# WATERSPOUTT

**Deliverable 5.1 – Influence of conflict, gender, and class relations.**

| **Deliverable No:** 14 (D5.1) Report on Influence of conflict, gender, and class relations on availability of water in the household **Lead Beneficiary: NUIM** 7 / National University of Ireland Maynooth (Maynooth University) **Work package No: 5** Social Science: Transforming access to safe drinking water through integrated solar technologies **Work package leader:** 7 / National University of Ireland Maynooth (Maynooth University) **Last edit:** 22 May 2017 | **WATERSPOUTT** **Water Sustainable Point Of Use Treatment Technologies** *Grant agreement No 688928* | This project has received funding from the *European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme* under grant agreement number 688928 |
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**Influence of conflict, gender, and class relations of water in the household. A written report synthesised from analysis of secondary source data describing the influence and effect of conflict, gender, and class relations on availability of water in the household within the four case study areas.**

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**Introduction**

This review essay lays out the conceptual and historical groundwork for the primary research that the WATERSPOUTT social science team will carry out through the project period over four research sites in Ethiopia, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. We have described it as a report synthesising secondary data on conflict, gender, and class relations in the four case study areas**.** However, it is emphatically not intended as an exhaustive description of the specificities of the four research sites – the sections that follow will traverse quite unevenly across these regions. The essay will instead offer an overarching reading of how these research sites are situated within wider structures and relationships of power. It will engage the recurrent themes and key debates that have dominated the relevant literatures in the fields of social theory and historical and social studies in order to build a broad foundation of understanding for the empirical research that is to come.

The first task for the WATERSPOUTT project – given its goal of providing safe drinking water in four research locations to those who rely on unsafe sources -- is to investigate the underlying reasons for what the geographer Alex Loftus has called "the injustice of water poverty" in each location. Loftus points to the important recent work done in this regard by scholars using political ecology perspectives.

> "Rather than taking it as a given that some will have access to water and others will not, or rather than finding solace in technical solutions or high-profile pledges, political ecology seeks to politicise understandings of the distribution of water.
> …( Political ecologists) are against Malthusian readings of resource wars that naturalise the scarcity of resources, arguing instead for a recognition of the power relations through which resources are both produced and distributed" (Loftus 2009: 953-954).

Political ecological studies of water (found in such works as Bryant and Bailey 1997, Donahue and Johnston 1998, Johnston 2003, Peet and Watts 2004, Peet, Robbins and Watts 2010, among others) have been surprisingly influential, significantly informing, for example, the first *Human Development Report* on access to water, titled *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis* (UNDP 2006).

It is hardly necessary to point out that the emergence of global mass poverty, and within it water poverty, ties in with the histories and geographies of capital and empire. Rosa Luxemburg was one of the first theorists to suggest that capitalism can thrive alongside non-capitalist production relations elsewhere, and may indeed need them in order to survive (Luxemburg 1913 [2003]). Her account of the predilection of the capitalist mode to expand overseas in search of cheap raw materials, cheap (and often unfree) labour, and new markets shows an early understanding of the economic underpinnings of imperialism. Where Marx had spoken of 'primitive accumulation' (or direct plunder) during the era of mercantile adventure *preceding* the establishment of the capitalist mode of production, she conceived of 'primitive accumulation' as an *ongoing* strategy of capitalism[1].

David Harvey's articulation of contemporary capitalism's need for a 'spatial fix' and of its strategy of 'accumulation through dispossession' in new realms refers back to Luxemburg's insights (Harvey 1982). More recently, Harvey and others have characterised the privatised provision of safe drinking water as a new form of 'accumulation through dispossession' (Harvey 2003, Swyngedouw 2003). While it is important to situate water privatisation within larger processes of capital accumulation, it is also necessary to note that privatisation did not become as pervasive under neoliberalism as was initially feared, and that its consequences have not always been clear-cut (Loftus 2009). Bakker's work is particularly useful in this regard – she argues that water is an "uncooperative commodity", not well suited to marketisation, and that the 'retreat of the state' in water provision may very well lead on to the 'retreat of the market' in due course (Bakker 2004).

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[1] 'Primitive accumulation' in the sub-Saharan African context meant, in the first instance, the transatlantic slave trade (Davidson 1980, Mintz 1985, etc.). Later eras have focused on the extraction of other resources from Africa (e.g. Pakenham 1991, Arrighi, Aschoff and Scully 2010, Carmody 2011).

The quite specific character of water as a resource, as a commodity and as a source of social connection has also been of interest to certain branches of anthropological thinking, as Ben Orlove and Steve Caton have shown in their comprehensive review of the field (Orlove and Caton 2010). Thus, Veronica Strang takes note of the "essentiality" of water, or its centrality in multiple social domains (Strang 2004, Strang 2009); and Kirsten Hastrup evokes "waterworlds" to consider the ways in which water makes and unmakes social worlds (Hastrup and Hastrup 2015). Orlove and Caton themselves underscore the distinctive "materiality" of water as well as its "connectivity", and conclude their review essay with the exhortation that water research should reach across to science and technology studies.

> "waterworlds must be studied ethnographically, in all their components, including the often-neglected waterscapes…" (the term 'waterscapes' stresses the ideological and cultural-political dimensions of place, as used in Swyngedouw 1999, Baviskar 2007, etc.). "The wide range of people, agencies, and processes involved in addressing concrete water problems all require sustained scrutiny. Too often in the past, water consumers have been the sole concern, along with their national governments; this mindset is no longer sufficient when one realizes the profound presence and involvement of the transnational community of water experts" (Orlove and Caton 2010: 411).

The implication, of course, is that "water experts" must themselves/ourselves be scrutinised for the full explication of any given waterscape.

**Histories of state formation**

To understand current struggles over water in the four research locations of the WATERSPOUTT project, it is necessary to piece together the kind of "analytic history… needed to search out the causes of the present in the past", viz. "a historically oriented political economy" (Wolf 1982: ix). Following on from Karl Wittfogel's formulation regarding the hydraulic basis of state power (Wittfogel 1957), it is fitting to begin here with writings that have engaged with the dynamics of state formation.

In attempting to understand how power is organised in contemporary African states and how it continues to successfully fragment resistance, the Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani's

classic *Citizen and Subject* proposes what amounts to a general theory of colonialism in Africa (Mamdani 1996). He suggests that the various European colonial powers dealt with "the native question" – the question of how a relatively small group of colonialists can establish stable rule over an indigenous majority – in much the same way across the African continent. Thus, a bifurcated colonial state became the norm in Africa. There was direct rule and a racialised discourse of civil society in the urban context (to be a 'citizen', one had to be European); and indirect rule, or "decentralised despotism" as he terms it, in rural areas, where the African population was purposefully splintered into different ethnic (and/or "tribal") groupings, and lived as 'subjects' of so-called customary authority. Mamdani thus rejects the notion of South African exceptionalism, asserting that apartheid was the generic form of the colonial state in Africa. Noting that the British seemed to be particularly gifted at spotting "authoritarian possibilities in culture" (Mamdani 1996: 49), he shows how the colonial idea of custom was implanted across the continent (occasionally with chiefdoms being invented in erstwhile stateless societies), and the resulting "containerisation" of subject populations. It is an important argument about repurposing "the invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984, Southall 1970) in the service of colonial governance. Mamdani says of the colonial project in Africa – "it has sold to the colonised its own notion of what was authentic about them, what was trans-historical about them, and what cannot be changed without being violated" (Naqvi and Mathur 2001: 25).

This was a form of rule that managed to powerfully shape even the resistance that it spawned. Mamdani observes that the processes of decolonisation were able to achieve deracialisation but not democratisation – the bifurcated colonial state was thus dismantled only partially – and tensions have continued between "containerised" ethnicities, and between rural and urban populations. He makes his argument using historical data from all across the African continent, but with particularly close attention to rural resistance movements in Uganda and urban resistance movements in South Africa.

The consequences of this form of rule were momentous throughout Africa, and the WATERSPOUTT research locations experienced them as well. For instance, Mamdani uses the work of legal anthropologist Martin Chanock in Malawi and Zambia to show that the colonial state's sponsorship of customary law rendered women doubly subject, to male

domination as well as colonial domination (Chanock 1985). He also uses the work of Audrey Richards[2] to show the rise of colonial era ethnic tensions in central Uganda[3] (Richards 1954). Lastly, it is his own analyses of peasant movements in Uganda and of migrant workers in South Africa that together form the backbone of his argument about the fragmentation of resistance in postcolonial Africa.

Commentators from multiple disciplines have seen the long shadow cast by colonial indirect rule in contemporary strategies and dilemmas of development (e.g. Berry 1992, Cooke 2003, Mizuno and Okazawa 2009, Wa Muiu 2010). As for natural resources, and specifically water, there were, of course, plentiful instances of the colonial appropriation of water. "In South Africa, settler farms were often named after the captured fountains -- Grootfontein, Brakfontein, Modderfontein -- which initially sustained them. By the mid-eighteenth century, as the trekboers moved into the dry interior of South Africa, nearly 50 percent of new farm names were water-related" (Guelke and Shell 1992). Equally, there was colonial conservationism. In a wide-ranging review essay on the intermeshing of colonial and postcolonial histories with the history of the environment in Africa, Beinart shows, drawing on the work of scholars such as Grove (Grove 1995), that ecological and social regulation has usually gone hand in hand (Beinart 2000). Jan Christian Smuts' simultaneous embrace of ecological holism and racial hierarchy is a prominent case in point[4] (Foster and Clark 2008).

Unlike the vast majority of countries in Africa, Ethiopia did not experience colonisation over the long term. In fact, during Europe's scramble for Africa in the 1880s, the Abyssinian Empire was itself involved in an expansionist project launched by its architect, King Menelik of Shawa – later Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia. Menelik II is regarded as the only black African leader who actively participated in the scramble for Africa (Tibebu 1995). After defeating Italy in the Battle of Adwa, Ethiopia experienced from 1896 to 1935 a period that Charles Schaefer has characterised as "the fumbling debut of capitalism" (Schaefer 2005).

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[2] For an evaluation of Richards, and hence an account of the mutual distrust between anthropologists (particularly women anthropologists) and colonial authorities in one particular historical circumstance, see David Mills' fascinating essay (Mills 2006).

[3] Richards describes in detail the difficult road to assimilation into Ganda society for immigrants, for example, from Ruanda-Urundi (Richards 1954: 172).

[4] Smuts was the South African minister of defence from 1910 to 1919, and prime minister and minister of native affairs from 1919 to 1924 and 1939 to 1948. He has been described as the "architect" of apartheid (Harvey 2001: 36-38).

Bahru Zewde's magisterial history of Ethiopia discusses the stage-setting political and economic dominance of the North over the South and the East, exemplified in the processes by which Southern peasants were reduced to the status of tenants in this period (Zewde 2001). This hegemony took unexpected routes – even the apparently unremarkable activity of land measurement resulted in the dispossession of the peasantry. "In Wallaga, for example, the measurement process which started in 1910 resulted in the appropriation by the state of three-quarters of the land" (Zewde 2001: 89). Land measurement facilitated taxation, and encouraged private ownership and land sale. This marked the start of the agrarian relationships that constitute the backdrop to the subsequent history of famine in Ethiopia. Taxation was especially severe -- during the time of the Emperor, farmers were often forced to pay between 50% and 80% of their produce as rent (Miller 1984 cited in Vestal, 1985).

 Zewde notes that fascism in Italy was tightly bonded to colonial forays in East Africa, driving the military policies that culminated in the 1936-41 Italian Occupation of Ethiopia. Zewde's characterisation of the Hayla Sellase era as absolutism has been controversial. Schaefer disagrees (Schaefer 2005), for example, arguing that Hayla Sellase's regime did not have the stranglehold over the economy that is usually associated with the absolutist state, as in Perry Anderson's use of the term (Anderson 1974). The years of Derg rule, following the ouster of Hayla Sellase in 1974, had catastrophic consequences for people's lives and livelihoods, and for the environment. While the peasantry may have benefited in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution from land reform measures and literacy campaigns, subsequent Derg policies consigned them to war and famine. Ethiopian agriculturists were especially hard hit by artificially set low prices for foodgrains, such as teff, wheat, sorghum, and maize, and high taxes for cash crops, such as coffee. Nearly eight million people were exposed to famine across Ethiopia's fourteen administrative regions in 1985. The worst affected regions were Wollo, Tigray, Eritrea and Shewa regions in the north and centre of the country, and Harerge, Balle and Sidamo regions in the south. The ongoing deforestation and natural resource degradation has not helped the situation since that time.

Another key Derg policy that affected rural communities in Northern Ethiopia was the relocation of entire populations under the various resettlement schemes. In 1984, the Ethiopian government introduced these programs to drought-affected communities, intending

to relocate 1.5 million people from the northern provinces to more fertile locations in the southern and western parts of the country, 500-800 kilometres away from their villages of origin. These coercive schemes frequently dumped migrants in harsh environmental settings, and always in unfamiliar ones. "Critics also point out that moving Tigrean people of the north to southern areas would be similar to moving Norwegians to Greece" (Vestal 1985: 16). Resettlement is widely understood to have been used as an instrument to weaken political resistance in the north, and to dilute or compromise secessionist elements. In the worst case, it was used to destroy people and control their land. When the resettlement programs finally ended after 1986, 600,000 people had been relocated. The Derg era finally came to an end in 1991, brought down by ethno-nationalist insurgency, economic crisis and the end of the cold war (Zewde 2001).

This section captures some dimensions of the processes of state formation and the historical structuring of power relations that underlie the complex terrain on which struggles over water take place in the present. It is necessary to bring a historical mindfulness to our research priorities and practices as we attempt to grasp these contemporary struggles. Proposing a political sociology of research traditions, Pankhurst observes that scholarly images of Ethiopia tend to be media-driven, focusing on

    (1) a socialist experiment

    (2) disasters (famine, war and refugees)

    (3) ethnic regionalism

      (Pankhurst 2006:58)

Moving beyond stock images and top-down concerns in the four research regions, it is worth remembering that research strategies need to be decolonised as much as research agendas (Chilisa 2012).

## Class Disparities and Conflicts

The preceding discussion of the creation and manipulation of racial and ethnic categories by the colonial form of rule and their continuation into the postcolonial era alludes only in passing to the intersection of race and ethnicity with class over this long historical period[5]. It

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[5] Zewde's class-inflected historical account is an exception, but Ethiopia itself is an exception also, in mostly escaping the effects of colonisation and indirect rule.

may now be useful to place the analysis of class explicitly under the lens, without, of course, losing sight of the intersectionality of class with race, ethnicity and gender. It goes without saying that a historical sensibility is necessary to the understanding of the contemporary lived experience of class in the WATERSPOUTT research contexts. Thus, for example, an analysis of class in the South African context needs to begin with the question of how apartheid worked as a system of labour control. Labour migrations were critical to the functioning and flourishing of race-inflected capitalism in South Africa (Hunter 1936, Wolpe 1972, Spiegel 1980, Ferguson 1990, Arrighi, Aschoff and Scully 2010, etc.) and other parts (Arrighi 1967, 1970) of what Samir Amin has described as the "Africa of the labour reserves" (Amin 1976).

Scholarship in postcolonial South Africa points to the continuation of class inequality along the same well-worn grooves. Thus, Maharajh's economic history of racial capitalism documents the racial economic disparities that contemporary neo-liberal South Africa has inherited from its apartheid past (Maharajh 2011). Class inequalities are literally inscribed into the landscape – as in, for example, Lehohla and Shabalala's account of the social, economic, and spatial inequalities that are the legacy of fifty years of apartheid and three hundred years of colonial rule in Africa (Lehohla and Shabalala 2014). According to Lehohla and Shabalala, class disparity has continued along the ethnic and racial divide. There were multiple layers of segregation. Thus, within the black African community, allocation of residence was ethnicity or tribe-based, whereby the Basotho, Xhoza, Zulu, Shangaan, etc., would occupy their own sections of the townships and their own ethnically designated schools. Another level of segregation occurred between the blacks and the whites, and between the urban and rural neighbourhoods. Therefore, urban centres and what became commercial farms remained for whites, thereby carving out 87% of the productive land mass of South Africa for a group constituting an estimated 10% of the country's population. The remaining 13% of productive land assets were allocated to blacks. Ten of the areas to which blacks were relegated were predominantly rural: Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa and Qwaqwa.

Yet another layer of segregation occurred at the level of the city. The residential areas of the city were divided according to race, such that black Africans were located furthest away from the Central Business Districts (CBDs). Such arrangements made it difficult for the black

population to access services such as water, hygiene and sanitation, which were more developed in the urban areas and inner parts of the city. The white population was located closer to the CBDs, followed by Indians and coloureds. Du Plessis and Landman note that the spatial layout of the city resulted in "the exclusion of large sections of the population from the economic, social and environmental benefits of vibrant, integrated, sustainable urban development" (Du Plessis and Landman 2002: 2). The urban subalterns thus excluded range from the so-called "dangerous classes" to those that Bayat designates as "quiet rebels". The latter's politics of "quiet encroachment refers to the non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives (land for shelter, urban collective consumption, informal jobs, business opportunities and public space) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion" (Bayat 2000: 536). The class landscape of the WATERSPOUTT research location in South Africa, in the peri-urban informal settlement of Enkanini near Stellebosch, conforms to this picture (Ewert 2012).

The other WATERSPOUTT research locations – in Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda -- are all rural. To gain some sense of the issues and debates involved, we will undertake a close reading of the literature and debates in one particular context, that of changing class relations in the Malawian countryside.

An edited volume by Guy Mhone, *Malawi at the Crossroads: The Post-colonial Political Economy*, appeared in 1992, the year that saw the most violent confrontation between the Government and the populace since Malawi's independence from Britain in 1964.  Drawing heavily on government sources, the contributors were still able to show that the country's "long term goals of economic growth, development and equity, have been sacrificed at the expense of private greed and aggrandisement by a minority political and economic elite" (Mhone 1992: xviii). Most of them agreed that Malawi's economic difficulties were linked to the mismanagement and corruption rampant in President Kamuzu Banda's Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regime. This was about to change precisely at that juncture. By 1992, the Cold War had ended and the Soviet Union had collapsed. Reluctance to institute democratic reforms had estranged President Banda from his traditional Western donors, and also antagonised Malawians who were clamouring for a more open and accountable system of government. Pressure intensified on Banda when South Africa, Malawi's staunch ally,

undertook to dismantle apartheid and create a multi-party democratic system, also in 1992. Demonstrations that year by university students and urban workers led to a referendum in June 1993 when Malawians overwhelmingly voted for change. This, in turn, paved the way for the May 1994 presidential elections in which Banda lost to his one-time MCP secretary-general, Bakili Muluzi, the leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and a member of the minority Muslim community.

An influential if controversial rebuttal to 'dependency' perspectives, Bayart's notion of "extraversion" definitely comes to mind in the context of this volume (Bayart 1993, 2000), as also that which Englund describes as "chameleon politics", borrowing the image from a poem by Malawi's acclaimed writer Jack Mapanje (Englund 2002). In Bayart's account, global geopolitics and Africa's marginalisation become resources in their own right in the domain of African as well as global political cultures, as African political elites orient themselves outwards and join "the rush for spoils in which all actors — rich and poor — participate in the world of networks" (Bayart 1993: 235). "Extraversion" has continued to be a notable feature in the regimes that followed Dr. Banda's – the concept returns as a theoretical pivot in an article by Brooks and Loftus on the recent politics of transition in Malawi (Brooks and Loftus 2016). Following Bayart, at a minimum, externally oriented and self-seeking postcolonial elites must not be regarded as an aberrant category, but as an enduring feature of class hierarchies.

Present-day class conflicts in the countryside are determined, of course, by the historical structuring of land and labour in the Malawian context. An early contribution to the economic history of land tenure in Malawi by Bridglal Pachai considers migrations, settlement and competition for land in a society dominated by matrilineal inheritance (Pachai 1978). To understand the conflict that dates back to the European land settlement, particularly after 1891, Pachai reviews such colonial era factors as the expansion of labour migration, the encouragement of tenant farming and cash crops, and the effect of the railway on land. Absentee landlords became an established feature as population increase exerted pressure on land and accelerated the move towards repurchase of freehold estates and systematic resettlement. Pachai reviews agricultural trends and land usage in the decade following independence, where the government became more concerned with the rights of the

traditional majority. The Malawi Land Act of 1965 and subsequent legislation has sought to bring private, public and customary land under uniform control to permit a more rational use of the nation's land resources (as much as 80% of the land was under customary tenure in 1974).

The anthropologist Pauline Peters has produced a body of work examining customary land tenure just as revisionist thinking in the World Bank and powerful aid agencies was beginning to cast these forms of landholding and land use favourably as 'negotiable' and 'adaptable' (Peters 2004, Peters and Kambewa 2007). She found that new policies aiming to clarify and formalise customary forms of land tenure led to intensified competition over land even before they were implemented, setting in motion increased sales and rentals, but also new discourses about 'original settlers' and 'strangers', and political manoeuvring by chiefs. Once in place, there was a further intensification of competition over land and a deepening of social differentiation in many realms – pitting young against old, men against women, and opening up confrontations along ethnic and religious lines. Most significantly for this discussion, these policies led to the appearance of new social divisions that could unmistakably be regarded as class formation.

A contrary note is sounded by Jul-Larsen and Mvula. Arguing that there is no evidence to support the view that agriculture plays a role in the formation of wealth and elites at either the local or the national level, they observe that elite status in Malawi (and elsewhere in Africa) is in fact a function of access to state power and resources. "In the context of customary tenure", they conclude that "the egalitarian and communal ideologies and values that underlie customary law are sometimes a bulwark against the accumulation of land and increased economic differentiation" (Jul-Larsen and Mvula 2009: 189).

Regardless of how one views this and other such debates, this section's consideration of the inequities of land and labour should put paid to any notion that initiatives such as the WATERSPOUTT project are ever likely to be intervening in a unitary 'community' setting.

**Gender Relations**

There is a sizeable literature that seeks to understand gender dynamics in Africa within the context of everyday material struggles (e.g. Obbo 1980, Bay 1982, Brownhill 2009). "From the colonial creation of the male breadwinner to contemporary contests over love and money", notes Andrea Cornwall, "the intersection of livelihoods and life ways forms a key thread through the literature on gender in Africa" (Cornwall 2005: 7). A recognition of material processes underpins, for example, Musisi's reflections on the colonial era construction of "good" and "bad" women in the emerging urban space of Kampala (Musisi 2001). However, feminist economists have pointed out that gender continues to be sidelined in their field, not only by neoclassical economists, but surprisingly also by the Marxist tradition. Thus Shahra Razavi writes, "it is high time that the political economy of agrarian change acknowledged 'the other economy' (Donath 2000) of uncommodified work, domestic institutions and social relations" (Razavi 2009: 222).

This is critical since the experience of poverty and powerlessness is invariably gendered, as evidenced, for example in Megan Vaughan's narration of famine in Malawi (Vaughan 1987). Water poverty is also experienced in gendered ways, with water-related tasks usually being assigned to women, while most water-related powers and rights remain with men (UN 2013, Hellum, Kameri-Mbote and van Koppen 2015). Even radical social transformation and the enactment of progressive legislation does not necessarily grant women access to or knowledge of their rights, as Mary Hames notes in the South African case (Hames 2006). Moreover, progressive water policies may not go far enough – as in Loftus' discussion of the upheavals stemming from the limitations of the policy to provide free basic water to informal settlements in Durban. The gender division of labour means that women have to negotiate both a commoditised and a non-commoditised relationship to the work of water provisioning. He urges attention to the "situated knowledges of women as a necessary position for radical politics" (Loftus 2009: 965) – women's particular placement in daily struggles over water sparks protests and offers new possibilities for democratic change that should be of interest to us.

Several members of the WATERSPOUTT social science research team have conducted considerable prior research into the role of gender in access to water, water collection and

participation in water governance in the Makondo parish in rural Uganda (Asaba 2013, Asaba, Fagan, Kabonesa and Mugumya 2013, Asaba, Fagan and Kabonesa 2015, Asaba, and Fagan 2015, Magala, Kabonesa and Staines 2015). This provides the bedrock on which to base the further research associated with the WATERSPOUTT project.

### Resource Conflicts and their Interpretations

A final cautionary note is provided by an important study of how patterns of change in the African landscape have been misrepresented by experts (Fairhead and Leach 1996). For a very long time, widely spaced forest patches in the savannah along the Niger river in Guinea were assumed to be the relics of a once vast and continuous forest. Both in the colonial and the postcolonial periods, policy makers interpreted the situation as deforestation, blamed it on the land use practices of the local population and made their environmentally based development interventions accordingly. Fairhead and Leach discovered that it was in fact the local inhabitants who had been the ones to plant and grow these forest patches around their villages in the savannah. They try to account for the persistence of the assumption made by the authorities that the inhabitants were incapable of good land stewardship, and explore the on-the-ground consequences of decades of policies built on these mistaken assumptions. This saga of the fallibility of expert knowledge and the complexity of local ecology and politics is enormously relevant as we set the social science objectives for the WATERSPOUTT project. Prior research by two important WATERSPOUTT partners will help flesh out these issues in two of the WATERSPOUTT research locations.

Wapulumuka Mulwafu's 2011 book *Conservation Song* considers the agriculture-dependent economy of Malawi, the ecological impact of agrarian policies and the political impact of state-enforced conservation measures, both in colonial and postcolonial times. The establishment of British rule in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a familiar pattern of changes to the countryside – the production of commercial crops such as cotton, maize, tea, and tobacco; an increase in rural poverty, inequality and landlessness; the setting up of estates and native reserves. By the 1920s, this had led to significant ecological damage, with considerable soil erosion and falling agricultural yields. Concerned at the extent of land degradation, the colonial government introduced in the 1930s another set of policies, *malimidwe* (conservation measures), to try to restore the soil. However, peasant resistance to *malimidwe* flared rapidly,

becoming a major component in anticolonial politics and leading finally to decolonisation in Malawi.

Mulwafu provides an intellectual genealogy of conservationist thinking in Malawi. Several senior Forestry Department officers were trained at Oxford's Imperial Forestry Institute, where they learnt from practices that had been tried throughout the British empire. The controversial *malimidwe* measures implemented by the British in the 1930s – the planting of grasses and trees to protect watersheds, the construction of structures to prevent soil erosion, etc. – were probably quite sound from a soil conservation standpoint, even if they showed no interest in or regard for existing local conservation practices. However, they were also extremely labour intensive, and the imposition of compulsory labour requirements (*thangata*) for their construction meant that there were labour shortages at crucial stages of the agricultural cycle.

These resentments about compulsory labour exploded into protests, which were violently suppressed by the British. Mulwafu describes the politicisation of women in this process, since they were the main agricultural workers. Protests against *malimidwe* fed into the decolonisation movement, leading finally to Malawi's independence in 1964. It may seem curious at first sight that colonial soil conservation policies should develop into a major flashpoint in just the same way as oppressive colonial revenue demands or colonial policies of racial discrimination. The central issue, of course, was the compulsory nature of the labour demands forced on to an already overburdened peasantry. Mulwafu's work points to the explosive political potential of high-handed colonial policies regarding natural resources, and shows us that postcolonial policies regarding resource conservation and distribution can equally stoke fierce resentments.

The substantial body of ecological research at Stellenbosch University, and particularly its Sustainability Institute, also offers insights regarding these issues. Wessels writes about the ambitious process of incremental upgrading that is attempting to nudge the informal peri-urban settlement of Enkanini into the direction of becoming a sustainable human settlement (Wessels 2014). His study examined the larger transdisciplinary research project's efforts at the co-production of knowledge with settlement residents, which was intended to move the

exercise of power away from the government and towards the citizenry. The research process is itself designed to empower the research participants, as in Hanise's experience of listening to the stories of women in the South African rural water services sector to understand how their traditional roles intersect with government gender mainstreaming initiatives (Hanise 2008). This inclusiveness is again evident in Meyer's transdisciplinary learning approach to the problem of the Eerste river (Meyer 2016). Using the Stellenbosch Eerste River as the common denominator to allow for participation of Enkanini residents in a co-production research process, Meyer explores transdisciplinarity as a research framework to bring in the experiential life-world of the informal settlement resident into the research process. She does this by using photography and crochet as art forms that allow for direct visual and aesthetic interpretation of the participant's viewpoints on Stellenbosch watershed.

However, a recent doctoral thesis based in close-up, immersive ethnographic research in one section of Enkanini offers a critical reading of the Enkanini slum upgrading project (Zibagwe 2016). "Haunted by historical legacies of neglect and the logics of patronage that displaced their demands", Zibagwe argues that some Enkanini residents interpreted the solar energy solutions being offered to them very negatively, since they were seen as a means of furthering their exclusion from service provision. "The solar energy initiatives were perceived by shack dwellers as a dispossession of their upgrading discourse as well as a palliative response to their envisioned improved lives that were woven around connection to the national electricity grid" (Zibagwe 2016: iii-iv).

There were tensions and conflicts, which erupted in protests, heated meetings and riots – performative acts not unlike the Cape Town toilet protests studied by Robins (Robins 2014). The introduction of solar power as an alternative to electricity was seen as a hindrance to security of tenureship. Although the Sustainability Institute regards incremental upgrading as an interim step towards electrification and not as an alternative or ultimate solution, and although several sections of Enkanini did not respond negatively, Zibagwe's thesis does demonstrate the potential for a mismatch between the intention of the technology providers and the perception of the recipients. Such an intervention inevitably plays out within force fields created by long-term historical and political economic processes, which cannot be left out of consideration. This analysis underscores the need for bringing a critical and self-

critical awareness to the WATERSPOUTT project.

**Conclusion**

Given that "water often does lie at the very heart of the complexity of social and historical concerns that form the focus of our disciplines" (Fontein 2008: 738), this essay is an attempt to understand the terrain on which our interventions are to be made, in the hope of calibrating them according to these nuanced understandings. A historical and conceptual distillation of the relevant literatures, it will inform the project's future reflections on the articulations between the global and the local, on the intersectionality of the contemporary lived experience of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and on the everyday encounters between existing practices and struggles and 'expert' knowledge.

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## Conclusion

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