TERESA CREMER

“It’s a privilege to call it a crisis”:

Improvised practices and socio-economic dynamics of Cape Town’s water shortage (2015-2018)

KÖLNER ETHNOLOGISCHE BEITRÄGE
Herausgegeben von Michael J. Casimir

Heft 57

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Picture 1: The Water Collection Point in Newlands, Cape Town, photo by the author: TC 2018.

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Editor’s Preface

This study, supervised by Prof. Michaela Pelican and supported with a research grant of the Thematic Network ‘Remapping the Global South - Teaching, Researching, Exchanging’ of the Global South Studies Center Cologne (GSSC), addresses the 2018-2019 water crisis in Cape Town. It foregrounds the experiences of Capetonians whose voices, so far, have received little attention in the discourse surrounding the water crisis: that is, Capetonians living in the townships who, irrespective of the crisis, have been living with limited water supplies and inadequate urban infrastructure. Teresa Cremer investigates how the political framing of the acute water shortage as a “crisis” was perceived by different actors and social groups, and which new scopes of action and social practices it has engendered. She argues that while the portrayal of water scarcity as a “crisis” and the measures of the city administration primarily reflect the interests and perspectives of Cape Town's privileged middle and upper classes, the needs of poorer and marginalized residents are hardly heard. At the same time, she shows that the crisis discourse not only reinforces existing inequalities, but also opens up new spaces for creativity and action. In her ethnography, Cremer focuses on the public water collection point in the Newlands neighbourhood and vividly describes how it is valued and made use of by different groups of actors as a site of dense social interaction and creative income-generating strategies. The end of the water crisis in 2019 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 led to the closing of the Newlands water collection point. Yet Cremer's very well-informed and lucidly argued analysis is instructive also in view of other crisis situations, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. The study demonstrates the strength of empirically grounded, ethnographic research to critically question crisis discourses, and recognize alternative perspectives and the emergence of new productive spaces.

Michael J, Casimir

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List of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CoCT	City of Cape Town
DA	Democratic Alliance
GSSC	Global South Studies Center
NGO	non-governmental organization
PODs	points of distribution
SAB	South African Breweries
WCP	Water Collection Point
WCWSS	Western Cape Water Supply System
WMD	Water Management Devices
WRTT	Water Resilience Task Team

Prologue

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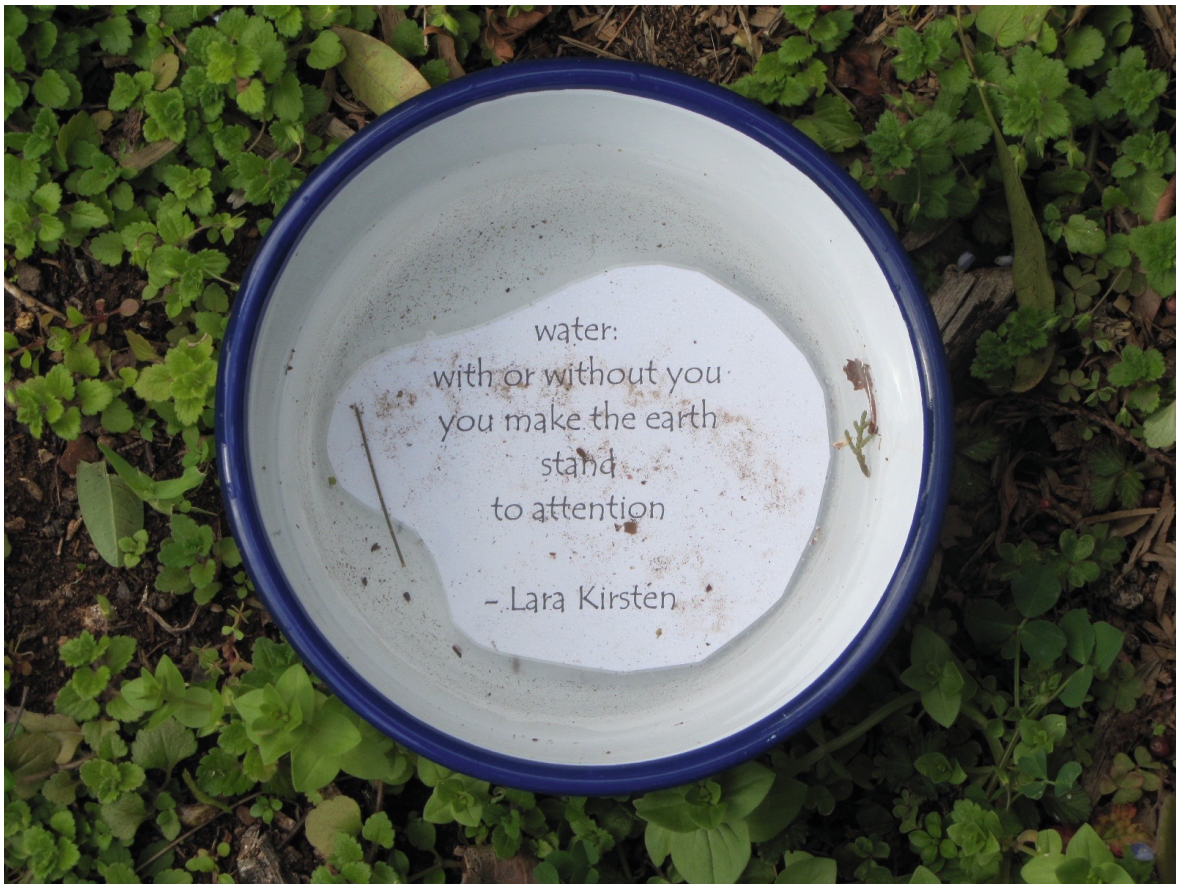

McGregor Poetry Festival; photo by the author: TC 2018

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What is water? -

„Body, state-captured, politicized, financialized, vital, must-have,

natural resource, scarce, essence, companion and sometimes

like my favorite ice-cream on a very hot day

- so smooth“

(Paul, field notes, 07/31/18).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When Amkele talks about his personal water consumption, everything sounds pretty decent. He is not worried about whether he has got enough water. Scarcity of water does not affect him, he tells me. The water he uses is a very manageable amount. He needs water for drinking, cooking and washing. There is no car that needs to be washed and no garden that needs to be watered. Only in the further course of our conversation, I get a bigger picture. The fact that the water on the few standpipes that he is sharing with several families gets cut off by the City of Cape Town (CoCT) for several hours a day, or sometimes for weeks, is only mentioned on the side. But Amkele is not part of the current narrative about a water crisis in Cape Town. If not people like him, then who?

A severe drought had hit Cape Town in 2015, low precipitation dragged on for years and culminated in a water crisis that reached its dramatic high point with the City of Cape Town announcing a Day Zero for early 2018, the day when the taps would be shut off in the city.[1] Thanks to drastic water savings by citizens, agriculture and businesses as well as heavy winter rains from 2018 onwards, supplies could be sufficiently replenished and Day Zero was averted. The events in Cape Town circulated worldwide as a story of success, in which a city of four million had defeated a major crisis and could be taken as a future role model for other cities facing the threat of climate change and water shortage. There is no doubt that the radical measures taken by the CoCT were effective. But in a city like Cape Town, where many residents routinely struggle for access to water and electricity and poor and marginalized settlements regularly protest the lack of service delivery, the so-called water crisis also reveals significant inequities that persist along racial lines, deeply entrenched in this post-apartheid city. Many of Cape Town's marginalized citizens emphasize their consternation about a government that is unable to provide even the most essential services. Access to water is for many residents in Cape Town, everything but a matter of fact. This insight is not new. But the dominant crisis narrative tended to represent Day Zero and the water crisis as a natural given that hit everybody in the city equally. However, the perception and experiences of the so-called water crisis among the residents of Cape Town was obviously more diverse.[2] The media coverage of the crisis was mainly based on the lifeworld of affluent citizens which constituted the status quo for crisis production.

[1] When referring to the city as a municipality I will use the abbreviation 'CoCT' for the 'City of Cape Town'. Since the city council is often not inclusive of Cape Town's vulnerable and poor residents, it is misleading in my understanding to refer to it as 'the City', a common abbreviation as you would read in other texts.

[2] When I use the term 'water crisis' in the following, I always kept in mind this ambiguity.

I met Amkele at the Water Collection Point (WCP) in Newlands, Cape Town, where I did a three-months ethnographic research, from July until September 2018. The Water Collection Point was a public place, opened up by the CoCT in the course of the Day Zero panic in May 2018. Sixteen water taps had been installed adjacent to a large parking lot, located right at the Main Road, opposite the South African Breweries (SAB). People from all over the city came together to fill up their containers with fresh and cold water from the esteemed Newlands spring that had been gushing down incessantly from Table Mountain for centuries. The WCP was a dynamic space where multiple dimensions and practices within the context of a crisis could be witnessed. The practices at the WCP were as much about quenching thirst or saving money as they were about creating lasting forms of belonging to the city or making a living. For some, the current situation was a crisis in their usually orderly life; for others, the situation provided an opportunity in their generally volatile living conditions. Both of these competing and complementary relations at the WCP tell us more about overall dynamics in the city and reveal inequities inherent in urban society and the water crisis narrative itself.[3]

Against this background the following questions emerged: What implication does it have that the City of Cape Town claims the current situation to be a water crisis? For whom is what a crisis? What is the norm? Who creates it? Whose lifeworld and lived experiences are reflected in the narrative of Cape Town's water crisis? What are the power asymmetries behind Cape Town's water crisis? What are the epistemological implications? What other stories are not heard, like those from city dwellers such as Amkele who express that it is a privilege to call the current situation in Cape Town a water crisis? If what for many Capetonians[4] is now a crisis, is everyday life for others, how do we call the condition Amkele lives in? What effects does the water shortage have on people who live with Day Zero all the time?

Based on this observations – that the water crisis in Cape Town is not a crisis for everyone – my goal is to question the status quo of crisis-production as well as to further portray the inequities which are obscured through crisis narratives. In turn, I also want to consider how crises challenge well-established notions of inequality and difference. Using ethnographic accounts from the Water Collection Point in Newlands, I want to guide the reader's attention

[3] Religious faith and gender aspects also influenced the way how many of my interlocutors experienced crises or coped uncertain living conditions. Since my focus is on socio-economic dynamics and improvisation in practices in the context of the water crisis, I only refer to those issues marginally.

[4] With ‚Capetonians' I indicate the residents of Cape Town.

towards people's agency and their practices in a situation understood as crisis. Focusing on people's situated practices in the context of a crisis enables us to include both, those for whom the current crisis is a state of exception and those who have always been living in such conditions that now constitute a crisis for others. The dynamics at the WCP show strikingly how conditions of increased uncertainty also require a "register of improvisations" and flexibility to try out new practices or to think outside the box in order to meet personal urgent needs (Mbembe and Roitman 1995: 326). This characteristic of crises is given special consideration in my analyses.

Consequently, my research questions are the following:

- To what extent do situated practices and social dynamics at the WCP challenge the status quo of crisis production and persistent structures of power and inequality in Cape Town?
- What social practices and what forms of cooperation do crises enable as well as undermine? How do crisis narratives affect people in different ways and how do they bring them together?
- How are established ways of classifying and categorizing people called into question or redefined during a crisis situation?

The thesis is structured in four parts: The first part (chapter 2) contains an outline of the dominant narrative of the water crisis in Cape Town. This chapter is intended to provide the necessary context for the happenings at the Water Collection Point (WCP) in the winter of 2018 and to illustrate how one-dimensionally the crisis was created and addressed by the CoCT. The second and third part consists of a theoretical (chapter 3) and a methodical chapter (chapter 4) which together provide analytical and practical background information on the research conducted as well as for the forthcoming empirical chapter. The fourth part (chapter 5) contains the main insights of the thesis. It tells several stories of the Water Collection Point in Newlands. In four separate steps, the different lifeworlds and practices of people visiting the WCP are presented in detail. The people are divided into four groups: 1) Water Collectors, 2) Water Helpers, 3) Security Guards, and 4) CoCT officials. This multi-perspective approach of those who are often portrayed by the CoCT as one group - the Capetonians - provides a challenge to the dominant crisis narrative. Through numerous conversations and participant observations at the WCP, I now better understand, for example, what a sheep's guts have to do with water shortage or broken printers with social exclusion; how improvisation blurs the boundaries between informality and formality; how people's agency does not necessarily remain where historical disparities would situate it and

what competing perspectives on water, social inclusivity and rights become apparent in this crisis.

These insights from people at the WCP in Cape Town are then placed within the broader debate over equal distribution of water in an urban setting, the general inquiry into the status of 'crisis' in social theory and its political use as a narrative device. Finally, I link these insights to questions of power relations in an urban setting, vulnerability, resilience, agency, improvisation in practices and on access and exclusion to the city's water infrastructure. Based on ethnographic accounts from the WCP, I would like to contribute to a timely and engaging analysis of contemporary crisis narratives.

The shortfall in South Africa's water supplies by 2040 is predicted to be 17% and water resources remain one of the biggest global risks (Winter 2020). Coping with past and growing inequality will remain Cape Town's greatest challenge (Leibbrandt and Ranchhod 2018). Uncertain climatic development threatens to exacerbate the deep inequality in water accessibility. These macrotrends point to the urgency of the underlying conflicts expressed in the ethnographic accounts of this thesis. As the dynamics at the WCP illustrate, crisis narratives are often not inclusive and not representative of what is happening on the ground.

These accounts should not be perceived as complete and definitive but rather as indications of the narrow and selective reality reflected in the dominant crisis narrative. They are presented with the hope of contributing to existing research that challenges the hegemonic discourse of crises and encourages multi-layered representations of seemingly self-evident realities, or crisis narratives. Instead of taking these narratives at face value, this approach opens up for a more granular understanding of crises including the ability to recognize advantages and potential for improvement emerging from them.[5]

Chapter 2: The water crisis in Cape Town 2015-2018 – a dominant narrative

Day Zero suddenly appeared and captured *the city,* wreaked havoc on *its citizens*, grew into a public enemy and just as suddenly spat its *captives* up again, disappeared in vague shape, uncertain when or wether it will be returning. Fear arose and pictures of citizens stockpiling

[5] My thanks go to the DAAD thematical network 'Remapping the Global South – Teaching, Researching, Exchanging' for their scholarship, allocated at the GSSC; to Prof. Dr. Michaela Pelican for the supervision; to the DELTA team for feedback, and to Micha for proofreading and commenting. My deepest gratitude goes to my research participants at the WCP who were willing to generously share their time, experiences, thoughts and knowledge with me.

water and of blank supermarket shelves went viral. Businesses, neigbourhoods, politicians, service providers and others started considering about what it would mean if there was no water in the taps. International media attention focused on the city and tourists started cancelling trips. Those citizens who had the means drilled private boreholes in their gardens or even left the city. As the trust between citizens and local authority got porous, saving oneself and the family became a top priority.

What sounds like a scene of a sci-fi movie, is in fact the story of Day Zero in Cape Town, which reached its dramatic high point in summer 2018. Day Zero turned into a term that became synonymous with the Cape Town drought – the moment when emergency rationing measures would started and the government said it would turn off taps in Cape Town, to all but 'essential services', like hospitals or standpipes in informal settlements. *Everyone* would have been required to queue for a daily ration of 25 liters of water per person, from 200 designated points of distribution (PODs) around the city. Based on consumption scenarios, the beginning of Day Zero was set for when the dams got down to 13,5% in total which would provide three months worth of water at a reduced volume supplied of 350Ml per day. The last 10% of the reservoir levels is difficult to extract (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 5; Wood 2019).

The dominant narrative implies that Day Zero is a natural and inevitable surprise, that scarcity is a calculated fact and that running out of water impacts everybody in society equally (Sarni 2020).[6] In this chapter I want to outline what political decisions have contributed over the last three to four years to amount to the crisis narrative. Since those information was missing or incomplete for my interlocutors, I mainly draw from secondary data in this chapter to complement my findings on the ground. An incredibly amount of material was published constantly by journalists, scholars or specialists who have been involved in the Cape Town drought in one or the other way. Getting a bigger picture of what was happening at that time was very complicated, as circumstances were changing on a daily basis and the media coverage only provided a limited insight into the crisis on the ground. Yet those circumstances and information fundamentally affected Cape Town's residents. It shaped their image of reality, was reason for complaints, criticism, panic or to the way they took action. Therefore this chapter should provide the reader with a general context that most Capetonians faced but very few understood in its full extent, at this point in time.

[6] Which is called into question by italicizing these generalizations in this text.

There are numerous studies on how water indexes power relations (Anand 2017; Swyngedouw 2004; Strang 2016). Anand (2018b) emphasizes that "[m]arginalized social groups (gendered, raced, classed, or caste others) often have less reliable access to water than those in more dominant positions. These inequalities are evident and often quite proximate in cities". Similarly in Cape Town, the distribution of water resources and their accessibility is very unequal across socio-economic groups and commonly runs along racial lines (Enqvist and Ziervogel 2019). Antina von Schnitzler has shown in "Democracy's Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest After Apartheid" (2016) how apartheid-era South African water infrastructures still continue to reproduce their politics in the post-apartheid era. Access to water even worsened after 1994, as the water infrastructure system was not maintained or improved as a result of the rapid urbanisation and expanding economy. The City of Cape Town has a population of over 4 million people (1,6 million in 1980), with 14% of households living in informal settlements. 180.000 households in informal settlements do not have running water in their homes, and collect free water from public standpipes (WCG 2017; Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 6; Parks et al. 2019: 3). While informal settlements use only 4% of the CoCT's water, residents in formal housing consume 66%. Those who cannot afford to pay for water are eligible for a free allocation each month, which applies to about 1,5 million people (Ziervogel 2019: 3).[7] Just as Cape Town is a city of inequality, the water crisis is very selective in whom it actually affects. The fear that grew inside the middle-class during the drought and Day Zero was very different to the challenges the people in informal settlements were facing. As the city's political past show, the City government is one that is primarily concerned with middle-class interest as opposed to interests of the poorest people.[8] This is also reflected in the City of Cape Town's communication strategy, which was mainly communicated to a certain group of people in

[7] The CoCT operates on a block or so-called debt tariff system for water in which each additional unit of water becomes more expensive as greater volumes are used. Different rates are applied based on the level of water restrictions currently active. There is a free basic water policy in Cape Town (and South Africa) that grant 6kl (6000 liters) free water per month per every single household, while indigent households received an additional 4,5kl free. There are generally three aims for tariffs. 1) the CoCT needs to get enough revenue from selling water to pay for the provision. 2) everyone has to be able to afford a basic minimum amount; 3) to discourage wasteful use (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 12; Parks et al. 2019: 4; Enqvist and Ziervogel 2019: 9).

[8] Since 2006 Cape Town is being run by the Democratic Alliance (DA), opposition party to the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The DA attempts to maintain its image as the party that represents 'good governance' and on potraying itself as less corrupt and more efficient city manager than the ANC. "These claims have been continually dogged by accusations that its "efficieny" is reserved for the wealthy (predominantly white) areas of the city, while the Black poor continue to suffer discrimination. The DA is accused to create a "First World" mirage for the (white) wealthy off the back of inadequate services for the poor and Black" (Gastrow 2018).

Cape Town. They started to teach middle class citizens how to consume water and to bring down their water use (Robins 2018). The information focused on how to flush toilets, how to take a shower, the saving effects of collecting and reusing rinse water or using a cup instead of running taps for brushing teeth, how to use the washing machine or the dishwasher sustainably or how to check for leaking pipes (CoCT 2017).

Figure 1: Your guide to 50l or less per day; source: www.capetown.gov.za/thinkwater

The mainstream media was neither representing nor confronting the different lived realities within the city during the drought. Whereas big companies got support by water experts, it was the Law Enforcement who took care of micro businesses in informal settlements. No one was communicating to people who run smaller businesses in informal settlements and supporting them with how they would operate beyond Day Zero. The worlds first 'water police' was introduced by the CoCT in order to track down residents who waste water by washing cars, filling up pools, watering their garden or who sold water, all activities that have been declared illegal during the water crisis (McCarthy 2018). This also included informal car washes, that got shut down on a large scale.

Cape Town almost exclusively relies on a surface water system. It gets over 95% of its water from the Western Cape Water Supply System (WCWSS) of six rain-fed reservoires that also

supply water to agriculture and other urban areas (Wolski 2018).[9] Early indications of what will happen to Cape Town were already apparent in 2015 when below-average winter rainfalls (June to August) failed to replenish the dams. The continuous absence of rain and the typically hot and dry summer seasons (December to March) worsened the situation throughout 2016 and 2017 until Cape Town turned into a city marked by the threat of a drought. Between 2015 and 2018 South Africa's South Western Cape region experienced three of the lowest rainfall years on record (Wolski 2017, 2018). The combined dam total storage volume is about 900 million cubic meters of water, which provides enough water for around a year and a half of ordinary usage by both urban users and agriculture. The CoCT uses around 58% of the WCWSS available water, agriculture gets 26% of that, smaller towns take about 6% and around 10% is lost to evaporation and through infrastructure failure in the bulk water system, such as leaks (Wolski 2018; Joubert and Ziervogel 2019:6). But when there is no rain, the cycle does not work. The dry years led to a situation where the "big six" dams - Theewaterskloof, Berg River, Voelvei, Steenbras Upper, Steenbras Lower and Wemmershoek - dropped from 100% in 2014 to 71%, 60% and 37% of capacity in the subsequent years, reaching the lowest level of 28% in 2018 (Wolski 2018; Deklerk 2018).

This extreme weather event in this already semi-arid region, combined with leaking and inadequate infrastructure, lack of diversity in the water supply system, continued population and economy growth and unequal consumption practices contributed to the eventual crisis. Faced with the looming Day Zero scenario, Cape Town's status as a tourist destination and as South Africa's economic hub, ensured great attention throughout the world (Ziervogel 2019: 2).

But Day Zero, as a response to and as an epitome of the crisis, was only the tip of the iceberg. There have been many more attempts to deal with the crisis. Some failed and are very controversial, others succeeded and can be taken as an example for future water shortage responses. The city council as the main political institution of Cape Town was primarily

[9] The integrated WCWSS and the planning for that is coordinated by the National Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) in cooperation with the City of Cape Town. The national DWS as main authority is responsible for producing major water infrastructure within South Africa, including building dams. It maintains full ownership, regulatory control and right to allocate all water in the dams Cape Town relies on (Rawlins 2019 in Enqvist and Ziervogel 2019: 5; Parks et al. 2019: 2). The CoCT as water service provider is responsible for providing basic water services to its residents, schools or hospitals and is required to plan for water management including conservation, recycling, supply, and sanitation as well as future supply (Enqvist and Ziervogel 2019: 6). During the crisis, both parties blamed each other of not taking on responsibilities and following jurisdictions.

tasked to develop the response to the crisis. As such it needed to accept being in the firing line of its citizens as well as having a great responsibility for the city.

The drought was in full swing and the dams emptier than ever when the city council appointed a Water Resilience Task Team (WRTT) in May 2017. The Task Team finalised a Water Resilience Plan that prioritised an emergency action. It set a goal of securing 500 megalitres (1 mega liter = 1 million litres) non-surface water per day and a target of reducing water usage to 500 megalitres a day. Given that water usage in early 2015 was about 1200 Ml a day, this was an ambitious target and important for designing new restrictions (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 6f; Parks et al. 2019: 6). As the scale of the crisis became even more evident after the very poor winter rains, the city council considered that a more diverse view on this issue was needed.

A phase set in where responsibilities shifted from one to another mandate and political ledership was unclear. Members from academia, business, NGOs, Provincial and National government were involved in further work. The CoCT engaged the World Bank to provide input from international advisors. The water management and desalination experts stressed the importance of water demand management and the development and prioritization of groundwater sources over emergency desalination plants, as this would promise faster access to water (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 27).

By October 2017 the CoCT prompted the release of a Critical Water Shortages Disaster Plan, that laid out three phases (Water Outlook 2018). Phase 1 referred to the current rationing at the time, Phase 2 would be disaster restrictions and the actual implementation of the Day Zero idea and Phase 3 would be full-scale disaster implementation when water would not be available from the WCWSS, resulting in households and businesses unable to access water and a reduction in water to critical services. Although this Disaster Plan was never fully implemented it was an ambitious exercise as no plan for a city-wide water shortage had yet been developed, neither for Cape Town nor for other South African cities (Ziervogel 2019: 8; Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 20).

As the dam levels were still declining and the winter rains in far distant future, technical shifts were occuring and new political tactics were applied. Towards the end of 2017, a more hands-on strategy with ‘daily water meetings’ got launched and the term ‘Day Zero’ was made a more visible part of the crisis communication by bringing in a consultancy called Resolve (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 20). The strategy to overcome the drought and getting through to the rainy season required several measures, especially two main approaches: 1)

water demand management and 2) water supply management. The latter included augmentation schemes, bringing in water from other sources, including desalination plants, groundwater extraction from Cape Town's aquifers or direct water re-use. Rainwater harvesting and alien vegetation clearing were also under discussion (Parks et al. 2019: 8). However, the highest expectations were placed on water demand management. Reducing water demand as much as possible was achieved through reductions in the water pressure in municipal pipes across the city, Smart Water Meters, communication campaigns, stakeholder engagement (to drive a behavior change) and, particularly important, water restrictions which increased with dropping dam levels. Already starting in May 2016, 20% restrictions were imposed on both domestic and agriculture water use in the WCWSS. For agriculture the restrictions were increased gradually up to 60% in December 2017. Domestic water use restrictions increased to 45%, implemented in December 2017, when residents were restricted to a maximum of 50 liters of water per person per day, known as the Level 6B water restrictions (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 4; Parks et al. 2019: 4).

Those restrictions were accompanied by significantly increasing water tariffs from 2016 and were not downgraded until October 2018. The new tariffs for the block system (the more water a household uses, the higher the prices get for the respective tariff block) curbed residents to reduce water demand and was required to mitigate the loss of income resulting from reduced water consumption (Parks et al. 2019: 4). This resulted in increasing water prices as soon as the water used went beyond the restricted amount. During the drought the CoCT removed the free allocation of water for non-indigent households whereas indigent households (earning less than R3,500 per month (≈140€)) still got 10,5kl free per month, which is equivalent to a family of seven using 50 liters per day each in a 30-day month (Jones 2018). Therefore, the structure of the water tariffs ensures that residents in larger households (commonly in lower income communities) will each pay more for their daily water than a person from a small family in an affluent area, even though each person is using the same amount (Rountree 2019).

As expected, the strategy to get more money from people who are using less water has attracted a lot of criticism, accusing the CoCT of making profit from the drought. Additionally, the CoCT introduced a new fixed monthly connection charge based on the size of a household's water meter (around R115 per household per month) and continued to rollout flow restrictors, better known as Water Management Devices (WMD), for residents deemed to be overusers (Scheba and Millington 2018). WMD is a technology attached to a households' water meter that restrict their water supply to 350 liters per day, or 10,500 liters

per month. With high administrative burden, households can apply for increased amounts of water based on the number of people living in the household (Parks et al. 2019: 4).[10]

From a meteorological perspective the drought started in 2015, but the most acute phase for Capetonians started with a devastating press statement on the 18 January 2018, when Mayor Patricia de Lille, declared:

> We can no longer ask people to stop wasting water. We must force them. We have reached the point of no return. […] It is quite unbelievable that a majority of people do not seem to care and are sending all of us headlong towards Day Zero. At this point we must assume that they will not change their behaviour and that the chance of reaching Day Zero on 21 April [2018] is now very likely.

The Mayor's message was the moment when things shifted significantly in how the drought was perceived across the city. It was the first time that a specific date was attached to the abstract idea of Day Zero whereby it became very tangible. Through the release, the council blamed the citizens to be solely responsible for the approaching crisis (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 27; Deklerk 2018).

It was at this point, when Cape Town resembled the movie scenery described at the onset of this chapter. Citizens wanted to know what would happen. They were thirsty for information. The need for a stringent and continuous information flow got ever-more pressing. The city government launched a number of information sources to increase awareness about the water crisis and reducing water demand. The Water Dashboard was one of those platforms, which gave weekly updates on consumption levels and dam levels on the CoCT's website. A novel online Cape Town Water Map was developed and launched in January 2018 that used green dots to show low water use per household and red dots to show households exceeding the allowance. This 'technology of surveillance' helped citizens to see how their water use was faring compared to the restrictions, their neigbours and other homes across the city. It was a controversial intervention as some Capetonians felt that the website violated their privacy and was being used as a tool to publicly blame and police each other (Robins 2019: 7).

To assist citizens in reducing their consumption, the CoCT launched numerous communication campaigns in both traditional and social media. Through radio, prints or Facebook, informations about how to use 50 liters of water a day or about household leak

[10] WMDs were introduced in Cape Town in 2007, almost exclusively in low-income households, supposedly to manage debt and unfixed leaks. They set at limit of 350 liters of water per household per day and are highly controversial. Throughout 2017, as part of Level 4 restrictions, the CoCT targeted high-consumption households, who refused to voluntarily reduce water use despite having received written warnings, this time also in high-income areas (Enqvist and Ziervogel 2019: 5; Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 14; Parks et al. 2019: 4).

detection and repair were shared on a daily basis. These communication campaigns and the visibility of social norms around consumption were successful in contributing to changing the social norms around water use in the city as many of the recommendations were widely adopted by residents (Parks et al. 2019: 5). Capetonians took the severe consequences of not saving water to heart. To become a 'water-wise citizen' or a 'water warrior' was on *everyone's agenda*. As the message was spread, residents and businesses started reducing their water usage. The daily usage dropped to just below 500Ml a few times, which was about 50% of the pre-drought usage. No other city has ever achieved this level of reduction without resorting to intermittent supply (Joubert and Ziervogel 2019: 9). Everyday practices of people became important for the greater good, civil virtue of saving water and responsible citizenship turned into a challenge that Capetonians wanted to rise to. Conversations about the water crisis, personal methods of saving water, sharing ideas on technical aspects of water, supporting each other in how to read a water bill and discussing the idea of infrastructure turned into an indispensable part of daily business. While on a macro scale it was not possible to augment water supply that quickly, on a micro scale people started building their own solutions, like putting up water tanks to harvest rain water or collecting water at the city's public spring water collection points. These collection points became indespensable for many Capetonians in the course of the crisis, as we will see in the main chapter. Amidst all this chaos a sense of community and solidarity was notable, leading (inter)national media to portray the water crisis as the "great leveler" (Robins 2019: 2). The water shortage sparked tension and frustration but it also allowed citizens to get together and help each other out. Steven Robins described the way citizens were almost yearning to aquire knowledge on water-related issues as a new form of "water literacy" (Robins 2019: 8).

In March 2018, Day Zero was pushed back, initially to later in 2018, then eventually postponed to 2019 and beyond. The rapid change from the city officials' language of doom and warning of the inevitability of Day Zero, to suddenly declaring Cape Town as one of the most water-resilient cities in the world, generated – apart from the natural relief – also criticism. Some people claimed that this hasty turnaround was political opportunism in the run-up to the 2019 national elections, while others deemed it as an attempt to prevent further setback to economic development and tourism in the Western Cape (Robins 2019: 7). Critical voices have also been raised on the CoCT's crisis communication which could have been better in ensuring trust in the quality of information during this period of heightened uncertainty. Especially in South Africa, where the role of media in society and its relationship to government is still being contested, it is essential to provide maximum

transparency. “Crisis communication should contribute to a better understanding of the various stakeholders’ positions, and should be based on a genuine willingness to overcome pre-existing biases” (Wasserman and Hyde-Clarke 2016: 254). Instead of fighting pre-existing biases, the dominant water crisis narrative rather tended to maintain established notions of difference and inequality. Yet, these differences came to the forefront all the more as the water crisis also raised public awareness around water and its infrastructure. The way the CoCT went about communicating revealed who is addressed as Capetonians and who is not.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

The Water Collection Point in Newlands was opened in response to the water shortage in Cape Town. It provided a glimpse into the dynamic relationships, discourses and practices that shaped the water crisis and can be seen – to some extent – as representative of the general happenings and the narrative of a water crisis. As the centerpiece of this thesis, the WCP shapes my theoretical considerations and my empirical approach.

Cape Town speaks of a ‘water crisis’. Rather than just reiterating those crisis scenarios, I want to look behind the term to reveal what it generates, but also, and this is crucial, what the ‘crisis-prism’ obscures.

In the following, I therefore, firstly, draw on different approaches in the social sciences, especially sociocultural anthropology, to shed light on the ambiguity of the concept of ‘crisis’. It will become clear that ‘crisis’ is an elusive term, that varies in its interpretations, and even veers into the realm of the paradoxical. With regard to the actors at the WCP, the immanent differences in how a crisis is experienced come to the forefront, showing again the divergent realities subsumed under the term ‘crisis’.

Secondly, I want to understand ‘crisis’ as a narrative device to underline its hegemonic bias. This view on ‘crises’ helps us to understand why some people deem it a privilege to call the water shortage in Cape Town a crisis. This approach asks: What does one need to proclaim a crisis? What narratives does the declaration of a (water) crisis enable and what does it foreclose?

By having gained a multifaceted idea on ‘crisis’ (or better ‘crises’) I then want to outline a few theoretical thoughts on improvisation as a form of agency within the context of a (water) crisis. Whatever a crisis might exactly constitute for a specific group, the way people cope

in uncertain settings is characterized by improvisation as processes of 'in-the-making', rather than products that are already made (Ingold and Hallam 2007).

3.1 "Whose crisis?" – Anthropological insights into the concept 'crisis'

Crises are something abstract, intangible. There is no crisis in itself. Only in relation to something else it gains any meaning. In this sense crises take all kinds of shapes, from personal to social, mental, environmental, structural, cultural, political or economic crises. It became a "buzzword of our time", one of the "most universalised and universalising words today" (Kosmatopoulos 2014: 479). The breadth of the term makes it fit to different contexts based on what is favored by a certain group at a specific time. Over time, it has lost its preciseness and conceptual purchase (Koselleck 2006: 399).

Tracing it back to its etymological origin from the ancient Greek term *krísis* (judgement, decision, turning point, discrimination) and more specifically the verb *krinô* (to separate, to choose, to cut, to decide, to judge), the term used to possess a very precise meaning. Confined to the medical sector initially, the term indicated not only a critical situation (the disease or illness) but a definitive decision related to it (life or death, good or evil) (Roitman 2012). In this application of 'crises' a dichotomy emerged between the normal state of affairs and the state of crisis. Understanding crises as a rupture or a break separating two 'normal' conditions from each other is the red thread in the concept's further development. Up to the present day the term has increasingly expanded from the fields of theology, law and medicine to the political and social domain, the military, the foreign policy and political economy, to also become a historical-philosophical term (Koselleck 2006: 358f.; cf. Vigh 2008).

Crises have been the object of study of social sciences at large and there are abundant ethnographic research projects dealing with crises.[11] There is as yet no clear differentiation between crises, catastrophes or disasters and empirically grounded analyses on crises are missing in anthropology (Beck and Knecht 2016: 56). To think about crises as a decisive moment of emergency, a temporary disorder or rupture in the order of things – when something, a social or economic system, an ideology or an established set of practices

[11] In his review article, Nikolas Kosmatopoulos emphasizes three anthropological books as core readings and representative of a contemporary anthropology of crises: *Markets of Sorrow, Labours of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (2013) by Vincanne Adams; *Life in Crisis – The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders* (2013) by Peter Redfield and *Anti-Crisis* (2014) by Janet Roitman.

collapse upon themselves – is the most common way of how crises have traditionally been approached in anthropological works (RWS 2019; Vigh 2008: 8).

Scholars such as Émile Durkheim, Arnold van Gennep or Victor Turner revealed the need to shift the ethnographic focus of observation from tradition and stasis to transformation and dynamics, most prominently outlined in theories of ritual (in Beck and Knecht 2016). A holistic approach and extended case studies on situations of crises were seen as a promising entry into more profound anthropological analyses and theoretical models of the relationship of persistence and social change (Beck and Knecht 2016: 59). This understanding of crises has received most criticism for its underlying assumption of a world structured by a dualism of stasis and change, of simple and complex, traditional and modern society. Such a structural-functionalist idea of a static norm that exists before each crisis and returns, slightly transformed, after the crisis "support[s] the master narrative of a 'great divide'" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 59; cf. Nyamnjoh 2013). In other terms "[…] its inherent, specific Christian and Western idea of time, more specifically the relationship between past, present, and future, remain fundamentally intact" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 60).

The consideration that a crisis situation might get experienced like a liminal phase in Turner's sense, understanding crisis as something that pulls people out of normality and is in the classical sense a similar experience for those undergoing this situation, emphasizes some interesting aspects. Linda Jencson (2001) for instance expands on this idea in 'Disastrous Rites: Liminality and Communitas in a Flood Crisis'. In Cape Town, however, there is not 'the one group' per se that share the experience of the water crisis or that speak, as a coherent group, of the time 'after the crisis'. Experiencing crisis as a liminal phase would only apply to some Capetonians. Approaching the water crisis with Turner's concept of liminality would again leave out those city inhabitants who do not experience the water crisis as an exception in their ordinary life.

To address this concern, a crucial shift in focus to crises as a social condition and lived experience had to be taken into account. Mostly poor, socially marginalized and structurally violated people are alerting to the fact, that for many people crisis is ruling their everyday life rather than being a singular event (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Roitman 2016; Vigh 2008: 8). Henrik Vigh (2008) further considers and argues in 'Crisis and Chronicity" to approach crises as context, or, as a "terrain of action and meaning – thereby opening up the field to ethnographic investigation" with a focus on the way we cope, not through but in crises (ibid.: 8). When a crisis becomes context, it bears a contradiction in itself – an "oxymoronic permanence" (ibid.: 12). Still, Vigh argues that approaching crises as context

allows for the recognition of people's agency, lifeworlds and the emergence of practices, social relations and new meanings of the material and social world (ibid.).[12]

There are relevant aspects of both approaches for my research. Despite the legitimate criticism, the 'traditional' definition of crisis as a rupture in the ordinary flow of things, has a certain validity when looking at the way the city council and those people who felt concerned by the dominant crisis narrative in Cape Town acted. However, looking beyond the specific temporality and mediatized gaze, helps to see crisis as context and a social condition in order to take into account the people's agency and lived realities. Both definitions of the crisis concept will thus be taken into account to obtain a multi-perspective and inclusive approach to the water crisis, particularly with regard to people who have been living with such conditions for ever but are not part of the crisis-talk.

Apart from those analytical considerations, crises are of course not purely discursive and never just a simple product or a form of narrative (more in chapter 3.2). They have material origins and consequences (more in chapter 3.3). In the case of the water crisis in Cape Town, it was a critical drought situation that led to a shortage of available water in the dams that serve the city with drinking water. Talking about water *scarcity* however should also be scrutinized critically. Theories of political ecology on scarcity of resources indicate the social construction and situatedness of scarcity and reject arguments that scarcity is a given material situation:

> We often track water scarcity as a shortage of the absolute quantity of water that is available for people to use. But scarcity is not just a result of physical, climatological reasons. It is also a result of the social, political, and technical ways in which water is drawn and extracted and how cities come to use that water. Scarcity emerges because of environmental, technological, and social relationships around water. It's not just a question of too little rain. […] So, scarcity is not caused by how much water we produce but how much water we can consume (Anand 2018).

In dealing with Cape Town's water crisis it is therefore crucial not to take only environmental dynamics into account but also (human induced) climate change, water management, politics, service delivery and the (inefficient) distribution system, that all contribute to the situation to be witnessed in Cape Town (Scheba and Millington 2018).

The use of the concept crisis was produced and mobilized as the defining category from within Cape Town. It was the city government itself that imposed the crisis category on the

[12] In *Culture in Chaos* (2008), Lubkemann also suggests that, we need a "fresh perspective on war when it becomes the context for normal life rather than an exceptional event that disrupts it" as conflicts across the globe span decades and generations.

situation of drought in the city. Since crises texts are an understandable and marketable product, the narrative was then also taken up by media outlets across the world.

Having said this, I want to dissociate from the Eurocentric gaze that associates Africa with the pervasive sign of crisis and which makes it seem impossible to discuss Africa without making recourse in some shape or form to the figure of crisis (or to its inversion of Africa as the continent of hope) (Goldstone and Obarrio 2016: 5; Nyamnjoh 2013: 134; cf. Wainaina 2008). That does not mean that the events of the water crisis in Cape Town need less examination – to the contrary – it aims to achieve a deeper understanding of these events by shaking off the eurocentric dichotomoy of crisis and hope. In that sense, the next chapter will show, what it means to proclaim a crisis, what power structures crises narratives entail and what consequences follow a judgement of crisis.

3.2 "Why crisis now?" – 'Crisis' as a narrative device

> I wonder, why crisis now? Why does it need a rich person with garden and borehole to declare a water crisis? There are thousands of people living in Cape Town who are used to get along with 25 liters of water per day. They could have told you about a water crisis already years ago! (Paul, field notes, 09/28/18).

This chapter is not intended to evaluate the authenticity of crises or to determine who is right and who is wrong. What matters is, and that is also what Paul's statement implies, that crisis claims are not ontological assessments but instead are produced and (in many cases) fundamentally political denunciations (Roitman 2012).

The respective decision makers are often privileged people within society (often involved in politics) who mobilize crisis in narrative constructions to highlight certain events as 'moments of truth' or to denote a certain state of affairs, often defined as turning points in history (ibid.). A state of crisis can justify extraordinary actions. Decisions are taken and often the consequence of crises brings huge loss but also new chances and specific advantages for certain parts of society. "[T]he term "crisis" signifies a diagnostic of the present; it implies a certain telos – that is, it is inevitably though most often implicitly, directed toward a norm" (Roitman 2016: 25). The question that arise by declaring a crisis is therefore: To what state do we compare it? This normative dimension is tied to an implicit assessment of how things ought to be or how we would like them to be and that the 'new' condition, how things are now, signifies the opposite of 'normal' or good. Crises are therefore more than a mere descriptor of a situation and designate something more than a historical conjuncture (Roitman 2014: 2). It is therefore worthwhile to clarify what is at stake

when crises are announced and what the ethical and epistemological grounds are for proclaiming crises. Roitman claims that crisis has become a

> […] metaconcept of sorts, a linguistic placeholder, a structuring device that, far from simply appraising the quality of this or that phenomenon vis-à-vis a particular calculus or within a specific narrative, literally constructs the narrative itself (in Goldstone and Obarrio 2016: 6).

Crisis narratives often ensure that the attention on those urgent, emergency-charged events supplants a whole range of other phenomena. Before taking crises as a starting point for critique, we should therefore question the matter itself and be wary about the basis for crisis claims. What questions does the proclamation of crises leads us to ask? It entails major risks as it "[…] facilitates a reconciliation of the status quo on the terms set by those who get to proclaim crisis" (Khasnabish 2014: 572). The disclosure of a normative dimension behind crisis production provides an occasion for a critical challenging and redefinition of the status quo. Habits and customs get to be critically questioned and (re)negotiated. Crises thus act as incubators for discursivity and reflection, they "irritate conditions of order and disorder, of limitation and scope of action, of visibility and invisibility" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 61).

3.3 Improvised practices as a form of agency in times of uncertainty

Whatever crises constitute for various people, what applies to the majority is that, within the context of uncertainty and unpredictability, people display new practices and are required to act, often in a creative way that is new to themselves. Crises allow space for improvisation. When the way how things usually work is no longer ensured in a society, practices previously taken for granted derail, routines are lost and norms lose their value, then new connections must be made, and new steps must be taken to structure the ways in which people organize their life. People cannot necessarily count on the social and political structures anymore that should provide security. Understood as fragmentation, crisis "entails on the one hand a loss of a certain coherence and unity, yet this experience of fragmentation does not necessarily lead to passivity" (Vigh 2008: 10). The driving force of the individual is to change something (mostly attitudes and certain behavior), to break down patterns of perception and consumption, to improvise and be innovative. Therefore, crises not only allow space for improvisation, but

> […] crises, by definition, involve conditions in which people (including the state's agents) must improvise with the elements of their social and political technologies and cope with a variety of unexpected disruptions and opportunities (Greenhouse 2002: 9).

Considering the wide field of anthropological approaches to improvisation, for the purpose of my research issue, I want to use a general notion of 'improvisation' as a natural way of tackling the unexpected and uncertain aspects of everyday life, referring to actions, negotiations and practices, arising at the WCP (and beyond). I thereby take reference to Ingold and Halam (2007) and Amit (2015). The former contend, that improvisation and creativity "[…] are intrinsic to the very processes of social and cultural life" (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 19). They regard improvisation as being:

> […] *generative*, in the sense that it gives rise to the phenomenal forms of culture as experienced by those who live by them or in accord with them. Second, it is *relational*, in that it is continually attuned and responsive to the performance of others. Third, it is *temporal*, meaning that it cannot be collapsed into an instant, or even a series of instants, but embodies a certain duration. Finally, improvisation is the *way we work*, not only in the ordinary conduct of our everyday lives, but also in our studies reflections on these lives in fields or art, literature and science (ibid.: 1; emphasis in original).

In a similar line, Amit sums up three properties that are associated with improvisation, in light of de Certeau's notion of the 'grasped opportunity' (1980):

> First, it reminds us that amidst the predictable routines of daily life, serendipities also occur, which can provide people with openings for changing, in smaller or larger ways, aspects of their lives. Second, it proposes that there are slippages and gaps – disjunctures in other words – even in the most thoroughly severe and unyielding set of institutional arrangements. Finally, it suggests that the very obscurity and anonymity of the lives of many ordinary people may provide them with the possibility, when the right opportunity arises, to take advantage of these slippages and gaps. Disjuncture may provide an opening for creative responses that provide those exercising them with some room for manoeuvre within frameworks over which they can exercise little direct influence (Amit 2015: 36).

The WCP itself can be seen both as a medium and a product of social improvised practices. On the one hand it is a space in between (in)formality and (in)visibility and therefore it provides people room for all kinds of agency. On the other hand, the WCP itself originated as a result of the water crisis and still gets formed and appropriated by those people who visit this place. The focus is on people's agency within the context of the water crisis or volatile living conditions that require flexibility and new routines; to be irregular, creative, ingenious, innovative, informal or corrupt. Improvisation in practices do not arise out of nothing but build on pre-existing patterns, knowledge and structures to life. Those negotiations in the context of crises and those new practices manifested at the Water Collection Point in Newlands are mostly aimed to reestablish an order, either for maintaining the previously familiar life as well as possible or for creating at least a certain consistency in their otherwise volatile life, if only temporarily. As the WCP will show, "these new

practices of ordering […] are the result of friction in unaccustomed constellations, side-effects of the rise or emergency of certain social groups" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 61). Alternative perceptions of the urban social web and of the natural and material world offer new margins for action. This becomes particularly relevant in the main chapter, where examples of the WCP will show how different practices and perceptions of the water crisis are, depending on the people's position in society and on what repertoire of options and experiences people are able to fall back.

Chapter 4: Methods and research setting

> If you build a wall, brick over brick, and the wall gets higher and higher and in the end it seems like a stable and steady wall. But they forgot to put concrete, so with one kick the wall collapses. The concrete is the unseen, the not-told of the story, but what contributes to the functioning in the end (Bryan, field notes, 08/01/18).

What Bryan was expressing in this conversation was that, in light of the larger discourse on the water crisis, the main perspective told in the media and news is just about the bricks but not about the concrete. The dominant crisis narrative creates an image of a water crisis that seems to be complete and comprehensive but it excludes one part of urban citizens without which the story (and society) does not work though. The dynamics at the WCP and the presence of a diverse public enables to get to know another story than the dominant crisis narrative. Staying within Bryan's methaphor, my goal is to 'fill the wall with the missing concrete' and to make it complete and truly stable by letting the different people tell their stories, show insights into their lifeworlds and emphasize their meaningful practices. Ethnographic methods like participating, observing as well as holding extensive in-depths conversations helped me to approach this objective.

4.1 Participation, observation and qualitative interviews

My data collection is mainly based on qualitative, ethnographic field research methods such as observation, participation and informal conversational interviewing. I deem those methods to be most appropriated to gain an in-depth understanding of the WCP and its dynamics and to guarantee a multi-perspective approach on the water shortage in Cape Town. Despite the criticism and vagueness of participant observation as the basic and widely practiced method in anthropology, I want to exploit the benefits of this research method, as not being too systematized and close to everyday actions, lifeworlds and practices. It allows

“thick participation” (Spittler 2001) and “thick description” (Geertz 1999) and therefore fits well for doing research at a place like WCP and a research focus like mine. I see interviews and all sorts of conversations not as a separate method to participant observation but as complementing and mutually defining each other. The same applies to field notes.

To find out about the specific features of the place, I first wanted to capture ambiences and get a feeling for the overall situation, the people, their movements and rhythms. I quickly realized that the place had been shaped by opposing forces. On the one hand it had a highly fluctuating character on the other hand it had fairly constant entities. I gradually began to introduce myself to the actors who provided for a certain permanence at the WCP: the security guards, the water helpers and the cleaners of the public toilet. They had cast an eye on me from the very beginning. „You’re not an ordinary customer. People do not really queue for such a small amount of water. Now they are getting curious. Do you see? They wanna know who you are and what you’re doing here“, Ryan, the toilet cleaner whispered to me on the very first day, since I only had a 1-liter bottle in my hand, while he pointed to the water helpers. However, very quickly I was perceived and treated as a welcomed and accepted visitor. Whereas the coming and going of thousands of water collectors per day ensured the fluctuating character. Over time, I perceived the anonymity due to the hustle at the WCP rather as an advantage which allowed me to freely observe the happenings and show up at the WCP anytime.

Depending on the ‘group’ (water helpers, water collectors, security guards or city officials) I applied slightly different approaches. However, my first and fundamental priority for an ethically desirable approach was reciprocal appreciation, respect, transparency and informed consent. For that I assured people of confidentiality and anonymity. In line with ethical principles I therefore have used pseudonyms for all research participants if not agreed otherwise.

I was probably most familiar with the role of the water collectors, simply because I could have been a member of this group. It was also their perspective that was most strongly represented in the mainstream media. Whereas with the other groups it took some time for me to become familiar with their ‘working routines’ at the WCP. While I addressed certain questions more directly and target-oriented to the water collectors and city officials (since they could have been leaving at any time), I could literally hang out with the water helpers and the security guards for a whole day, follow and join them in their activities and conduct a lot of casual and in-depth interviews. I supported Ricky and Mo in their work as a water helper from time to time. We shared the work of one of their mutual customers by three,

which meant taking the empty containers, waiting in the queue, filling the containers up, and then the most exhausting task of carrying the heavy containers back to the car. That day I got my first tip.

Picture 3: My third round of queueing as being a ‘water helper’; photo taken by Ricky 2018

Together with Yolanda, a security guard, we controlled for several hours the entrance to the water taps to check that the people wait in line do not enter with more than 25 liter water containers at a time. With the water collectors, it was probably their worries and the time of waiting, I most participated in, either in the queue, at the water faucets or in front of the car. Those waiting times were opportune moments for me to approach them, as they were often keen to have a chat, while the water helpers looked after their water containers. The participation in the people’s activities helped me to understand once again that the perception of time, space, weight, weather or boredom cannot be replaced by anything other than one’s own experience, feeling, or undergoing it, at least to some extent.

In general, I met many of my interlocutors again and again, which positively influenced the establishment of rapport. Due to the continuity, some conversations gained a certain depth and personality over time. This concerned, above all, the water helpers and the security guards who came almost daily to the WCP. Since I also went there at least five days a week for about 2-8 hours a day, I was increasingly perceived as ‘one of them’, as they told me

playfully. They seeked me out to talk to me or to show me something and involved me in their concerns, perceptions or ideas and whatever else came into their minds. After a while I also became more familiar with those city officials and customers who showed a certain regularity in their visits to the WCP.

I experienced myriad of discussions between July and October 2018, lasting between a few minutes up to several hours. The style of interviewing varied between informal interviewing, unstructured interviewing and semistructured interviewing (Bernard 2006: 210f). The first two types of interviews were the most appropriate way to begin a dialogue or of getting to know lived experiences of people at the WCP, to build initial rapport with people or for studying sensitive issues, like racial or ethnic prejudices (Bernard 2006: 213). Approximately fifty of these conversations are available in written form, either as transcripts of recorded interviews or as memory- or thought protocols (field notes) that were noted down during and after the conversation.

The diversity of people and ethnicities at the WCP demanded, also independently from me, English as lingua franca. Hence, to my benefit (while also being aware of the heavy legacy of the language policy in South Africa) I had no problems to conduct research in English. I could also follow many conversations between the people among each other at the WCP. A professional translation assistant was not necessary but depending on the situation, I asked one of the water helpers or security guards to translate roughly from isiXhosa or Afrikaans into English.

To complement my qualitative data, I did also a structured observation of frequency of visits to the WCP on three different days of the week (Monday, Thursday and on a Sunday). I counted from eight in the morning till seven in the evening how many people entered the WCP, how many liter they collected and divided them roughly into three age groups (students/young adults; adults; seniors). I counted the duration of their stay and observed their interactions among each other as well as with the water helpers and security guards. The visits of people in the hours before and after my stay were counted by the security guards in order to report it to me later on. Purpose of that counting was to get a better idea of the daily and weekly routines at this spot and to find out about patterns at the WCP. Those collected data generally confirm the statements of my interlocuters from qualitative interviews about peak periods at the WCP (before and after work, 7am-9am, 5pm-7pm, and around 12am-2pm), the average waiting time in the queue of twenty minutes, how rules are being neglected when it is not that busy and how conflicts and complaints get louder when it is busy. There were always at least two to four water helpers ordered to help. Young adults

were outnumbered by seniors and older adults (of both gender) who accounted for the majority of water collectors. On weekends I registered more people, especially families, at any time throughout the day. On an average day there were 3000 people coming to the WCP. On a weekend up to about 4000 people.

I also gained access to the results of the survey by the CoCT from 18 to 21 August 2018. The results show in first instance from which areas the water collectors came to the WCP, which was interesting, since they came from everywhere across the city.

Picture 4 and 5: Newlands Springwater Feedback Report – survey at the WCP, photos by the author: TC 2018

Newlands Springwater petition to operate 24hrs

YES	NO
1726	98

General comments

- More taps
- Assess risk and security
- Re open other springs
- Too much crime
- People collecting for commercial use should not be allowed
- Increase time and security
- More lights
- Feel intimidated by helpers
- 50 litres per person
- Need cover against rain and sun
- 5:00 – 23:00 is fine (as is)
- Control 25 litre limit when there is a queue
- More parking
- No what about local residents- fights at night and crime
- Discipline the car guards
- Be aware people with bakkie are sell water in their communities
- Too many undisciplined drug users acting as helpers, too open for vagrant accessibility.
- No order needs more security. Toilet facility (helpers) urine anywhere. Helpers need to be screened. Helpers uses all taps at once (not disciplined, rude, vulgar)
- No Enforcement of water limit between 5-7 AM (no control)
- Use spring water for washing machine, that has reduced the water account

People come from these areas

North	**South**	**Central**	**East**
Kensington	Strandfontein	Nyanga	Khayelitsha
Salt river	Newlands	Ravensmead	Mitchells plain
Sea point	Kenilworth	Rylands	Samora
Brooklyn	Claremont	Newfields	Mandalay
Pinelands	Phillip	Crawford	Somerset west
Kraaifontein	Retreat	Gugulethu	Blackheath
Mowbray	Wynberg	Kuils river	
Bokaap	Steenberg	Delft	
Maitland	Rondebosch	Lansdowne	
Observatory	Diep river	Bonteheuwel	
Langa	Grassy park	Athlone	
Table view	Southfield	Parow	
Hout bay	Capricon	Belhar	
Woodstock	Plumstead	Heideveld	

Blouberg	Muizenberg	Hanover park	
Melkbosstrand	Noordhoek	Manenberg	
	Lotus river	Gatesville	
	Tokai	Goodwood	
	Parkwood	Monte vista	
	Zeekoevlei	Ruyterwacht	
	Ottery	Bellville	
	Ocean view		
	Pelican park		
	Meadowridge		
	Wetton		
	Fish hoek		

Figure 2: Newlands Springwater Feedback Report; source: CoCT, 09/10/2018

Needless to say, beside the data collection on the ground (WCP), I kept myself informed on different channels. As my topic was evolving from day to day, it was being intensively discussed in politics and made headlines. I also followed thoroughly what had been published in newspapers, in traditional and social media like facebook (Water Shedding Western Cape, Friends of Newlands Spring) and joined a Whatsapp group (Water Press Riyaz Rawoot). Extensive literature research and secondary source material, like scientific and academic articles (on the water crisis in Cape Town as well as on theories of crisis, scarcity, informality etc.) were essential for my research. Many specialists, scientists, activists and researchers have published numerous articles about issues relating to the water crisis in Cape Town. Photographs and video footage complemented my documentation and can be accessed upon request. Furthermore, I also arranged individual appointments with many people outside of the WCP to get deeper into the matter (Miss H, Paul, Riyaz Rawoot, my housemates, participants of the poetry-festival in McGregor 24-26 August 2018 with the theme 'The Sound of Water', the Supreme High Commissioner for the Goringhaicona Khoi Khoin Traditional Indigenous Council, colleagues). Those meetings helped me to contextualize my conversations at the WCP and define the research focus.

During my research I have reflected a lot on my position on the ground as a white female researcher and on the discourse of the postcolonial turn in academia, in and of Africa and specifically in anthropology. I will keep the forthcoming reflections on positionality quite short. I see a certain overlap between my central research question on the water crisis in Cape Town and my personal situation as a researcher on the water crisis in Cape Town. It is

the issue of power relations, knowledge production and coining the epistemological status quo of something.

Especially against the background of South Africas 'Fallist' movement in 2015 (#RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall), during which the cry for decolonizing education specifically and the fight for a just, inclusive and decolonized South African society at large, became all the more present, reflections on power relations and postcolonial discourses needed to be included. Who is telling the dominant narrative? Who has the power to define the disciplinary status quo or to do research? Why is it still a Western perception of Africa that often dominates the status quo? What else needs to happen in order to incorporate more African epistemologies into the anthropological corpus or in African studies? Where do I locate myself as anthropologist and researcher within this debate?

My answer to these questions for this research was influenced by the story of the blind men and the elephant and Nyamnjoh's considerations of this metaphor (Nyamnjoh 2012).[13] The focus in this story is on ways of seeing and knowing, the question of what constitutes reality and privileges of belonging. Relating thereto, I approached ethnography as a dialogue with the ones on the ground and not as a monologue. Knowledge production should be a co-production and team-work in anthropology and so should be the production of the crisis narrative in Cape Town.

4.2 Particularity of the field of research and access to the topic

Since both the research area and the topic strongly influenced the choice of methods, I will now outline the special features of the Water Collection Point. The WCP seemed to me to be very suitable and significant for my field research in many respects:

1) The WCP opened on 9 May 2018, which means that I was able to follow the dynamics and the emergence of this place from the beginning.
2) Water-space: The WCP came into being because of water and its availability or absence in the urban area. The circumstances in Cape Town (water shortage, crisis) culminated, among other things, in the existence of the WCP.
3) Public space: A diverse people with different negotiations and practices in the context of the water crisis encountered and interacted with each other.

[13] Read the story here: https://www.langaa-rpcig.net/IMG/pdf/551-576-1-PB.pdf (Nyamnjoh 2012).

4) Improvised and innovative space: The WCP was a highly dynamic space which showed habitus, everyday actions, ritual, political, religious, economic, social and cultural techniques and improvised practices. It was not a fully thought-out and carefully planned location but created out of necessity. It offered a great scope for action and need for improvisation or ad-hoc solutions.
5) Contested location: The opening of the WCP coincided with the closure of the historical water spring site – a topical and controversial issue in Newlands and beyond which incited discussions about privatisation of water, accessibility to water and public space, formality and informality. Whose interests does the city council represent? Long-lasting structures of inequality and power appeared in the dynamics at the WCP.

What makes the WCP relevant above all, are the dichotomies which became apparent in the form of informality vs. policies, temporality and transience vs. permanence, improvisation vs. habitus and exclusion vs. solidarity. It is these dynamics and the way in which the various actors shaped this space, which allow for multi-dimensional reflections on the water crisis in Cape Town. Accordingly, such a mixture of overlapping social and material spaces and the highly fluctuating character of the site had to be reflected by the choice of methods as well. In-depth research on situated practices through attentive observation, participation and conversations was chosen to best capture these characteristics.

My approximation to the WCP had been gradual. One afternoon Steven Robins dropped me off at Main Road. He is a cultural anthropologist at Stellenbosch University, lives in Newlands and used to go often to the old historical spring in Kildare Road in Newlands (see chapter 5.1), on whose closure he was also writing a paper at that time. The findings of his 'Case study of the politics of water and its infrastructures' (2019) in the context of Day Zero, concerned exactly the same field of interest as the one I came to Cape Town with, only that I wanted to challenge the crisis narrative itself and the basis of what was mostly taken as a starting point: What does it mean to speak of a water crisis in Cape Town? What questions and lifeworld does the crisis narrative conceal and which does it promote? The only thing missing was the right location for my research. I did not join a research group or any organisation dealing with this issue, but rather started my own research from scratch.

There were of course NGOs and active citizens who were doing community-based work and were engaging with those here described neglected lived realities of the dominant water narrative in Cape Town. Contacting some of them (Social Justice Coalition, Water Crisis

Coalition, Reclaim Camissa, GroundUp) proved to be difficult, though. In a public meeting in the Woodstock City Hall on 07/18/18 Mr. R. from Ndifuna Ukwazi[14] told me:

> We were only peripherally involved in some of the organization around the water crisis. One of the reason was that a lot of activism was not very programmatic or practical. It seemed to be focused on conspiracy theories, lefty antagonism to the privatisation of water, and opposition to water meters. Few were dealing with the effetcs Day Zero would have on working families and preparing for it, or thinking about longer term sustainable development models. It felt like a crisis that people who had a gripe already, jumped onto as a vehicle.

Water 4 Cape Town, a non-profit charity, was one example of many mushrooming organizations launched in 2018, which shortly after shut down work again. Chairperson Miss H. told me in an interview that the mission was to tackle training in the Business, Industry, Tourism & Education sectors on the Western Cape water crisis to prevent Day Zero and assist with implementing water augmentation in schools for instance.

My non-institutional approach allowed significant freedom and flexibility but, in turn, hampered a quick entry into the field as it was not preshaped. I started visiting the Water Collection Point in Newlands almost every day. The first three to four weeks at the WCP were primarily explorative in my approach, the overall research was inductive. Theoretical assumptions were not set out in advance, but developed dynamically in the course of the research. The gain in knowledge of such an open and inductive methodological approach of participant observation consists in the development and application of theories based on lived experiences (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002; Bernard 2006).

What made access easier for me was the ubiquity of my general research topic and my own experience of being affected by Level 6B water restrictions. For my stay in Cape Town, I moved into a room in a two-storey house with a small garden, close to Main Road in the now gentrified Woodstock. I shared the house with four young South Africans who shared a conscious living. Level 6B water restrictions made us to save and re-use water whenever possible. In occasional meetings we, as a household, discussed possible water saving strategies. Primarily, this involved to keep the shower as short as possible, catching shower water in a bucket, reuse rinse water and occasionally washing machine water, collect rain water to use it for flushing the toilet or for the plants. The toilet was only operated according to the motto “When it’s yellow let it mellow, when it’s brown, flush it down” and homemade water dosers made out of plastic bottles and straws replaced the usual tap at the sink. Due to high water bills the landlord also looked after leaks in the water pipe that quite likely had

[14] Ndifuna Ukwazi is a non-profit organzisation, based in Cape Town, that campaigns for equality and justice in poor and working class communities (Ndifuna Ukzwazi 2015).

been leaking for years. Altogether familiar practices around water took some more time, but, personally, it did not reduce my quality of life.

Everyone was in one way or another in touch with the water crisis in Cape Town or had heard about Day Zero. Discussions on the water situation in Cape Town became an omnipresent topic. Therefore I was also confronted with the issue beyond the WCP. Every day, in all possible moments, I had the opportunity to be involved in discussions about dam levels, water quality, cleaning substitutes, simply about water itself or related issues of social injustice and a brighter future. It was astonishing how well many Capetonians at this point in time had aquired knowledge about chemical and technical information, about water (infrastructure), about numbers and measurements of their own water consumption or the upcoming weather forecasts.

4.3 Welcome to the Water Collection Point in Newlands

Based on the happenings at the Water Collection Point in winter 2018, I want to address the overarching research issue of how the water crisis lays bare and challenges well-established notions of inequality and categories of difference in Cape Town. The way people coped and their practices that came to light in the context of uncertainty and unpredictability reveal what the dominant crisis narrative enables as well as undermines. In four separate chapters I will shine a light on people's lifeworld and their practices. The actors are divided into four groups based on their incentive to seek out this place: the water collectors, the water helpers, the security guards, and officials of the City of Cape Town. Their presence and practices ensured a dynamic at the WCP that exposes the dominant narrative of the water crisis in Cape Town to be a single-sided story.

The multi-perspective approach calls into question the CoCT's ways of categorizing and classifying *Capetonians* and challenges the status-quo of crisis production which perpetuates deep-rooted notions of difference and inequality within the urban society of Cape Town and South Africa. Dealing with changing circumstances and uncertainty uncovers the importance of improvisation and flexibility in people's practices. Rearrangements and adjustments of customs and habits are required when confronting conditions that previously did not exist for oneself. The water helpers and the security guards will be playing a key role in illustrating how situations that others call a crisis have become the background to their everyday life. Those circumstances provided them with a remarkable ability and a broad set of negotiations and strategies to cope with volatility and uncertainty. In contrast, the way the water collectors

and the CoCT officials acted, represents basic patterns, based on a biased definition, according to which crisis is a sudden rupture in the normal state of being. Taken together, the four different perspectives illustrate how a huge part of Cape Town's society is still not sufficiently taken into consideration when the CoCT speaks of *Capetonians*. Particularly against the backdrop of existing inequality in access to water, the dominant water crisis narrative needs broadening to do justice to all urban dwellers.

Chapter 5: Improvising multiple (s)paces in a single place

Each of the next four chapters, which together form the centerpiece of the thesis, starts off with a description of the location from the perspective of the particular group. Those parts are framed by asterisks. The significance and utilization of this locality is very different among the people who show up at the WCP. This again relates to questions of accessibility to basic services, above all water in this case and societal participation and inclusivity. This insight led me to a grouping of people based on their motives for visiting the WCP. Of course, the individual groups did not form homogenous units but were highly heterogeneous. The water collectors came due to the free spring water, whereas, what exactly they used it for and how strongly the water crisis affects them could vary greatly depending on individual circumstances.

The water helpers came to earn money, as they were not affected by the water shortage in the sense of having less immediate access to water. Some of them were homeless and living on the street, others rented a small bedroom, most of them lived within the Cape Flats area.[15]

The job was also the reason why the security guards' came to the WCP. Yet, their official employee status distinguished them from the water helpers. The officials of the City of Cape Town were similarly affected by the water crisis as the customers, but did mainly seek out this spot because of their work, which then focused on informing about the water restrictions, future scenarios or managing the WCP.

[15] The Cape Flats is the name for the Coloured and African parts of the urban periphery of Cape Town that were created through segregation and apartheid urban planning and legislation (Robins 2019). Most of the city's townships and squatter camps are situated on the Cape Flats.

5.1 Water Collectors

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"It's a spring point. It should be free 24 hours a day for the public",

a water collector told me with a face marked by worry.

> I don't know why the council don't put a bit more infrastructure for taps. Maybe in more public spaces. The water should be distributed a bit more, I think. To more areas. This spring here is only accessible by those who get here with a vehicle and who can fill up themselves. I come here often, but the spring in Kildare Raod was much better (field notes, 09/21/18).

From 9 May 2018 the CoCT welcomed its citizens to this new spring water collection site. The huge banner attached to the fence, one from the outside and one inside, was supposed to invite people to the site, but it rather scared them off. It listed five rules that applied to the facility. 1) Open 7 days a week from 05:00-23:00 (hours subject to review); 2) 16 taps available, via a queueing system; 3) A maximum of 25l per person may be collected at a time, for domestic use only. Not for commercial use; 4) Vehicles may park for a maximum of 15 minutes. Parking also available at the Newlands Swimming Pool parking very close by. And what confused people most, was point number 5) THIS IS NOT TREATED WATER. USE AT YOUR OWN RISK in red capital letters (see picture 6).

Intended to solve disputes and facilitate a smoother access to the water faucets, those sentences became precisely the biggest issue and eventually the reason to close down the spring in Kildare Road. Riyaz explained:

> The words could just be different like: 'This water is from a natural source and no chemicals are added'. The sign is there to say that council is not taking any responsibility for anything that may happen to the consumer because the water is not treated. But people were seriously confused as this description was never applied to this very same spring water which they have been drinking for years (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18).

The atmosphere at the WCP was busy, certainly different to the old historical spring site, but still people visited this place continuously and the crux of the matter did not change significantly: parking quickly as close to the water taps as possible, holding empty water containers in one's hand, queuing, waiting, queuing, refilling, stowing the precious good in the car, from time to time a quick chat and then finally driving off. It was a place of waiting, to leave it again as soon as possible, already anticipating the next time you would be coming back. Most people came for the water, then for the money, for themselves, for the family, for health, for the luxury of a full bathtub, out of chance, for the neighbors, for their pets, for their garden, for generations, but rarely just for fun.

There were two official entrances and exits to the site. One of them was mainly used by people in cars, as it led directly to the parking area. Depending on the time of day it could guarantee a suitable spot under the cork trees. The other entry led visitors from the Main Road through a narrow passage formed by the steel fence, which was reminiscent of a prison. This passage led to the area where the wanting citizens could supply themselves after long queueing with the spring water. Those 16 taps were in permanent operation and the cold and fresh water that gushed out of the taps attracted on average 3000 people over the day. The council employed security guards to surveille the place and check the size of the water containers. Many water collectors accepted the help from the *water boys* to carry the containers and to have an additional person who speeded up the whole process for oneself.

At peak times the queue of people spread from the tap installation through the prison-like pathway, out to the sidewalk on the Main Road (see picture 7).

At those times there was not just scramble at the taps, but the parking lot burst at the seams. Without a car it was hard to transport the heavy freight back home. About 45-50 cars could park under the trees and they waited for an average of 30 minutes for their drivers to get out of the fenced area with sometimes hundreds of kilos of water more in the trunk. The large plane trees and cork trees made the WCP to appear green and gave a hint of both, the prosperity of the middle-class Newlands suburb and the frequency of rainfall at this side at the foot of Table Mountain (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18).

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Picture 6: Welcome to the Water Collection Site in Newlands; photo by the author: TC 2018

Picture 7: Peak time at the WCP at 1.35am; photo by the author: TC 2018

The initial impression of the rigidity of the Water Collection Point, a place that seemed to be entirely controlled by the city council, should be seen against the backdrop of the incidents around Kildare Road. It was impossible to evade stories about the closure of the old spring if one followed conversation at the WCP as it caused a lot of discontent. Riyaz Rawoot, a resident of the Newlands suburb who had put all his effort to prevent the closing of Kildare Road spring in May 2018 told me:

> The spring at Kildare Road used to be vibrant. People were talking to each other and making friendship. Older people used to come out just to see what's happening and telling stories about how this place used to be in earlier days. They came to fetch water because they loved this spot. They loved the water (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18).[16]

Many Muslim and Coloured families, who used to live in Newlands Village prior to their forced removals under the Group Areas Act in the 1960s used to go to Kildare Road spring. Collecting water at this spring was therefore experienced as a "[…] remembrance practice that connected people to a social world that had existed there prior to the forced removals" (Robins 2019: 20). Back then, the water of this spring was said to be sacred because a saint

[16] Steven Robins worked in more detail about Riyaz Rawoot and his efforts to put on an improvised PVC pipe at Kildare Road spring. Rawoot's effort had contributed towards reanimating historically embedded water collection and memory practices, as well as creating a convivial, diverse social space in a time of the water crisis. Yet, activism and conviviality were not enough to prevent the closing down of Kildare Road spring (Robins 2019).

had once prayed there and ever since people sought out this spring due to its fresh taste and the healing effect (Robins 2019; Paul, field notes, 31/07/2018).[17]

With Day Zero approaching and people suffering the massive water tariff hikes with the water restrictions from 2017, the way to a spring outlet became indispensable for some Capetonians. There are over 70 springs around Cape Town, yet the CoCT has refused to open these to the public and the water of those few that are accessible, is mostly not drinkable. On the contrary, from the beginning of 2018, the Newlands spring site experienced greater rush than ever before.

Located at the end of a cul-de-sac, the spring site became quickly overloaded, and complaints from Newlands residents who felt disturbed by noise, traffic and foreign people became explicit. Groups of activists and residents have formed to improve the situation, first and foremost Riyaz Rawoot (Robins 2019: 2). But the commitment to retaining the long historical legacy of Kildare Road spring water as a public good was not appreciated by many of those residents. On 7 May the CoCT put the spring under concrete while putting up signs telling people that they could go from now on to the Water Collection Site at Main Road (Robins and Muller 2018, Robins 2019). I met with Riyaz Rawoot twice, and he made unmistakably clear to me that he saw the closure of the old historical spring as a major mistake by the city council and yet another expression of racial exclusion and 'white privilege' (Robins 2019: 21; Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18). Riyaz told me that

> […] community is better in self-organizing than having those enforced rules like here at the new site. Crowds need a bit of guidance to make things working smoother. But those imposed rules are rather harassing them. For instance, up there we had 26 outlets. That means 26 people were standing next to each other plus their containers. It became a little bit chaotic and to get past that I put on a rope. Just a rope. To make it into queues. And that solved all the problems besides the rude persons every now and then, who attack everything. A rope that makes queues. But I did it and it was meant in a good way, so it was positively perceived. But what the council is doing, more or less with the same purpose, namely, to make order, is not what people want. They don't want just to follow, because they feel ignored and disregarded (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18).

[17] The historical significance of the spring water in Cape Town and specifically in Newlands, goes even further back to its Khoi use during the pre-colonial period, when Cape Town was also known as 'Camissa' – Khoi word for 'place of sweet water'. During the early 19th century, the Newlands springs came to be associated with mills for the grinding of corn and, by the mid-19th century, they were being used by a number of breweries that had been established in Newlands, including the South African Breweries (SAB) (Robins 2019).

However, whether they wanted to keep the spring or not, most of those who used to go to Kildare Rd. or the public spring water collection point at SAB's Newlands Brewery, which got also shut down, were now to be found at the new water collection point on Main Road.

I met a magician, who used to earn her money in shows with her singing dog, but since the dog died and no more shows took place, she came to the WCP to lower the water bills. I met a woman who renounced the social norms and society in South Africa and was living in the woods in the outskirts of Cape Town. She stranded at the WCP with her two dogs in a damaged car and told me a lot about water consciousness based on theories by Masaru Emoto.

Another man I talked to came to the WCP because the spring water was the best for his huge aquariums. The spring water for the freshwater fish and seawater for the salt water fish. I talked to two young guys who came to collect water for their plants:

> I love this water. And especially my plants love it. I'm here because I'm growing organic marihuana. Perfect pH level. Not other water tastes like this water. It has got a very special taste. I love it. It's sweet and gold. Like liquid gold. I think it was tested as the fourth best water in the world or something. The Brewery use it too. It's very good water (water collector, field notes, 09/21/18).

However, the majority of the water collectors made clear statements about the water crisis as a major change in their life that required them to rethink usual habits and routines. The level of stress and the seriousness of the situation varied among the group of water collectors, but for many of them things were not functioning anymore as they were used to. Coming to the WCP was a way to confront the water crisis and secure having *enough* water despite the restrictions and to save money. At that point of my research and of the water crisis, Day Zero was already postponed, but water restrictions were still ongoing, requiring people to not use more than 50 liters per day. Many water collectors had already adapted to the new situation and found their ways of how to use less water in their everyday life. However, 50 liters of water per day per person was a significant challenge for those Capetonians, who were used to consuming water regardless of the amount. As a woman told me while waiting for her family to fill up the water cans:

> Besides drinking and cooking, 50 liters is just enough for one flush of the toilet and a very short shower a day. The washing machine is just used one load a week otherwise we're quickly over the 50 liters per day. It is good that having a dirty car is a sign for solidarity in these times (field notes, 08/21/18).

The majority of the water collectors used the spring water for the washing machine or flushing the toilet. By that they could use less municipal water and therefore save high expenses for water bills. The lady further elaborated on the topic:

> We would still come to the spring to fetch water, even if the restrictions are gone. For saving purposes, mainly to prevent giving out extra money. Because now you see, actually our money has just been gone into electricity and water bills (field notes, 08/21/18).

Collecting water at the WCP was soothing this new kind of uncertainty. Similarly, it also expressed the panic that many of the water collectors were seized by, as an outraged young guy stated:

> It was absolutely a crisis. We luckily are over the worst. But if your running water gets cut from your house, you're fucked. You can't flush your toilet anymore. This was very intense. We got cut off for three days and after that we realized, oh fuck, how bad it actually is. If you're trying for three days without running water you realize the trouble that you be in (water collector, field notes, 09/21/18).

Those people, who were living barely above the poverty line, or residents who had small water-dependent businesses, were indeed facing existential worries since already a slightly higher water bill would mean financial ruin.

Two boys came to the WCP every day to collect several hundred of liters of water to be able to continue baking the dough in their well-attended bakery. The floors of their house, above the bakery, were sublet to students. "We also need water for our tank at the roof top. We fill it with spring water, so that we still can guarantee a shower for our guests", told me one of the shy guys who came from Durban to Cape Town during the water shortage, in order to help his uncle in the family business. He ended up spending his vacation daily at the WCP carrying water buckets. The need to rethink and to improvise in order to keep up the daily business and still be able to ensure the usual lifestyle as much as possible, kept most people at the WCP on the move. However, finding and trying out a new daily routine that allowed spare time to go collect water at the WCP posed a challenge to many water collectors as well as getting accustomed to a more conscious use of the resource water.

Sacrificing familiar routines that may have never been questioned ever before, had brought some people out of their comfort zone. Complaints about the high time required for trying out new practices or new ways of saving water made their rounds. The time that was wasted was then somehow spontaneously made up for. Some arrived later at home after work, had an hour less sleep in the morning or used their lunch break for coming to the WCP. People proudly reported about their strategies, about trying out and always remaining flexible for readjustments. By and by some people figured out what time is best for them to go fetch water at WCP, they became better in saving and reusing water and got used to use water

consciously so that they had to come less frequently to the WCP. Beyond that, a family of five explained to me:

> Coming here with the car also means paying for petrol. We come here every second day. You have to count all these factors, you know. What costs you gonna pay for the month, buying food and groceries and all that. The free water needs therefore to be settled with the fuel costs and the money for the water boys. For us, the feeling to save is in the end equal to zero or you spend even more money (field notes, 08/29/18).

All types of pushcarts or handbarrows were constructed in order to carry more easily several 25-liter containers at once.

Picture 8: Example of a self-made pushcart; photo by the author: TC 2018

Alternatively, people who had the opportunity (such as the people in the shared flat, I was staying at), put 25 liter buckets out in the garden or terrace for rainwater harvesting to reuse it for flushing the toilets.

The time and frequency of people's arrival at the WCP differed greatly. Some came every day, others just once a month, and everything inbetween – there were all sorts of rhythms. Cyclists came by on their mountain bikes and collected only five liters of water. School buses opened their doors at the WCP to let their students out to get their drinking water bottles filled. Big cars and spacious vans halted for at least an hour to drive off with

sometimes over 600 liters of water in their car trunk. Busy people just unloaded their empty containers, hired a water helper, drove off to make use of the time elsewhere and came back an hour later to load up the filled containers. The average visitor visited the place twice a week and collected about 25-50 liters for each member of the household. A lot of families combined their Sunday trips with a visit at the WCP. It was not uncommen that people on weekends then came from quite far away, like Muizenberg or Bellville (20-30 km).

Many of those who previously used to go to the old spring site, precisely because of its good taste, continued to drink the water at WCP. Some, however, were unsettled by the CoCT's announcement and decided not to drink it anymore. The redirection of the water, the regulation by taps, the changing of naturalness made many visitors not recognizing the past taste of the water anymore. The descriptions about the water at the WCP were inspiringly diverse. As a water collector told me, that "[…] the taste of the spring water changes every time. When it's raining you can taste and smell the soil from the water. When it's dry like now, then you obviously taste the pipeline" (field notes, 09/13/18). Some water collectors said that the water was not the same anymore. At the Kildare Rd. spring the water came straight from the mountain. "If we can trust the City of Cape Town then this same water is just redirected via pipes from the Newland spring to the parking lot", speculated Riyaz Rawoot (field notes, 08/20/18). But many visitors reacted very sceptically. "The spring water here is not the same taste like the water from the other spring. This water here makes you even more thirsty. It dries up your mouth. Before it was fresh and cold" (water collector, field notes, 08/01/18). For others it still had the same healing effect. Gabriel told me while we were driving along the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden where he had been working for over 30 years:

> The water that is in the tap, the council water, has a lot of chemicals in it. But the spring water here has nothing in it. The spring water is running 24 hours. It is clean water. They don't add chemicals because it runs underground. That's why I say it is healing water. It's coming from the mountains. Somewhere from the mountains. Drinking this spring water, yoh! It makes you feel good. I never drink tap water. Whereever I am I try to keep some spring water. I've been drinking this water for almost 70 years now (field notes, 09/02/18).

The Kirstenbosch garden, he told me, is supplied by its own dam and not by the CoCT, therefore he and his work did not suffer that much from the water crisis. But privately

> […] the crisis hit me. I come here twice a week and collect about 200 liters for the washing machine, for drinking and for my plants. But now I concentrate more on waterwise plants. On succulents. Due to the crisis. Also in Kirstenbosch, they work now more and more with waterwise plants (Gabriel, field notes, 09/02/18).

These divergent assumptions about the spring water's quality indicated a more fundamental problem. A lot of people who visited the WCP felt helpless and not well informed about what was going to happen and were looking for advice or at least some information on what the CoCT was planning to do in reaction to the drought. They were frustrated, lacking proper information and felt left out. Trustworthy sources with reliable information were not easy to access for everybody and the lack of trust in the city council or in the government complicated the cooperation. Consequently, water became an increasingly important issue. Citizens started to share concerns, exchanged tips and information among each other about how to save best, on neighborhood level and also at the WCP. Conversations revolved around all kinds of questions: Where to file a complaint? Why is the due amount of the last water bill unreasonably high? Whom to reach out to get the leaks fixed? How to clean borehole water? How to get the raw smell off the wellpoint water? What size of a pipeline provides what kind of water pressure? Communication, exchange, mutual support and assistance took shape over time. People of very different backgrounds mingled at the WCP, waited in the same queue chatting to each other, recognizing each other the next day and inquired for their well-being the week after. The WCP emerged as a suitable meeting point where one could combine fetching water and meeting up. People organized car sharing and gave friends or neighbors a lift. Each day, after work around 5pm, from Monday to Saturday, Dominic waited for his colleague to take him to Bellville. Another water collector told me that "[…] this water is actually for my neighbor. I started using this water in the kitchen for washing dishes. But now I give the water to this lady next door. I bring her water and she washes my cloth. That is our deal" (field notes, 09/14/18). Others like Riyaz Rawoot who had lost something very important with the closing of Kildare Rd., were rather sceptical and were missing the old site because "here it is like lining up in a bank queue. People also meet there but you wouldn't call it socializing. And that's the feeling I have here. Before it was vibrant, here it's like in a prison" (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18). Others were happy to have off-road parking and a more regulated environment. Paul, whom I met the very first day at the WCP while queueing, perceived it in a similar way like Rawoot:

> Diverse people come here to this place and are talking to each other. But it's just for a moment and the talk is also segregated. Have you noticed that? There are clusters. When it comes to a need, people don't trust each other. They are just here to benefit of this place for themselves. If you think there is trust, then it's just trust out of need. It's kind of social chaos (Interview 44, 08/28/18).

Mutual approximation and relationships developed between water collectors and water helpers over time. Especially for elderly who were not able to carry jerry cans (25 liter water containers) the water helpers were a great assistance. Through personal agreements with

water helpers, the water collectors knew who was going to help them with queuing, filling up and carrying their containers, without feeling overrun by five other water helpers at the same time. There were several designations for the guys who help at the WCP to carry the water containers. Some called them trolley boys, water boys, water helpers, water porters, others water carriers or Newlands assistants. "When I see a water boy with a cap, I go straight there and want to get their help, because I know I can trust them", a water collector told me referring to Ricky and Mo (field notes, 08/22/18). Not everyone was happy about the presence of the water helpers at WCP. Some regarded them as a threat as they "[…] carry knifes and are drunk and take drugs all the time" (field notes, 08/20/18). It was not unusual to hear people perceiving their own plight as the guilt of others. Especially people in townships were accused to be using water wastefully and blamed for not knowing how to use water correctly, despite the fact that informal settlements in Cape Town only use about 4% of the city's water. Some of the water collectors came with their own helpers who were usually staff of their company or domestic helpers, for whom fetching water was yet another task.

The most dissatisfaction could be recorded towards the city council and their political machinations in response to the water shortage. Paul was a candidate for easily getting upset about the political situation:

> It's a manmade crisis, not environmental or climate crisis. People make money during crises. With all these issues, even if people suffer, but they make money out of it. This spot is a luxury. I say luxury because the people who come here are not really desperate, they actually don't really lack this much. On the surface it's working but underneath its politics involved and bribery involved. It's certainly really politically motivated and it's working somehow but definitely not benefitting the poor (Paul, Interview 44, 08/28/18).

Another water collector with whom I entered a brief conversation just wanted to let me know that

> […] it's all about the haves and the have-nots. The haves have the ability to come here and fetch water but the have-nots live outside. They don't have the ability to come and to fetch water. So the cycle of inequality is kept alive. The access to water and sanitation is largely compromised in these areas with less financial basis. Even here..all have a car. But the majority of Cape Town does not. There exists a large inequality (field notes, 09/12/18).

In the background we heard a man shouting and answering to himself: "What is the root of all evil? – Money is the root of all evil". He continued:

> The city's poor, who are wholly dependent on the municipal supply and have limited space to store water, have been the hardest hit. The City of Cape Town acts contrary to the need of the population. They must come check and see

> what's happening on the ground. But they are rather looking into the sky and making their decisions there (field notes, 09/12/18).

Riyaz Rawoot reported the same: "You can't have the rules on paper without knowing how people are and about the dynamics, in order to make the rules function on the ground" (Rawoot, Interview 43, 09/28/18).

Yet, those city officials played a dual societal role. On one side they were perceived as being part of the guilty group who did not react properly or way too late and did not care for society or even are culpable for leading the city into a misery. On the other side they were also perceived as knowledgeable and a possible source of information on the current situation. Therefore many water collectors took the opportunity to reach out to city officials who visited regularly the WCP and who were usually not easy accessible, including for myself.

Many of the new practices and behavioral strategies were on the one hand aimed to save water but on the other hand also to become more independent from the municipal water grid. Some were more driven by the pressure of the high water prices others more by the realization that their own being is trapped in the clutches of the political system through patronage-based structures. This was also a question of wealth. The trend of going 'off-the-water-grid' or at least to become less dependent on the public water grid was frequently voiced by many middle- or upper-class families at the WCP. One water collector, Mr. Petersen, told me that during times of such a severe drought, there are very diverse ways that people manage their situations. Augmenting the private water supply through boreholes, water tanks, rainwater harvesting, wells and reusing grey water is one way to become more independent from the public water grid. He told me that "[…] a lot of money is needed to go off the grid. It is very expensive to install the entire new pipe system" (field notes, 08/16/18). He also pointed out that

> […] to renounce the one area of infrastructure, in this case the water system, does not mean being entirely independent from municipal infrastructures. You are still part of another infrastructure, the banking system for instance. The reasons for going off grid are different. Some do it to be water conscious, some think mainly about money, others are motivated by environmental awareness (ibid.)

In his household they do not want to go entirely off grid but their construction is based on a wish to be able to use as little grid-supplied water as possible in an extremely critical drought situation. Plumbers and technicians had already started setting up all the measures to construct the rainwater and grey water system prior to the drought. The implementation of the construction went step by step. I accompanied Mr. Petersen to his house to get an impression of the water system. That day rain poured down heavily as if I was supposed to

be shown how the whole system works when it is in operation. Mr. and Mrs. Petersen had a 750 liter JoJo Tank and two 2500 liter JoJo Tanks for storing rain water, which were located in the garden in front of the house. One tank was connected to the roof gutter, through which the water flowed into the tank. Through the effect of gravity the one tank filled the other tank. When both tanks were full the excess rain water flowed freely without any further pipes into the garden to water the plants. The water from the tanks was redirected through a large pipe structure into two smaller tanks at the back of the house, which were connected to the toilet and the bathroom. Again, the water coming through the upper tank pushed the water into the lower tank which again was connected to the toilet flush. The same system also worked for the kitchen and bathroom sinks. Mr. Petersen stated that this is a "sophisticated and complex system". They turned off the main water pipeline but it can be turned on again any time. They mounted a lock so that the rain water does not flow back into the municipal pipeline and make it dirty. The Petersen family also had an old wellpoint in the back of the garden, like many families in their neighborhood. But as the water was contaminated, brownish and ferrous, it could only be used for the toilet. Even trees and flowers were dying from this water, just the lawn got along with it. Despite their alternative water system they were still collecting spring water. As it was mainly for drinking purposes, they did not collect much, only about a five liter container. Mr. Petersen was not necessarily sure whether the spring water is healthier or not, but it tastes much better, he said. The way to the gym led past the WCP in Newlands. If there was no queue, he stopped to fill up the water container. During the height of the crisis, beginning of 2018, the atmosphere in the city was different. Back then, many people panicked. Water was sold in the shops. Everyone rushed to the shops and wanted to buy tons of water to store it at home and have it for emergency in case the taps run dry. Eventually, the shops only allowed to get a specific portion of water per person, 25 or 30 liters. Mr. Petersen himself was not panicking that much, yet they also bought, collected and stored water and were not completely unaffected by the alarmism. Their garage was full of water containers. In the end they shared it with friends and brought it to Philippi, where their housemaid lived because it is better not to store spring water for too long. Mr. Petersen told me that the whole crisis and the Day Zero scenario, however, did not drive him into a serious state of panic. He believed that for economic reasons alone, there would always be water in the shops. Worst case could be that they just had to bring it all in from other places in South Africa. Cape Town had already received water donations from Johannesburg. They came with trucks from Johannesburg to bring water. The city would never run out of water completely, he said (field notes, 08/16/18).

5.2 Water Helpers

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"I am a water boy. Does anybody need help? Hey Lady, do you need help?"

The shouting across the WCP interrupted Ricky's and my conversation. He turned back to me and continued:

> […] there is the reception. If a car drives by, we must check if we know them. Then the right person follows this car. Over there (he pointed to the wooden hut, where the security guards bustled) is the police station. They like the corruption. And the spot here between the trees, behind the reception up to the fence, that is for the service. Here we wait on our customers. Ah, and there (he hinted at the water taps) is the checkpoint. If you cross the border you can fill up your water containers with water. But they are just watching and let me always pass. The rest is parking lot. Before, all was nice grass. Now stones. Just white people used to come here before as it was a parking lot for people who went to a rugby match, for the swimming pool, for the brewery or for the restaurant. Now it's more mixed (field notes, 09/11/18; 09/27/18).

Ricky's colleague Bongani refuted that still,

> […] this is a white place here. Look at this house on the other side of the stream, only whites live there. If something does not work in their home, if there is a leakage for example, they just make a call and a plumber comes right off to help. Those who come visit us in the townships instead is the law enforcement and the many leaking infrastructures we have, simply continue to be ignored. And also look here are one, two, three…ten, eleven, oak trees just in a row at this small place. They, the minority – I don't want to say whites – are selfish people, they don't share, they want everything for themselves. The difference between the township where I live and the affluent suburbs is that they have trees. We don't have trees, that's why I dig up small baby trees here and play the squirrel back in my township (field notes, 08/20/18).

Ricky continued:

> People come here to get water. They are crazy about water. We know many of them already. We know who is coming when and for how long they're staying and how many liters they want to get and how many water helpers they need and how much money they give. We come here to work. They come for the water. It is a good spot to hang out and to earn some cash at least something to get through the day. There is green for some to sleep at night and there is the river to have a wash (field notes, 09/14/18).

***

Ricky and Bongani were only two of some fifteen men and women who stayed at the WCP for a long and physically demanding day.[18] They started early in the morning, when the gates

[18] When I speak of the water helpers in the following, this includes a loose, fluctuating composition of people in number and gender. The core group consisted of around 10 men between 17-45 years old. Occasionally 3-4 women also worked at the WCP to help out their partners for a few hours.

opened from 5 am to ring in a new working day. At that time many of them had already a one-hour bus ride from the Cape Flats to the Newlands suburb near the city center. Others did not have such a long way, as their sleeping place was the green verge next to the WCP along the Main Road. As 'water helpers', they offered their physical strength and endurance to relieve those who had become their *customers*. Often the water helpers undertook the whole process of waiting with the empty water containers in the queue, then filling them up at the water faucets, carrying the full containers back to the car only to start all over again. On an eight to ten hours shift the number of carried water canisters could easily mount up to about 600 liters in total. Ricky told me:

> Water is heavy. 25 liters equal 25 kilograms. Simple. Imagine you do this every day. You develop muscles better than going to the gym. Working here makes me stronger. I'm like the army. In the end of the day I'm tired. I feel my arms. I feel muscles. I feel the way I breathe (field notes 08/30/18).

In exchange for their service they hoped to get a good tip, as their newly created job as a water helper was their main if not only income. The water helpers *invented* this job due to conditions of water shortage and drought in Cape Town. More and more people joined this activity for whom the water crisis could be understood as an opportunity rather than an aggravation. For some of the water helpers the last dry years even had a positive impact on their neighborhood as their shacks did not get flooded as badly as previously. As much as they were threatened by flooding, they also had to make sure to get access to water.

On the 22nd and 23rd of August 2018, fifteen people got their ID's through which the CoCT formally declared each single person as an "informal water helper". A code of conduct agreement had to be signed beforehand (see Picture 9), they had to hand in a photograph and a copy of their passport.

None of the women was officially registered as a water helper by the CoCT. One lady wanted to earn some extra money at WCP to be able to finance a pretty dress for her daughter for the first day of school. Another lady told me that they were not taken seriously by the water collectors who said: "You're so small, you can't carry this. I'd prefer to have a man. They think it should not be a women's job, as if we were too weak to help out with the water buckets. But I want to do something else anyway. The money you get at the end of the day is too unsteady" (field notes, 08/28/18).

Picture 9: Code of conduct agreement for informal helpers at the WCP; photo by the author: TC 2018

Code of Conduct Agreement
For informal helpers at the spring water collection point in Newlands, Cape Town.
…*NAME*..fully understand that the following code of conduct rules apply at this site owned by the City of Cape Town, and I accept them and commit to complying with them.
I agree to:

- No fighting with anyone
- No alcohol or drugs, or being inebriated
- No weapons of any kind
- Wear reflector vest and identity tag at all times
- Keep the area clean at all times
- Be polite and respectful to everyone
- Uphold the allocation of 25 litres of water per person, per time

I accept the consequences that if I do not follow these rules then I will not be allowed to help on this site any longer. I also fully understand and accept that this is not a job/employment with the City of Cape Town or any of its contractors or partner organisations and it will not lead to permanent employment.

Signed: ……..
Date:…… Place:……
ID number:……..

Figure 3: Code of conduct agreement for informal helpers at the WCP; 08/23/2018

This in turn promised them an orange safety vest, a name tag with a passport photo and the 'formal' permission to work 'informally' at the WCP. Thereby everybody was identifiable and those who did not have an ID were officially not allowed to work there. In order to regulate the happenings even stricter the CoCT introduced a shift-system by which they further sought to contain and reduce informal, unmanageable actions. It was envisaged that six guys were assigned for an early shift from 5am to 3pm and the rest of the group from 3pm to latest 11pm. But what works on paper does not necessarily work in practice. Even though law enforcement or the facility's responsible person made its rounds at the WCP to chase away non-registered water helpers, the rules and regulations were not entirely taken seriously. The water helpers still established their own 'work environment', building as much as their individual discretion allowed on the City's policies, uniforms, schedules, and expanded it with their own rules. "The police or the city officials always say 'you must, must, must. No! You can!" (Ricky, field notes, 08/28/2018). Emily, one of the few women who worked 'unofficially' at the WCP said:

> It's always a power game. They need to show the hierarchy, they feel so much better than us. The way they talk to people. Respect me please. I don't like that, honestly. I grew up with showing respect to each other (field notes, 08/28/18).

Despite all this, the water helpers perceived the WCP not as part of a problem but as a solution. Like Bryan told me, on the street, or *places like this*, they had room for agency and access to money, which in turn made them valuable. The water crisis of others generated a chance for a change for the better. While the water collectors improvised in their practices to maintain their usual order of how things had been before the water crisis, the water helpers did not aspire to 'go back'. Reflections on their social conditions were omnipresent. Ricky explained to me as if this was his daily motivation:

> You know, we are living a life of full stress. And everyone just tries to be very careful for his own life. If we didn't work here we'd be pushing our luck. You don't come working, then you gonna lose your people [customers], you gonna lose your whole life. So your life is dependent on how much you force yourself.
>
> […]
>
> Others are no longer fighting, there is no future for them. They don't even think about tomorrow. Sometimes you can even witness them having given up on life, despite having children and a family. As soon as they get some cash here, they go and get ganja or tik [crystal meth] (Ricky, field notes, 09/14/18).

Ricky, however, saw himself sitting at a farm back in Tanzania one day, where he grew up, and where he will be planting his own vegetables, keeping a few chickens and engaging in farming.

The group of the water helpers was by no means homogeneous. Their social and cultural background varied. Violence, mistrust and xenophobia also divided the group.[19] But what they had in common was that none of them perceived the current water shortage as something that restricted their water accessibility or as a rupture in their usual way of consuming water. The water helpers were just a few of many people in Cape Town who made the general public aware of the fact, that social, political and existential crises are a constant feature in the lives of many people in the city. Day-to-day, many water helpers suffered from the fact that transport was in crisis, education was in crisis, health care was in crisis, housing was in crisis and particularly water supply was in crisis. In their statements, however, it was only on the side that they touched upon issues like lack of basic services or missing access to water. The fact that water got cut off for hours was something well known for residents in informal settlements, as Amkele's description in the beginning shows. Some communities created makeshift water connections, like tapping into the water pipes from neighbours. Communal toilets and unsafe water quality was the norm. Some had private water taps and got a free amount of water when qualified for the CoCT's indigent benefits. Bongani was angry about the fact that "[t]hose crazy people try to tell us to save water. But they don't even supply water to us" (field notes, 08/30/18). Even though cut-offs and scarce access to water represented the status quo, living in a (water) crisis was not topic number one. Getting enough money for the day was the more existential and immediate challenge.

In this context we should also consider the argument that the water helper's lifeworld yield certain advantages, like being experienced in improvisation and flexibility. This is more of an analytical reasoning, however, in order to dismantle hegemonic crisis narratives and to highlight the water helpers' agency, it is essential to reflect on. Neither would they necessarily make the direct link between water crisis, WCP and job as such, nor would they say that their live is characterized by a prolonged water crisis, even if there is no doubt that it qualifies as such, especially according to what the CoCT currently described as a water crisis.

Out of necessity they showed a creative potential to detect essential loopholes in a setting that seemed to be highly regulated and thereby they shaped the quality of the WCP. As mentioned in the theory chapter, improvisation as a form of agency in the context of crisis or uncertainty does not happen from the void. The water helpers' familiarity with living in

[19] Major conflicts existed between 'foreigners' (=other Africans), Black South Africans, Coloureds, those who lived on the street, those who rather lost hope and those who tried to make a better living. Many of them had moved from the Eastern Cape or other rural South African areas to Cape Town to find work.

variability, fluctuations or informality, made it easier for them to adapt to highly volatile contexts. Flexibility seemed to be a key to cope with or take advantage of permanent changes. Informality as a "[…] distinguishing characteristic of contemporary South African cities in terms of both livelihoods and shelter" (Rogerson 2018: 157) contributed to having accustomed many in living with those fluctuations. What is very interesting in the context of the WCP and its dynamics is to think about informality as a *mode* rather than a sector, a status, or an economy (Millar 2018: 131). By regarding informality as the ability to adapt to one's external circumstances, we can recognize the potency in the water helper's practices and not, as the dominant water narrative underlines, the absence of their agency within a suppressive state.

In the specific context of the WCP it enabled the water helpers to benefit from the water crisis as 'innovative small entrepreneurs'. Thereby they played a significant role in shaping and co-designing space and contributed significantly to the specific character of the WCP. They turned the crisis of others into their own advantage. Thereby they also helped to stabilize the processes at the WCP, especially for the water collectors, for whom the sudden conversion and the need for flexibility and improvisation produced stress and panic. By performing this work, they provided the water collectors with a certain order and support in dealing with conditions that were new to them. Thus, their work as water helpers did not only meet their mere subsistence costs but it produced important values, social relations and subjectivities that went beyond their own purview and affected all social relations at the WCP. As Mo told me:

> I have been working here at this spot for fifteen years as a parking guard. Together with Ricky. Everyone knows us. They trust us and now many want only us to help them with filling up their water containers. In the past the work was better. People brought me their leftovers and I only worked with Ricky. The money is similar, there's hardly any difference but the work is not the same anymore. It is too busy and a lot of stress. It's more contestation here now and for some of the guys the money is less here at this new spot because here are much more people working so we all need to share. People also give less because they can come close with their cars, so the way to carry the water is not that far anymore. Before, at the old spring, some earned like R700 [≈35€] a day. Yoh, that is so much. Here, 5 and 10 Rand is very little money. 50 Rand is good and 100 was the most I've gotten once from one person. In the end of the day I get between 200 and 300 Rand (field notes, 08/16/18).
>
> Me and Mo are supervisors here at WCP. We are the only ones who are experienced here. That's why we also wear those hats. Only us. Some customers say, thank you for being here every time and managing the area. They give tips. Sometimes I get amazing things. One time I got 340 Rand (Ricky, field notes, 08/28/18).

Over time, some water helpers had established their personal contacts with customers, which was linked to a mutual agreement to be 'the one' water helper for the respective customer. By having these personal agreements, the water helpers might at least expect a certain stability in their daily incomes. Negotiations among the various actors who came together at this place were required continuously as they provoked clashing of interests and of lived realities. Existing power relations which were displayed openly at this site, could thus be undermined and smoothed through mutual contacts, gestures of solidarity and cooperation. By and by it struck me that more and more water helpers wore the same shoes. Ricky told me that a generous customer brought them those shoes which were solid and water-repellent. Besides shoes, this person, who I had never knowingly met sometimes also left behind a bag full of apples or oranges.

Some of the water helpers became experts in this specific metier and for this locality. They knew the best day and time to come to the WCP, they did better and better in teaming up with generous *customers*, city officials or other water helpers, they knew which taps had the highest water pressure, they knew how they could fulfil their work with the smallest effort, they continued to improve technically to carry those heavy water containers, became physically strong and reliable. They established relationships with security guards and knew how to go past the queue of waiting people. It also happened, that they got consulted for arrangements by their *customers*. Ricky, who took his role as a water helper very seriously and who took responsibility for the WCP and the other water helpers (also a task assigned by the CoCT), was very keen to be recognized as trustworthy by his customers. Through the way he acted and behaved, Ricky had managed to build a basis of trust with some regular water collectors, making him a *better* water helper than the others, like he and also some customers told me. He even shared phone numbers with the most trusted customers, to keep them updated about quiet moments at the WCP. During an overheard conversation between Ricky and one of his customers, I witnessed Ricky asking for advice on a personal problem. Generally, these two groups inquired about each other's life, health, weekend or family. "He is happy with me. I am happy with him. I also sometimes go with him and help him carrying water at his home" (Ricky, field notes, 30/08/18). However, the fundamental asymmetrical relationship was still uphold, characterized by marginalized and poor mainly Black citizens serving the needs of the mainly white, well-off residents.

> *25 August 2018 was a feast. The entire WCP disappeared in a cloud of smoke. The smell of grilled meat spread out along Main Road mixing up with car exhausts. People at the water taps tried to locate the smell. Unusual place and time for a braai (South*

African barbecue). But behind the guard hut happened the hustle and bustle. The atmosphere was cheery and exuberant. All water helpers and security guards gathered in one corner of the place. Many customers just caught a glimpse at this scenery whereas I was documenting how Didi gutted a guinea fowl. One of the water helpers found it injured and already dead along the street. Didi first plucked it, then he cut open at the breast. The insides were thrown into a bucket as garbage. Five eggs, not yet fully developed, caused a brief tumult. One egg was already normal size. As it broke, we were glad that it was not fertilized. In the meantime, the water helpers kindled a fire from collected branches that had been already stocked up in a trolley since early morning. A dishwasher grate served as a grill grid, onto which Didi threw the guinea fowl as a whole to get grilled. Two other water helpers brought packaged meat, one beef, one mutton, from Checkers (supermarket). When the meat started to get crispy and smell burnt, Didi removed the meat from the fire and cut it into pieces. Someone brought a broken printer and together with a bucket that was turned upside down both functioned as small tables. Within a few minutes the meat was eaten up, the water helpers and guards went back to business. Only the still smoldering embers of fire testified that something had been happening there (diary entry of August 26, 2018).

Pictures 10 and 11: ‘Braai’ behind the wooden hut; photos by the author: TC 2018

5.3 Security Guards

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“Since July 2018 I work at this site here as a security guard”,

Yolanda told me dispassionately.

> […] I did my training in Johannesburg, moved to Philippi in Cape Town in March 2018 in hope to have better chances to find a proper job. First, I started working for another company then I was getting hired by the Grinnell Security and found myself working here in Newlands someday (Yolanda, field notes, 08/22/18).

Yolanda did not like her job. She complained that working at the WCP was so boring. Instead she preferred to work in the office administration. At night she felt unsafe and was afraid of disputes, therefore she only worked the daytime shift. The day shift consisted of strolling between the entry, the exit, the water faucets and the small wooden shack at the rear end of the place, from where she could oversee the entire site. The little wooden hut was sort of a headquarter for the security guards. It served as a shelter when it started raining, for taking a seat at lunch time or having a quick nap. Standing in front of the wooden hut allowed them to check the exit and prevent people from confusing it with the entrance. Over time the council increased the number of security guards to three people per shift. One guard was deployed for the entrance gate, to check the number of water containers. In case there was a long queue, the responsible security guard had the task of regulating the access to the water

taps by closing and opening a steel lattice door that connected the passage with the water tap section. Only after checking the number of water container the *customer* might pass. The other guard managed the taps and took care that all taps were in use and everybody moved on in a row so that there were no gaps in the waiting line.

From a plastic stool at the head of the watertap-installation the respective guard provided support for the refilling of the containers by shouting 'Next!', 'Next! Here! Next!' and pointing to the unused water taps. When there was no queue, people ignored the rules and the guards were merely watching the site. The exit became the entrance and it then could happen, that all 16 taps were occupied by one person, until the van was loaded (see picture 12). "When one of the city officials come visit the site, we quickly go back to our demanded tasks", clarified Tony grinningly. At 6.30 pm floodlights went on. That was the time, when the night shift began, and the security guards were getting ready for a shift change. With fading daylight, the atmosphere changed. The remaining *trolley boys* rang in their final round for that day. There was again one peak time when people came after work. By 9pm the site got increasingly quiet and the last sounds died away. New faces came out and strolled across the parking lot. The cold wind came up, blowing from the river side. The water pressure of the taps got powerful because not all taps were in use and pushed away the water cans. At 11pm the two security guards of the night shift closed the gates and got ready for a night in the wooden hut.

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Picture 12: Off-peak at the WCP; photo by the author: TC 2018

The security guards were possibly among the people at the WCP who cared least about the existence of this particular place. It was neither the current water crisis that worried them nor the chance to make money of it. It was just one of many other possible locations where they could have been deployed as a security guard. As it was winter in South Africa at the time of research and (fortunately) rainy and cold weather, they often wished to be working somewhere else, in a shopping mall or at least indoors.[20]

The group of security guards showed only minor differences to the water helpers in terms of the crisis and Day Zero as their usual water consumption was very limited in their everyday life. A young lady who worked as a security guard at the WCP estimated:

> If we talk about containers of 25 liters, then I maybe use three. Because one of 25 liters is supposed for cooking, other one is supposed for washing your body and the other to do maybe something else... No..but actually I don't even need three per day (field notes, 30/08/18).

Like the *trolley boys* (that is how they named the water helpers) they did not share the sorrows of most of the water collectors at the WCP. In their statements they similarly mentioned Day Zero as something they do not know the full meaning of, but something bad that will bring chaos. Due to the way the CoCT reported on the water crisis, they were not able to relate the crisis narrative to their personal lives.

Having observed, joined and talked to the security guards for three months, I noticed above all their unique positions between rules, order and improvisation. As employees of the CoCT they were perceived as officials working on behalf of the city government. They had to follow certain rules and could be fired at any time. At the WCP they were responsible for maintaining order and security. Above all, they were expected to regulate and manage the activities at the water taps and to make sure that everybody followed the rules set by the CoCT. Tony's point of view was as follows:

> The people that come here, they like order, there must be order. They get cross when people have more than 25 liter containers or when they enter the wrong way. They get cross and shout: Hey security, security… (field notes, 08/23/18).

How seriously they performed their job depended on how crowded the place was. Sometimes they were very strict in checking the water containers. If someone wanted to enter with containers that contained more than 25 liters, they had to leave those excess canisters behind to fill them up later or they had to engage a water helper instead. However, they often were

[20] Analyses of security guards are based on conversations with mainly four employed guards at the WCP, two women, two men and sporadic chats with a few others who came for night shifts or who did overtime hours at the WCP for one day. They came from the Cape Flats for work to the city center.

also accused of not doing a good job, and it happened once in a while that water collectors threatened to inform the city council or the police.

At times, when there was almost nothing going on at WCP, the usual rules were being neglected. People entered through the exit without queuing and filled several canisters at once. Then the security guards were perceived as not qualified for this job and too lazy as they followed up on other activities, be it polishing leather shoes, trying out new tricks with the baton, or washing clothes behind the wooden hut by using the grid structure of a shopping trolley as a washboard.

Picture 13: Trolley serving as washboard; photo by the author: TC 2018

In case there was quarrels or conflicts they were obliged to interfere. When things got serious, they would rather rely on their backup and call the police or the Law Enforcement, than jeopardizing their lives for a payment that was equal to that of the *trolley boys* on a good day (security guards in South Africa get around R200 per day). Therefore, they also took the opportunity of getting some extra money. Their activities at the WCP can be seen in the same light as the ones of the water helpers. Their everyday life provoked them to be flexible and always open for shortcuts, workarounds or alternatives. “Here in Cape Town you need many jobs. One single job doesn’t maintain your livelihood”, Tony told me (Tony, field notes, 08/30/18). Some of the security guards had another official job in addition to their work at the WCP. Sometimes, when it was quiet and not so many people watching, Yolanda also helped carrying and filling up the water buckets for customers: “I’m coming back, just want some extra money” (field notes, 08/22/2018). Tony on the other hand was

experienced in purchasing, trading and dealing with all kinds of stuff at the WCP. One early morning, I saw Tony filling up water in a white bucket. Usually he never took water back home so I curiously came closer. Yolanda was waiting for him with a plastic bag in her hand filled with sheep innards. The bag was already leaking and blood was dropping out and they wanted to wash the insides in the bucket with spring water. He told me:

> I want to take it home. I got it here in town today. It's very fresh. Today is christmas. At home, my wife first cleans it then she puts it in water, only add some salt and it starts boiling. It's very nice when you cook it.

With Christmas Tony was referring to Eid al-Adha (21.-25. August 2018), the Muslim feast of the sacrifice, but he accentuated that it was more the fresh offer of meat and not a faith in Allah that moved him to buy it. On other days he showed up with sneakers almost as good as new, then a mattress, a suitcase, a child's bycicle, a hot plate, or curtains. He either wanted to resell it in his neighborhood or he also had some people who came to the WCP to purchase those things. The WCP transformed into his trading point and the wooden hut served as storage space. It symbolises the improvisational character of the place, of the power structures among the actors, and also of the resourceful practices by the security guards. Even though security service was continuously present at the WCP, even during night, when the gates were closed, the CoCT did not seem to consider providing a more appropriate guard booth. The wooden hut was a rickety shack, just big enough for two people. There was no light let alone electricity and wind entered through the slits between the wood planks. For recharging their mobile phones or getting a hot cup of tea they made friends with the workers from the toilet house, owned by the CoCT and which had been associated to the parking lot already before the existence of WCP. Tony fixed the hut with new nails as it was about to fall apart. He also put cardboard on the walls from the inside as a an insulation layer to make it a bit warmer. Someone brought a broken car seat and folding crates upgraded by cushions with floral pattern. Tony commented not only on the bad condition of his job but on his living conditions beyond the WCP:

> There is no relying on the city government who has proven often enough that they will not come when help required or if there is a need. Whereas white people write emails to the CoCT we just do it ourselves. Otherwise we wait and wait and wait and nothing happens (field notes, 08/23/18).

The water helpers called the hut derogatorily 'police station', but at the same time many of them wished to have a proper job as a security guard. Both groups accused each other of being untrustworthy. However, there was a neat exchange between security guards and water helpers. It was not uncommen to see a security guard mandating a water helper for going to the shop, for instance, to get them a sweet drink or milk, painkillers or food. Especially Tony

was giving those orders but also provided the purchase money. Similarly, however constrasting, was the security guards' relationship to some of their customers, who in turn gave them some extra money or a quick chat. The day was already long advanced, Yolanda and I were sitting in front of the wooden hut on a wooden pallet with a foam rubber pad on top and were just watching people. An older man came closer and slipped something to Yolanda: "Here, for you, Sisi." She thanked him and he left again. She opened her hand and had a package dried meat: "This is nice biltong. Do you want a piece? He comes often. I know him. Usually he gives sweets or chocolate". However, more frequently customers expressed their complaints towards the security guards. "We are often blamed for not letting them enter the exit to the water taps. We are just following our job. It is not my fault", Yolanda justified herself (field notes, 08/23/18). Tony loved to watch and chatter:

> There are two guys, they always come here and carry about 600 liters. Last time I asked them for what they gonna use it, they told me for the church. But now I know. They need this much water for pies. They have a bakery and need this water for preparing pies. They mix it with flour. When someone comes and asks for what they need it, I must say it's for church. You see, I must lie for them. It's not allowed because they make business with it. The water is not for making business (field notes, 08/13/18).

One month later, he shared phone numbers with these guys. Since then the deal was, that Tony called them when it was not too busy at the WCP. In exchange they came and brought along a 'Gatsby' sandwich (one of those alleged pies) for lunch.

5.4 City of Cape Town officials

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> *"Even when we had to close the other springs and opening up this one, we had to make a ceremony of course",*

told me Miss Gontsana, the CoCT's water demand management spokesperson on a sunny day.

> We don't just close that one and don't notify them about this new one. Now people have understood. We did our best stakeholder engagement. But some older people said they were not notified. Another lady yesterday she was saying that she has been going to the spring for fifteen years and people travel from Cape Flats all the way to come to the springs. We had been closing this off because we were getting pressure from other residents. The best we can do is to try to have a controlled environment. It's better to have a more designated area like this here. In terms of the heritage component we tried to do justice to them. People really want to come here to drink the spring water. It's good quality.

> We're trying to do a more structured space where people can come collect, we couldn't just close all springs. People love it, they feel like the spring water is a heritage thing. It's very important. But in terms of location this is a better space. The water still comes from the same vein. It's the same water (Gontsana, field notes, 08/21/18).

Through the new site the municipality satisfied their demands for control and rules. The entire site, now demarcated by a steel fence, was regulated by opening hours making the free water accessible to the public only in certain times. The formal structure with the sixteen taps had a platform for containers to stand on and a drainage system. This was a lot more convenient for the water collectors. The limit of 25 liters per person at a time was set to speed up the process of collection, to better manage the queuing and congestion and to ensure fair access to all. Patrick, who came every now and then to the WCP, a facility that fell under his area of responsibility as Water Conservation Officer of the CoCT, told me, that they were thinking of increasing the number of taps, from 16 to 32:

> […] and then making the place even bigger. Bigger would mean taking some space from the sports and recreation site and put another 16 taps there. We want to reduce the long queues and also want to change the water pressure. People are complaining that it does not come out fast enough when all 16 taps are in operation. Remember, if the pipeline's circumference is bigger, then the flow is less. With a smaller pipe we could enhance the flow. Changing the pipelines from a 2 mm to a 1,5 or 1,2mm pipeline. To push water faster. Same with veins, when they are narrow the blood runs faster (Patrick, field notes, 08/21/18).

The site was also equipped with security and Law Enforcement, who monitored the site, the surrounding area and controlled the water helpers occasionally. Mr. Zondi, Water Conversations Officer at CoCT told me:

> People here in Cape Town they steal everything, metal and copper theft is a common problem in South Africa. Even the metal rings from the valves are targeted. So, we need to put the site under surveillance 24/7 (Zondi, field notes, 08/20/18).

He went to the car, bent over the passenger seat and came back with a silver metal ring on his pinky finger. Still the ring looked more like fitting to a valve, but he insured that by polishing it adequately, one would get an engagement ring out of it for a good price.[21]

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[21] In February 2020 I received news in a WhatsApp Group, that the CoCT undertook maintenance upgrade in exposed surface copper brazen pipes apparently without conceiving of the idea to install other taps. Riyaz Rawoot posted publicly: "Why do you use incompetent contractors repeatedly?". Shafiq Morton added: "Copper? It is an invitation to thieves...Surely?"

The City of Cape Town shaped the public discourse on the drought and increased the panic over the water crisis. Thereby they also shaped the real happenings on the ground, as political announcements quickly had to be followed by actions. The Water Collection Point was one of those results. The WCP was established to the benefit of some citizens but also against the will of many other Capetonians. The decision to close down the old historical spring site illustrated whose needs the CoCT tended to identify and serve first. It also clearly showed that the CoCT officials' actions at the WCP were mainly aimed at establishing order and regulations. The water crisis challenged the officials further as unconventional actions were carried out and bureaucratic regulations were lifted for this purpose. While many Capetonians faced the officials with suspicion and mistrust, there was yet a certain dependency at play through which they remained the contact point for information and clarification about the current happenings.[22]

Miss Gontsana, who I met at the WCP during a petition explained to me:

> The drought has changed our work a lot. In my water conservation team it is now more about educational issues. I did a lot of engagement on a weekly basis informing people about dam levels etc. We had to move more to a transparent way of communicating. And it helped. We halfed the consumption of water. We've been in restrictions since 2015. Water restrictions were nothing new. People became serious when they realized that water could run out. And then they started to decrease it. Some alternatives like desalination plants take much longer than quick responses by behavioral change which is what eventually really got us here to this point. What also helped for sure was advancing pressure management, fixing leaks, pushing forward the desalination plant and using spring water (Gontsana, field notes, 08/21/18).

From the 08/18/2018 to 08/21/2018 the CoCT conducted a survey whether to operate the site 24hrs per day. They set up a table with information leaflets and a signature list for visitors who wanted to make the Water Collection Site open for 24 hours. The water collectors had to put their names, the area they came from and there was a blank column for general comments. Eventually, 1726 were in favor, 98 were against this initiative. Miss Gontsana assured to me that they definitely wanted to conduct another survey. This should be more qualtitative, asking for the reasons why people come to the WCP and what they use

[22] With the group of the CoCT officials I refer to the person's role and functioning as an official, working in and for the City of Cape Town. Their personal attitude might most likely fit the group of the water collectors and cannot be entirely separated from their work; but in the first instance, they represented the city governemnt and were accordingly perceived by the residents. As one CoCT official told me: "The City is a service provider. They should make sure to get water to people. We are very careful about what we say to the public. I won't put my head on the table by saying my own opinion. You must be mindful of what you speak to the media. Cape Town is politicized and polarized" (field notes, 08/20/18).

the water for. However, during the six weeks I spent at the WCP after my meeting with Miss Gontsana, nothing like this had happened.

Apart from that some CoCT officials still came by regularly. Some just wanted to fetch spring water for their personal needs, for others the WCP was their new work place. Such as Mr. Neilson, a water conservation officer working for the Department of Water and Sanitation. Mr. Neilson was responsible for water saving campaigns and for the management of education and awareness programmes:

> ThinkWater is a campaign that was launched during the height of the water crisis in 2017 to create awareness and water-saving strategies for schools, businesses and on private household level. We help to deal with the crisis and to change the mind sets of citizens to saving water. Before the crisis, since 2011, the water conservation campaign used to be 'Keep Saving Water'. The change in the campaigns lies in the focus which is now more on conceptionializing people to think about water as soon as they open the tap or better, even before. People shall think twice before they open the tap. Now we're actually zooming into households and try to find people who use excessively water. Then they will get sort of, not warning letters but some guide to reduce their consumption. The water map helped us to locate those households. But we've been going to diverse actors, like shopping malls, schools, households, everybody, to encourage rainwater harvesting or alternative water sources like using grey water for the garden, for washing your car or for flushing the toilet (Neilson, field notes, 08/20/18).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and outlook

This chapter provides in a first step an analysis of the main chapter, in which I want to bring the separately presented perspectives together. In a second step I will finalize the thesis with a general conclusion and outlook.

6.1 What does the WCP tell us about the water crisis?

As we have seen, a place like the Water Collection Point in Newlands can pose a challenge to the dominant narrative of the water crisis in Cape Town. The diverging vantage points of the four groups show that the socio-economic background (and historically rooted racial categorization of people) play a decisive role in how one experiences and perceives the so-called water crisis. Accordingly, the place was characterized by different rhythms, functions and meanings.

Interests, needs, worries and desires in this locality varied among the people who visited it. There were rush hours and quiet moments, people who stayed overnight and those who left

after a few minutes, people who waited for water, and others who hoped to earn their livelihood. While the water helpers and the security guards did not seriously care about the severe drought, the majority of the water collectors and the CoCT were facing life-changing circumstances as a result of the crisis. The two latter groups shaped and were represented by the crisis narrative, of crisis as a temporary disorder, of the loss of balance and instability, linked to the hope that everything will go back to *normal* once the crisis is overcome. While this might hold true for one part of society, crisis narratives drown out social conditions and lived experiences of other residents, like the ones for whom water shortage become a social condition, a pervasive context even before the crisis. Stories like those from Amkele, Ricky, Tony, Mo, Yolanda or Bongani are an example of how crisis can become a background for everyday actions. In contrast to the trend among the water collectors to go 'off grid', residents like the water helpers, who were not connected to the municipal water grid, were trying to get access to it, even if illegally.

Receiving legitimate water services and 'being connected' means being more of an actively recognized urban citizen. Those areas where access to water is provided, indicate which part of the urban area matters to the local state apparatus and which is excluded (Anand 2017). The opportunity people saw in the water crisis and to benefit from it by finding and exploiting loopholes to their advantage was based on the fact that their everyday life had been marked by the conditions that now constituted a crisis for Cape Town. Even if they already knew how to get by with limited amount of water, this did not mean that this is how things should be. Even "[t]hough crisis might constitute the local, quantitative normality it is not necessarily seen as positively or qualitatively so" (Vigh 2008: 11). They were equally aware that their life had been marred by poverty and political disadvantage for decades, and that life was lived differently and better by their neighbors on the other side of the highway or the ones at the water faucets. Hardship, inequity and suffering often posed a fact of social life. They described themselves as tough and resilient survivors. Or as Bryan put it: "It is easy for us to die but to live – that takes something" (field notes, 08/01/18).

Some of the water collectors might have thought about such a statement the first time due to the water crisis even if the inequities in Cape Town (and South Africa) were not new. Structures of their otherwise sheltered life became apparent as they were destabilized by changing circumstances. This happened mainly on two levels of which the group of the water collectors suddenly took note. Firstly, people became aware of the relationship between the personal and the social and how they themselves are constructed and constituted as part of larger entities (Vigh 2008: 15). If not before, then at this point, many of them started to

question the political actions by the city council and their management of and responsibility for the water crisis. Thereby many of the water collectors positioned themselves as part of a larger picture within Cape Town and started rethinking this relationship of dependency. Secondly, what happened concurrently was the realization of a possible breakdown of the water infrastructure. As Susan Leigh Star (1999) argues: "The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks" (ibid. 382). People started thinking about where the water comes from, how does it arrive at their taps and what system ensures the supply of water. People had an idea where the city's key dams were located and learnt about the waters' larger infrastructure, technical matters relating to dams, underground water and aquifers, sewerage systems or desalination plants (Robins 2020). Day Zero and the crisis changed the middle-class Capetonians' idea of water as something self-evident, something that 'just comes and goes'. At best, they started to see their life in reference to others and became aware of their privilege and of infrastructural disparities that exist in the city. That was key for realizing that everyone is able and also has a responsibility to make a difference; to change something by saving water. Having a common goal (reduce water consumption), a common task (conserving water), and a common enemy (Day Zero) strongly united people. But as creatures of habit, people also get nervous when they have to change. A sense of scarcity also produces an anxiety that paralyzes people and makes their behavior more rigid. The feeling of not getting enough because there is not enough, makes people hold on to what they have. Anand (2018) further elaborates that "[s]carcity politics can be very conservative politics in the sense that it's not inclusive, but instead draws lines between people" (Anand 2018).

With the new water collection site, the CoCT had achieved to establish such a line and space of inclusion and exclusion – in physical terms, through the fence and the opening hours, and discursively, by coining rules and regulations, for instance to officially declare some of those visitors (or rather their activities) as being informal. Before, space had been potentially open and the spring water was free available. The condition of urban space is thus an expression of power relations that evokes questions about urban governance, citizenship, and belonging (Bork-Hüffer 2016: 139f).

But a place like the WCP also posed a certain challenge for the CoCT and required them to be flexible and to adjust and improve already-made decisions. This challenge inhered in confronting the provisional character of the WCP itself and to confront people, like the water helpers, who were experienced in keeping eyes open for loopholes and interspaces to use those to their own advantage. So, even if a recourceful actor like the CoCT has more power

and capacities to reshape the structures of urban space, the WCP is an example of how generally marginalized people assign their own distinct meaning to the place and space. This again is inseperable from how the water collectors or the CoCT shape their approach and set of practices and through this shape the dynamics of the social web of relations at large. Labeling the water helpers and their work as 'informal' is further evidence of power relations with which the CoCT limited their agency and marked the water helpers and their lifeworld as 'not proper'. Through this official act the CoCT carried out its duty and shifted those 'unwanted' dynamics out of their area of responsibility. However, it is important to acknowledge dynamics such as these at the WCP, as informality is growing in significance in Southern cities (in Rogerson 2018).

The WCP represents much more than just a parking lot where people can fetch spring water. Its dynamics are transferable to the general neglect of poor peoples' lifeworlds as part of the city life or in this case the crisis-narrative. These residents constitute a large part of Cape Town (or the majority of South Africa) who live in the midst of urban society.

The CoCT speaks of a water crisis, but the ones who continuously suffer from water shortage are not included into these accounts. The CoCT praises the community spirit of its citizens and how faithful they restrict themselves in order to help the city out of its misery. But the people who help carrying water containers, like the water helpers, or those who ensure a smooth queuing at overcrowded spring outlets, like the security guards, are not taken into account.

Not to mention the many people who come every day from the Cape Flats to the CBD for work in cafes and restaurants, or help to dig boreholes and wellpoints, or clean the houses, and generally contribute significantly to the city's economy and lifestyle. Just as the WCP would not function without the water helpers and the security guards, Cape Town (and South Africa at large) would not be what it is without those who are not considered worth mentioning by the administration, the poor and marginalized residents. Recognizing their existence, rising awareness and openly revealing structures is significant to pointing out grievances in a society and to challenge the status quo of crisis production. When read together those different perspectives offer a more inclusive view on the water crisis in Cape Town at the level of its residents.

Besides the well-maintained neglection of those stories, the dynamics at the WCP also indicate that what ultimately shapes the real dynamics on the ground, which define the character of a place or make the everyday life in the city, is the people. A political and highly

selective narrative does not necessarily reflect what is taking place in real life. If the CoCT wants a holistic and inclusive strategy as a response to the water crisis they must also consider those different experiences and take into account the lived realities and lifeworlds of people like the water helpers and security guards. The diverse practices and negotiations at the WCP symbolize the different lifeworlds that are behind each practice and thereby are suggestive of the inequalities within the city. It is these inequalities and the failure to acknowledge marginalized people as a valued and inevitable part of Cape Town's residents, that allow for the exclusion of the multilayered realities and stances towards the water crisis in Cape Town in the larger crisis narrative.

6.2 Crises, continued.

Crisis narratives have their raison d'être. A crisis status can enable unconventional measures that would never have been feasible under *normal* conditions. Proclaiming a crisis is often the result of an exceptional situation, such as a drought that dries up water reservoirs, a virus that infects people, or perhaps the bursting of a real estate bubble. In a crisis it is crucial to take responsibility, listen to the experts, and do everything possible to reduce suffering and damage. Often the responsibility is on each individual to overcome crisis and improve the situation for all.

But what – in contrast to a crisis – is a normal condition? Crisis narratives reveal the normative dimension behind their proclamation. The lifestyle of affluent and privileged social classes often proves to be the status quo of crisis production. Recognizing this is crucial, because a crisis implies that things are no longer functioning as they used to. On this basis, new measures, restrictions or recommendations are devised to contain the risk. A crisis shows what does not work in a society or who is considered a member of society and who is not. Whose fears does the crisis narrative express? Whose lifeworld is depicted and taken as a starting point? Limiting water consumptions to 50 liters per day in the worst times during the water crisis in Cape Town was not at all a limit to many city dwellers: this amount of water was still more than many people in informal settlements consumed even before the crisis. The advice to Capetonians not to fill the pool or only take a quick shower, not to mention drilling a borehole in the garden as a personal way out, was absurdly irrelevant for the working class in Cape Town. And even if Day Zero entailed a certain precariousness, because it was so inflated by the media, it was just a new term for what some residents have

always lived with. From this perspective, the proclamation of the water crisis in Cape Town and its consequences can be read as a privilege.

The argument that the water crisis is not a crisis for everyone in Cape Town is certainly no great surprise. It was evident from the beginning of the crisis that the crisis narrative does not resonate with the marginalized people in Cape Town. Yet, the proclamation of the water crisis is very real and has indeed wider effects and further implications for many in Cape Town. Instead of taking 'water crisis' as a nominal value, this thesis focused on people's agency and practices to deal with the impacts of the situation declared a crisis. Thus, the research was able to include all people at the spring water collection point, no matter what temporal brackets crisis comprised for them, be it the experience of crisis as pervasive context of, or as a singular event in, their life. The thesis also highlighted the opportunities arising from uncertain and unpredictable circumstances and the need to remain adaptable and creative. The research at the WCP shows that a crisis for some can be turned into an opportunity for others. Interestingly, at this place, it is the marginalized and poor people who exploit the crisis to their benefit, at least on a small scale. My observation at the WCP illustrated the potential in the water helper's practices and not, as the dominant crisis narrative suggests, the absence of their agency. Within the context of a crisis, there is room for unbureaucratic, creative and improvised practices in order to negotiate changing and volatile circumstances. The socio-economic dynamics and the various forms of practices at the WCP show that in situations of uncertainty established ways of classifying and categorizing people are called into question and need to be redefined. I examined how the political framing of the water shortage as a crisis was perceived by various actors and social groups and what new leeway and social practices developed as result. Above all, such an approach challenges the status quo of crisis production and raises the issue of the need to deconstruct hegemonic structures.

The examples from the WCP invalidate the common statement taken up by mainstream media during the height of the crisis, that Cape Town is the first city to run out of water. It will be rather a city where those accustomed to easy access disengage from inconsiderate or 'normal' habits in water use. Gastrow (2018) has put it in the broader context and said:

> The panic over 'Day Zero' reveals South Africa's ongoing refusal to look north of the border in imagining its position in the world. While the press is going wild over the day that the taps will run dry, it turns out that most of Africa's urban residents do not have access to piped water in their homes. Day Zero, minus the army, would make Cape Town part of the norm, rather than the exception in urban Africa. […] The DA [Democratic Alliance] is accused of creating a "First World" mirage for the (white) wealthy off the back of inadequate services for

> the poor and Black. It is the Cape Town of sparkling beaches, cable car rides and international chefs that is marketed to the rest of the world as the proof of DA's record, and it is this representation which is gradually imploding as the DA finds itself scrambling to hold the falling pieces together. Black Cape Town is emerging as the DA's true representation.

In this same vein, politicians should also not say that Cape Town has avoided Day Zero. It is of course a relief that the Day Zero scenario, as created by the CoCT and 'Resolve', has not become reality. However, for many people in Cape Town Day Zero was and still is a reality. Would it not be more promising if there were headlines such as: "Cape Town – the first major city to combat inequities in water accessibility"? That would be at least as sensational in light of the conditions of water supply in many large cities worldwide. But the dominant story is another one. What remains as a sober realization, is the question of who does really matter as part of the society. The water crisis in Cape Town bluntly shows that as soon as the economy and/or affluent people are threatened and faced by inconviences things can actually change quite quickly. Why has it not been reason enough that so many residents of Cape Town or entire villages in South Africa have already been living their whole lives without basic access to water?

The common way to theoretically approach crises in anthropological works is to understand them as a decisive moment of emergency, a temporary disorder or a rupture in the order of things. This approach is also very criticial as crises are not a mere descriptor of a situation. It is therefore worthwile to clarify what is at stake when crises are announced and what the ethical and epistemological grounds are for proclaiming crises.

Whatever crises constitute for various people, what applies to the majority is that, within the context of uncertainty and unpredictability, people display new practices and are required to act, often in a creative way that is new to themselves. Crises allow space for improvisation. When the way how things usually work is no longer ensured in a society, practices previously taken for granted derail, routines are lost and norms lose their value, then new connections must be made, and new steps must be taken to structure the ways in which people organize their life

The theoretical framework of the research includes anthropological approaches to the deconstruction of crisis narratives as well as to improvised practices within the context of uncertainty. Considering the wide field of anthropological approaches to improvisation, for the purpose of my research issue, I want to use a general notion of 'improvisation' as a natural way of tackling the unexpected and uncertain aspects of everyday life, referring to actions, negotiations and practices, arising at the WCP (and

beyond). The WCP itself can be seen both as a medium and a product of social improvised practices. On the one hand it is a space in between (in)formality and (in)visibility and therefore it provides people room for all kinds of agency. On the other hand, the WCP itself originated as a result of the water crisis and still gets formed and appropriated by those people who visit this place. The focus is on people's agency within the context of the water crisis or volatile living conditions that require flexibility and new routines; to be irregular, creative, ingenious, innovative, informal or corrupt. Improvisation in practices do not arise out of nothing but build on pre-existing patterns, knowledge and structures to life. Those negotiations in the context of crises and those new practices manifested at the Water Collection Point in Newlands are mostly aimed to reestablish an order, either for maintaining the previously familiar life as well as possible or for creating at least a certain consistency in their otherwise volatile life, if only temporarily. As the WCP shows, "these new practices of ordering […] are the result of friction in unaccustomed constellations, side-effects of the rise or emergency of certain social groups" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 61). Alternative perceptions of the urban social web and of the natural and material world offer new margins for action. This became particularly relevant in the main chapter, where examples of the WCP have shown how different practices and perceptions of the water crisis are, depending on the people's position in society and on what repertoire of options and experiences people are able to fall back.

The insights from the WCP show that crises are socio-economically situated phenomena rather than only natural ones that impact everyone in the same way. The situated practices and social dynamics at the WCP challenge the status quo of the dominant crisis narrative as well as persistent structures of power and inequality in Cape Town. Whereas for some city inhabitants the water shortage entailed a rupture of their ordinary life and a severe crisis situation that they either tried to overcome or to find a 'new normal', many other city residents are used to live in such uncertain conditions.

Beside the dichotomy in how crises are experienced and lived through, the WCP revealed an important commonness, which was expressed by the actors' practices. Most of them acted and appropriated the WCP in a flexible and innovative way which made me to argue, that crises as conditions of uncertainty, allow and reinforce improvisation in practices. The WCP, a place itself that came into existence due to the water crisis, enabled forms of cooperation and broke down established structures of inequality on a small scale. The WCP offered room for improvisation that again required new forms of interactions and the need to properly

interpret the actions of others and to oppose or adapt to them. However, the underlying hegemonic structure of society was still maintained.

Steve Biko, when asked about a post-Apartheid future, argued that

> [t]here is no running away from the fact that now in South Africa there is such an ill distribution of wealth that any form of political freedom which does not touch on the proper distribution of wealth will be meaningless (in wa Ngugi 2020).

Transposed to nowadays, Mukoma wa Ngugi emphasizes its great significance by saying: "Decolonization that does not address economic inequality will be meaningless" (wa Ngugi 2020). To provide basic services and main infrastructure is a vital part of that, and as long as the incapacity to provide this in Cape Town and South Africa persists, informal settlements and townships will continue to be severely compromised (Robins 2020).

Today, the water crisis seems to be over, but Cape Town is still considered to be in a drought recovery phase. Water tariffs have decreased and Capetonians are under Level 1 water restrictions, which allow 120 liters per person per day. The CoCT emphasizes repeatedly, businesses, households, industry and agriculture need to actively work towards a 'new normal', to become water resilient. But water and its infrastructures once again receded into the background (Robins 2020). And the next challenge is already waiting on the doorstep. On 17 March 2020 South Africa declared a national state of disaster in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This time, it is, among other things, the inequality regarding access to healthcare that the 'new' crisis lays bare in Cape Town as well as worldwide. It also reveals that those declared measures to curb the further spread of the virus – self-isolation and social distancing, home-office, washing hands regularly – are only realizable and practicable for well-off people with sufficient space and infrastructure. It also reveals what measures can be taken at once, what funds can be mobilized, how action committees can be formed and how quick decisions can be taken or how regulations can be repealed. Again, it shows that it is actually possible to contain a crisis if politicians want to.

Now, during the coronavirus lockdown since 26 March 2020, the WCP is closed. "The CoCT considers the spring water as non-essential. "They live in a bubble", Riyaz recently wrote me. He is now busy preparing for a disaster. "Tomorrow I begin production. Next week I start with eye and face visors". The crisis situation is very different this time. "Everybody is scared!!", he wrote me (WhatsApp message 04/03/2020).

The 'corona crisis' brings up crucial issues that go hand in hand with the present thesis on water crisis in Cape Town and the insights from the WCP. The global crisis narratives on

the coronavirus emphasize again the importance of challenging the crises' inherent normative dimension. It is very different in what way people are affected by the pandemic, depending on class, race or gender etc. Challenging the status quo of crisis production ensures a more holistic, equal and inclusive debate on crises. To highlight situated practices of often marginalized people as an equivalent voice within crisis narratives is core for this endeavor. Such an approach makes aware of the significance of being receptive to flexible coping strategies and of being creative in life planning within unforeseen circumstances.

Closing down the WCP means also that the water helpers lost their job and therewith their only income. Ricky told me in a WhatsApp message:

> Food has become very expensive. Big queues. To shop tomato costs 65 Rand. For me at the moment, I have food but after a week, I don't know where to ask for help. Really, things for us foreigners will going to be tough because they don't care of us first in South Africa…I don't know when I have no money for rent how everything will be. For this situation I'm ready to go back home 'coz nothing I can do here. Amen (04/04/2020).[23]

[23] At the time of publication, the WCP had been reopened again, with changes have been made to ensure health measures (physical distancing by removing/closing a number of taps, shorter opening hours, provision of sanitizer sprays, additional security). Many of the water helpers resumed work at the WCP. Friends told me that "the water is accessible but compounded by the c19 issue where people have become disconnected from their networks of friends and family. The politicians worsen people's worlds as well" (WhatsApp message 01/16/21).

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TERESA CREMER 2020

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