subject of academic studies and documentaries (See Desai 2000; Ramjetan 2008; Naidoo 2010; Singer 2010; and Mottiar, Naidoo, and Khumalo 2011). They were also the subject of a photographic project titled 'See Our Voices,' which was exhibited in December 2008 at the Centre for Civil Society, UKZN. The images were taken by twelve women from Westcliff who created picture stories around issues such as prepaid electricity, water damage, and the lack of amenities. The exhibition included the women's composite demand:

With no jobs, with no work, we will never be able to improve our lot. The City wants to charge us for basic services and to pay arrears accumulated through unscrupulous service delivery policy. The City is trying to profit off the poor... We have a right to be alive; a right to shelter, water, electricity, and food. But the government has undermined any chance for a viable economy. We need support, and instead, the City calls us criminals. See Our Voices demands that you recognize us, that you hear the voices and see the images of real women living in a real place. We are not a revenue source for the City. We need programs that work, and we need them now.

These projects may be viewed by cynics as an instance of academics exploiting research opportunities, but they have given the women that I interviewed a sense of worth and confidence. This is evident in their willingness to leave abusive partners, their co-operation in addressing problems such as drug abuse, and in working cooperatively to change social and economic conditions.

From resistance to consultation

The community's approach to housing and service delivery has changed over the past decade. Orlean recounted that 'protests, resistance, defiance, we pursued that for almost eight, nine years [but] it's now changed to more engagement with the municipality.' This was due in part to the appointment of Derrick Naidoo as Deputy City Manager in 2003. Naidoo, the grandson of indentured migrants, grew up in Bayview in a working class family. He was the youngest of twelve children who lived in a two bedroom

house. He matriculated from Chatsworth High, participated in local civic and youth organizations, and was eventually recruited into Umkhonto we Sizwe's Bayview cell. He was arrested in 1985 and imprisoned on Robben Island until 1989. He joined the ANC after his release and served as an ANC councillor in the Inner-West region until his appointment as Deputy City Manager in 2002. At the time the eThekweni municipality was grappling with an appropriate response to the management of public housing stock which had resulted in massive revenue loss due to non-payment of rentals. In 2005, for example, out of an annual operating budget of R109 million, the Council recorded a deficit of R35 million (Morkel, 2005: 35).

Naidoo faced disgruntled tenants in many parts of Durban - Bayview, Westcliff, Crossmoor, Sydenham Heights, Wentworth, Lamontville, Marian Ridge, and Kwa Mashu. Under Naidoo, the Council attempted to 'sell' the houses to residents by offering it to them for 'free'. A political benefit for the local state was that it would no longer be seen as the landlord, which was a powerful tool for mobilizing the community. The price was set at R7,500, the subsidy provided by the government's Discount Benefit Scheme (DBS) to help tenants' acquire ownership of state financed rental housing. But tenants were required to pay off arrears and would be liable for rates and levies. Deputy Mayor Trevor Bonhomme threatened that those who did not buy their homes would be relocated to RDP 'starter homes'. According to Maurice Makhatini, the Acting Executive Director of Housing, the relocation could not be compared to apartheid: 'Apartheid was about grouping races. This proposal is about grouping classes. It is racially blind. Normal business practice demands that if tenants can't pay rent, they must be evicted' (Desai, 2000: 55).

Derrick Naidoo began negotiations with 'progressive forces' shortly after assuming office. He faced several problems: the subsidy was inadequate because most tenant's arrears exceeded it, there were divisions among tenants, the housing stock was in poor physical condition, a sectional title register had to be opened, and a body corporate established to facilitate private ownership. The municipality had a total of 15,765 units to sell. In Chatsworth, there were 800 flats in Bayview, 790 in Westcliff, and 300 in Crossmoor. Council agreed to refurbish the flats; 'park off' arrears (arrears would become payable only if the owner decided to sell the flat); 50 percent of the water debt was written off, prepaid electricity became the norm; and flow meters were installed to restrict free water to 200 litres per day. A special device was installed in the homes of those in arrears which limited the water supply to 6000 litres every 30 days. The device was only removed when the arrears were paid off. Naidoo helped to constitute democratically elected Steering Committees in each area to represent tenants. The scheme has been rolled out in many parts of Durban but is still being finalized in Bayview and Westcliff where poverty levels are higher.

The Steering Committee for Westcliff comprised entirely of members of the WFRA. According to Orlean, the committee was elected at a public meeting hosted by the municipality and, 'because of the work that we've done in the community, all our members were elected.' The first step was to refurbish the flats. This was 'a huge task,' according to Orlean, because our flats are really dilapidated, 47 years old [in 2010] with no maintenance.... The walls are cracked internally, the dampness is terrible, the roof has asbestos. The death rate in this community is quite high, people are dying of asthma or cancer, even the water was badly contaminated because the pipes are corroded.' Since 2007, the steering committee has been meeting weekly with Council officials (electrical, water, housing departments), external contractors, as well as members from the BFRA, to discuss technical issues around the upgrade, including new methods of service provisions, such as pre-paid electrical metres and water tricklers. While contractors utilized their own skilled labour, around ten women from the community were employed as unskilled workers.

The WFRA negotiated a change to the system of consolidated billing (water, electricity and rent on a single bill) which had presented a hardship to residents. According to Orlean, most homes were overwhelmed when faced with 'one exorbitant amount at the end of the month and people can't afford to

pay that entire amount.’ This pushed up arrears. On the other hand, with separate billing, ‘when people collect their grants, they’ll pay for water and then when they have other income, then pay rent, and so on.’ A controversial change was the introduction of prepaid electricity. There was much opposition to this measure, but Naidoo won the argument by explaining that tenants had to pay R800 to reconnect each time their electricity was cut off. Prepaid metres would allow them to ‘manage how much of electricity you going to be using and you buy your own electricity at will.’ Orlean, like most members of the community, regrets agreeing to this change.

The one thing that I really wouldn’t have done was accept the prepaid electricity. We’d rather tamper with metres for the rest of our lives if they can’t make electricity affordable. I definitely know that people can’t afford it. Even the pensioners are finding it difficult to buy electricity. People are actually cutting down on their food to purchase electricity and water. You know, they just imposed this sewer charges. If you’re using more than 9 kilolitres of water, you have to pay an extra charge. The government’s not thinking seriously about the poor. Pensioners are collecting R1000 a month and are contributing three quarters of that back to the municipality.

As a result of these changes we currently have a situation where the poorest members of the community are compelled to survive of limited water and electricity.

The transfer of flat ownership to the sectional title scheme remains unresolved in part because there is unease about private ownership. This has divided the community to an extent. While some tenants fear that if they fall into arrears in the future they could be ejected as the matter would be a civil one between them and the body corporate, with Council not required to provide alternative accommodation, others are keen on home ownership. The WFRA and other civic organizations had to balance these contradictory perspectives. Another concern is that despite the refurbishments, the flats remain in poor condition, and tenants are unsure how they will carry out repairs in the future. A third concern was that the flats were too small. For example, Dolly Pillay pointed out that there were six people living in her flat which had just one room and a kitchen. Under present Council policy, the will never be provided with a house as was the case previously.

Place and Identity

While starting out as a group of individuals reacting spontaneously to ‘community’ problems, formal structures were put in place. The WFRA comprises of a chair, vice-chair, treasurer and ten committee members. There were just three male office bearers in 2011, while there was a mix of Indian and African members. This in itself is significant in that men’s voices tend to dominated in many civic organizations even when women are in the majority. The WFRA meets monthly with between fifty and a hundred members in attendance. While close to ninety percent of members are women, Orlean described the WFRA as a ‘community organisation’ rather than a ‘women’s organisation’ as their concerns are not specific to women and their gender identity. This may in part be due to the important role that her husband Pinky, who chooses to remain in the background, has played in the group, but it also reflects the fact that they did not mobilize because they were women but because of a range of problems faced by the community. ‘Women’s interests’ cannot be easily disentangled from the ‘bread and butter’ issues that have been preoccupying many of them.

What emerged from the testimonies is that while the group constituted a particular identity in opposition to the state, within the group women tended to coalesce around their identity as women. They attributed the majority female membership to women’s ‘mothering’ roles. Interviewees described women as ‘being more caring’ and assuming responsibility for running the home, single parent households headed by women, ‘greater mental strength and endurance’ of women, and men’s substance abuse causing them to shirk their family and community responsibilities. The women also viewed the issues confronting the community as directly connected to the domestic sphere, such as housing and service delivery. According to Orlean, at least fifty percent of households in the area are female headed. ‘There is a huge problem

with men. They are in a different world altogether, busy drugging, taking alcohol, not supporting the family, shirking responsibility. Women have to make it themselves.' This was echoed by several other women who are raising their families almost single handedly and have been forced to move into the public realm in more visible and active ways in the absence of men.

According to Hassim (2004: 4), literature on women's organizations based on Latin American experiences distinguishes between 'feminine' and 'feminist' consciousness. While the latter seeks to eliminate hierarchies of gender power, the former refers to the struggles of women who, even while accepting their roles as 'providers, wives, and mothers', are moved into organizing by the everyday struggles of poor communities. The intervention of feminist activists can lead to shift from feminine to feminist consciousness. While not romanticizing their struggles, this involvement has been politically and socially empowering to the interviewees and also suggests that the distinction between the public and private realms is fluid. The roles of men and women within the household should not be essentialised, but women do carry the burden of running the homes.

Place has been important in the development of the WFRA. Working towards common goals and engaging in joint action has produced a feeling of collectivity and belonging. The WFRA meets weekly to discuss problems. In the formative years meetings were held in Orlean and Pinky's flat. However, as membership increased, the local primary school was used. Ron Singer, a teacher at Friends Seminary, a Quaker School in New York City, attended one such meeting in June 2010:

Chairing this gathering of some forty people, mostly women, Orlean responded to every one of the numerous complaints according to its urgency, its nature, and even the credibility of the complainant. An amanuensis (lieutenant) recorded names, flat numbers, the nature of each complaint, and a plan of action. These plans ranged from a visit from Orlean and Pinky the next day to check the electricity meter and to give advice about when and how much new service to buy; to a phone call to the local Council to check the current status of a previous complaint, or to make a new one; and to a long-range commitment for a mass protest at a culprit's headquarters (ESKOM, the electricity company) or office (the local Council).

Ramjettan, who attended several meetings, wrote that 'the mood is more jubilant and discussions more lively, as the daily grind of responding to individual letters and notices written by the Council, formulating complaints on one's living conditions, and attending meetings, give way to an appreciation of some shared condition and common purpose' (Ramjettan, 2008: 92).

The changing identities of the members of the WFRA emerged during the interviews. While they started out as part of the broader Chatsworth community that was engaged in protest, and later extended this to include members of townships in other parts of KZN, their involvement is now largely focused on meeting the needs of the local Westcliff community. Other activities are contributing towards a feeling of communal solidarity. Diwali and Christmas celebrations bring the community together in a collective spirit of resistance and celebration. These parties attract almost 2000 members, both Indian and African. Orlean pointed out that during Diwali the 'Black women wear saris and they'll do everything that we do.' The organisation also assists with burials, as one resident told Ramjettan (2008:93): 'we work on a day to day basis within the community. We come together in just a message being passed around - to get people together. Believe me if something ever happens in the community, the organization is on board. Even if someone dies and there's no money to bury, the organization helps out.' Another feature is the monthly Sunday afternoon lunch, mainly for older members of the community. According to Dolly Pillay:

Old ladies that live around don't get to get along with anybody, can't afford a decent meal, so Orlean and Pinky will invite them. They buy, cook and give them everything from minerals [soft drink] to whatever, you name it. If it's their birthday, they celebrate. They don't only say, if you're a committee member, It's for everyone. If they buy a gift, everybody have the same thing.

Both place (geographic locality) and non-place (common interests based on class and often gender) factors have linked members of the WFRA and formed a 'Westcliff identity'. This became clear when the women explained what the WFRA meant to them. According to Savatri, 'I got no family but I only got Pinky and Orlean as my backbone. Because family ... they don't care, as long as they know you're out, they don't care. I'm living here for the past 25 years but I don't get visitors.' Christina also pointed to gaining a 'new family.'

Conclusions

The women of Westcliff continue to persevere against difficult odds. During the past decade many of them have held a series of low paying casual jobs, such as working for an NGO cleaning up the Durban beachfront, washing clothes in private homes, getting casual employment on the Telkom Energy Saver Project in 2007, and a small number have worked on the upgrade of the flats. Desperate for something more stable, they started a small 'factory' in August 2010 on premises rented at a local school. According to Orlean, during monthly meetings members emphasised that most of them had skills from 'the clothing and textile industry. It's rich in this community because people have the background of working in the clothing industry.' A proposal was submitted to the Divine Life Society Africa in early 2010, which agreed to provide machinery. The factory initially sewed bedsheets, but subsequently secured less intricate work from commercial companies. Approximately thirty to forty women work in the 'factory' with profits shared between them.

The women find work fulfilling. Christina was 'excited' to be working again and hoped that the arrangement would become permanent as she 'enjoy working, I like to work. I work to take out the stress.' Orlean pointed out that when the factory closed for two weeks due to a lack of work, 'we realized what it is like to be without work, the women made commitments, work was very needed. Work brings brightness, more dignity is starting to grow, they feel a sense of worth, and they talk about things they want to do, like education for children.' For Dolly, on the other hand, work was a means of survival: 'If I don't work, nobody's going to give me money. I can't be a burden to anyone. I can't keep saying, give me something. God has given me the strength and I use it as well as I can.'

Notwithstanding these efforts, members have experienced little material improvement in their lives over the past decade. Savatri, for example, reflected, that she 'didn't have a happy life, I still don't have that happy life but I show myself happy.' Dolly has not only struggled to meet her financial commitments but has to deal with a son on drugs. To save her household, she took the difficult step of reporting him to the police even though this landed him in prison. Christina doubted that her dreams would ever be realised: 'If I get money or I win something, I build a house, I take all the children [because] they staying bad. They never stay nice inside the house.' However, she was realistic that 'I'm getting old now, my dreams never go there.' She hoped that her children will 'go school and then get a nice job now. Me, I try for my sweat to work, making sure they go to school.' She had cancer and was unsure how long she would live when we last spoke in March 2011. 'I tell them I'll die anytime because I have cancer. I got BP [high blood pressure], I got ulcer. Sometimes I pass blood, what can I do? Who must support me if I go with the wheelchair? I got small children.' Christina died on 7 July 2011. She was just 47!

One of the ways to exercise citizenship is through the political process. However, Orlean observed that people 'never go to the polls. The unemployment rate is what disgruntles them so much and they think there's no hope, why should we even vote?' This view was echoed by Dolly who 'decided I will not vote again.'

What I'm going to vote for? You making people become president and everything, but at the end of the day, they're not delivering. Now, you'll see them on the news, you'll see them in the papers, you'll see them all around but they don't do the work. Pinky and Orlean, look at them. If you say you got no water, you don't have power, you have a problem with the switch, it's the Rent Office's job but they

do it for free. But who gets the money? People are employed to do certain job, they get the money. While they having a peaceful sleep in the house, everybody else have to get disturbed and go and do the work for them. It doesn't look right.

Orlean herself has no intention of entering the formal political process, even though many in the community have urged her to do so. Dolly noted that 'they told us many times they won't stand for election because they don't want to be there. If they'll be there, they will have to see to other things, not the community, and we proud of them for that.' While this commitment to the grassroots level may be principled, and may have some impact, it means that Orlean will remain excluded from formal decision-making and the arena where her voice can have greater resonance.

The post-apartheid period has witnessed a mushrooming of activity by civic organizations in South Africa. The WFRA, one such example, allowed members to mobilize their individual grievances into a collective one and initially direct this against the local state in rental and service arrears protests. The growth of such organizations can be seen as an affirmation of a growing sense of citizenship. Members have developed a clear sense of the injustices perpetrated by the state, of their rights as citizens, of the possibilities of engaging in this kind of political space in addition to pursuing constitutional litigation, and of the potential of working with fellow citizens in pursuit of common ends. While the actions of the WFRA may appear as relatively subdued, it has played a positive role in allowing members to foster a sense of citizenship by accessing rights and participating in governance through this community sphere (Kaplan 1997). Involvement in the WFRA has also provided a means for members to translate their understanding of inequity from individual to structural terms, and thus develop a collective consciousness as a group experiencing structural oppression (Brush 1999: 123). The downside is that the lives of few women have improved materially, and state welfare support remains important for their survival.

Tension between the residents of Westcliff and the state, experienced at the level of physical confrontation around living space and basic services, is part of a larger conflict between the financially driven agenda of the state, with its emphasis on the reduced role of the public sector, and social-human agenda of local communities towards basic services. The WFRA initially adopted direct action tactics based around the communal defence of their housing and service delivery rights that brought them into conflict with the state. Gradually more moderate strategies and discourses were employed. This relationship has evolved to one of engagement, leading to accumulated arrears being written off, the installation of pre-paid electricity, and delivery of water under the Free Basic Water policy. This approach, however, implies an acceptance of the commercialization of basic services, minus its harshest impact. This has helped the municipality to address its under recovery problem through water tricklers, pre-paid electricity, and the sale of flats to tenants, which has shifted the burden of under-recovery onto poor families. The long-term consequences of this strategy remain to be seen.

The WFRA has evolved since its formation. Although the influence of founding member Orlean Naidoo extends beyond the local community, the attempts of the WFRA to forge alliances with other organizations with similar grievances met with limited success. Putnam's (2000) distinction between 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital has relevance. The former involves the development of networks between socially heterogeneous groups, while the latter strengthens networks within a specific group. It may be argued that the WFRA achieved 'bonding' rather than bridging social capital, given its role and influence in the local community, but not bridging social capital because it remains grounded in the local in terms of leadership, focus, and resources. It is nevertheless a strong and important organisation given that it has articulated clearly the interests of its local constituency and has mobilized them accordingly. While the WFRA has not spurned alliances, it has also acted independently when the situation demanded this. A decade ago there was great optimism that social movements, through a combination of petitions, protest, and litigation, will bring about real change to the status quo. While this may be up for debate, the WFRA, does, nevertheless, play a vital role in the lives of women in the

community by providing information, emotional succor, advice, work, and even financial support at times. It is difficult to predict the course that the WFRA will take over the next decade.

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