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Violent masculinities and service delivery protests in post-apartheid South Africa: A case study of two communities in Mpumalanga¹

Malose Langa and Peace Kiguwa

abstract

For the past few years, violent service delivery protests have been spreading across South Africa over access to basic services, such as water, electricity, housing and job opportunities. This *Article* draws on two case studies in which in-depth group and individual interviews were conducted with key male informants about their involvement in violent service delivery protests. It provides a gendered analysis of these events by focusing on Connell's (1995) notion of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to dominant cultural stereotypes in which men are expected to aspire to power, status, and wealth, and how these expectations are implicated in service delivery protests. In the interviews, the participants complained bitterly about the black elite men who drive flashy expensive cars, have money and as a result, are able to attract multiple girlfriends, while they are not able to do the same due to their poor economic status. Thus violence was used by the working-class men to deal with their sense of disempowerment and emasculation. This violence was also directed at women in politics within local councils. In conclusion, the *Article* argues that the current socio-economic pressures seem to be influencing young men to become involved in violent service delivery protests as a way of imagining and reimagining new forms of masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa.

keywords

Service delivery protests, violence, hegemonic masculinity, women, politics

Violent protests in South Africa date back to the apartheid era (Alexander, 2010; Seedat, Lau and Suffla, 2010), and continue to characterise the post-apartheid context increasingly in the form of violent service delivery protests². Service delivery protests have been spreading across South Africa since 2004, with a dramatic upsurge in 2009 to the present (von Holdt *et al*, 2011), which also coincided with 2008 violent xenophobic attacks against foreign African nationals (Hassim, Kupe and Worby, 2008). In his

media analysis of reported 'major' service delivery protests, Alexander (2010) also paints a similar picture of increasing service delivery protests in various communities across South Africa. More recently, the Multi-Level Government Initiative, which tracked protests between February 2007 and August 2012 also found an unprecedented increase in the number of the protests (De Visser and Powell, 2012). In all these studies, the protests are over access to basic services, such as water, electricity,

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and housing (Alexander, 2010; Booysen, 2007; De Visser and Powell, 2012; McLennan and Munslow, 2009; von Holdt, *et al*, 2011). Lack of these services is often attributed to the failure of local government, including allegations of maladministration, incompetence, corruption, and nepotism (Booyesen, 2007; De Visser and Powell, 2012). Drawing on Holston's (2008) work, Langa and von Holdt (2012) interpret community protests as a form of insurgent citizenship in which citizens who feel excluded in the new democratic dispensation are forcefully demanding to enjoy full rights of citizenship to have access to work opportunities and to all basic services as enshrined in the Constitution. It is evident that protests are becoming increasingly violent, marked by the destruction of public and private property, and confrontations between armed police and stone-throwing crowds (Alexander, 2010; von Holdt, 2011). There are many explanations for the violent nature of these protests, and this has been attributed to the culture of violence inherited as part of the apartheid legacy, unresolved traumas of the past (Seedat, Lau and Suffla, 2010), the inequalities between the rich and the poor (McLennan and Munslow, 2009) and municipal officials ignoring complaints by the protestors (von Holdt, 2011).

Clearly, the literature that has been covered so far shows that a lot has been written on service delivery protests in South Africa, but there has been less focus on who the people are involved in these protests. This *Article* focuses on the relationship between local politics in two municipalities in Mpumalanga and notions of hegemonic masculinity as one key aspect of exploring the subjective embodiments of protestors as active key agents engaged in specific practices. Post-apartheid South Africa has been characterised by promises of more democratic governance and better life for all citizens. However, the economic transformation following the first democratic elections in 1994 have witnessed increased economic empowerment for a selected few black elite, while the majority of black people still live in abject poverty. It is argued that men's sense of hegemonic masculinity has come under pressure (Morrell, 2001). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as:

“the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women and other men who are considered to be weak” (Connell, 1995: 77).

various groups of men compete to occupy different positions of power

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore understood as both “hegemony over women” and “hegemony over subordinate masculinities” (Demetriou, 2001: 341). It is argued that class politics play a significant role in the expression of masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa amongst black working-class and middle-class men. The current South African social and economic conditions, including the impact of the global financial crisis, make it difficult for many young black men to achieve ideal notions of masculinity, such as securing jobs, marrying, fathering children or establishing their own households (Hunter, 2006). In *Changing Men in South Africa*, Morrell (2001) argues that men responded differently to their sense of disempowerment and marginalisation. What is evident is that various groups of men compete to occupy different positions of power through subordination of other men and women.

Connell (1995) further argues that different interpretations of masculine identity sit uneasily with each other, occupying hegemonic, subordinated, complicit or marginalised positions vis-à-vis each other, and reflecting ongoing support and/or contestation of hegemonic versions of masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been applied in many South African studies (see for example, Langa and Eagle, 2007; Morrell, 2001; Xaba, 2001). Nonetheless, Connell's use of hegemonic masculinity to account for power in gender relations can be criticised for its over-reliance on macro-sociological issues and its neglect of micro-psychological issues. For example, Connell fails to address the discursive strategies that men employ in their daily experiences (Demetriou, 2001). Furthermore, the categories he adopts do not fully describe the different positioning and strategic deployments used by men. In this *Article*, the term will be used

with caution to describe the experiences of marginalised young men in the post-apartheid South Africa. It is therefore the aim of this *Article* to explore how young black men in this particular context make sense of their involvement in service delivery protests in relation to powerful men and women occupying positions of authority in local councils. Do these young men draw on any notions of hegemonic masculinity to justify their violent protest actions? Do these young men also feel subordinated and marginalised in their daily lives by other men and women who occupy positions of power? How does the violent nature of protests impact on women's participation in local politics?

Methodology

Research design

The research for this study was conducted qualitatively in order to explore how young black men make sense of their involvement in service delivery protests occurring within their municipality. Qualitative research allowed the researchers in this study to gain in-depth information as well as a contextual perspective in order to understand how participants construct their social realities characterised by lack of basic services within their local municipalities. The subjective nature of qualitative research was essential for this particular study as it was aimed at understanding the meanings and subjective experiences that the protestors attached to their involvement in the violent service delivery protests.

Research settings

The study was conducted in two municipalities, namely Kungcatsha and Azania³, in Mpumalanga Province, which like the Western Cape and Gauteng has also been experiencing an unprecedented increase in the number of service protests in the period between 2007 to 2010 (Alexander, 2010; De Visser and Powell, 2012). Overall socio-economic indicators in these municipalities suggest that between 43%-60% of the households live below poverty levels with no access to formal housing and basic services, particularly access to water and electricity (von Holdt, 2011). The lack of

basic services was mentioned by the participants in the study as reasons for service delivery protests.

The two municipalities were also characterised by power struggles amongst members of the local ANC branches over positions and access to business opportunities and tenders in the municipality. For example, following allegations about the disappearance of R30 million in Kungcatsha, a group of local ANC leaders (who belonged to another faction in the ANC) organised residents to protest against corruption, joblessness and the failure of the municipality to provide essential basic services. In Azania, the protest was also about the disappearance of large sums of money, lack of clean running water, unfinished RDP houses and the demand for employment opportunities, particularly by the unemployed young men at a new mine opened in 2009. In all these protests, violence flared up when police were called in to disperse protestors, firing rubber bullets at the crowd. The protestors often responded to this by throwing stones at the police, barricading roads, looting shops owned by foreign nationals, burning municipal offices and the houses of councillors who were accused of corruption and incompetence. It is against this backdrop that the interest to explore issues of masculinities and protests was born as many of the protestors were young men who derived a sense of pride from their participation in violent confrontation during service delivery protests.

Recruiting participants and data collection methods

In total, 38 participants were interviewed in this study over a period of three to six months. Out of this sample, only six participants were females and the rest were males. Interviews took place a few weeks after the end of the protests, while others took place during the course of the protests and during by-elections after some councillors were removed from the council following the service delivery protests. A snowballing technique was used to access all key informants as research on service delivery protests is sensitive, given the nature of information that the participants shared with us about corruption and power struggles in municipalities. No names will be used to protect participants'

identity as many informants raised concerns about possible retribution or victimisation from state agents and political opponents if their views were to be identified.

Data analysis

Focus groups and individual interviews were recorded and transcribed for detailed thematic analysis, which involved reading and re-reading of interview material to extract significant themes regarding how the participants made sense of their participation in violent service delivery protests. For the purposes of this *Article*, special attention was paid to reasons that the participants offered for their involvement in protests and how these were related to notions of masculinities.

Findings and discussion

The key themes that emerged in this study are that young men appeared to feel powerless due to their economic positions as compared to the local black elite who had access to tenders and contracts within the municipality, which then became the centre of the power struggle between the two groups (working-class and middle-class men). The working-class men had to draw on the repertoires of militarised masculinities of the past through *toyitoying*, burning of public property, and singing popular anti-apartheid struggle songs, some of which were modified to talk about current conditions post-1994. In this sense militarised masculinities continue to be valued and re-invented for current circumstances.

Another key theme that emerged was on the violent clashes with the police in which young men spoke about the importance of being brave, fearless, aggressive, and violent in what they described as a war with police. These themes reveal the way in which masculinity and violence are intertwined in service delivery protests.

Young men's opposition to more 'successful' masculinities: "I want to get married but I cannot afford *lobola*"⁴

Many of the interviewees in the protest leadership were unemployed young males

who spoke about the frustration of the lack of job opportunities within their area:

"There is too much poverty here. People are angry and frustrated that they can't find jobs, while councillors are busy hiring their girlfriends and relatives in the municipality."

Another participant said:

"Look I have not been working for the last three years. I want to work but you can't find work in this area if you don't have political connections. We submit CVs and CVs but nothing happens."

Lack of job opportunities was cited as one of the reasons by many interviewees for violently protesting against municipality officials who were accused of corruption and nepotistic employment practices. The participants spoke at length about how lack of job opportunities negatively impacted on their sense of manhood:

"I want to get married but I cannot afford *lobola* because I'm not working."

"I hate that Mr. P (who is a ward councillor in Kungcatsha) because he took my girlfriend. He has money and I don't have money. You can't find a girlfriend if you don't have money."

"Some of the councillors like to show off. They come here and park their cars. We wash their cars and [they] give us some money. These guys buy expensive liquor and have money, while we have nothing."

In the focus group interview, the participants complained bitterly about councillors (mainly men) who drive flashy expensive cars, have money and as a result, are able to attract their girlfriends. There was a sense of young males feeling envious and powerless in their inability to achieve the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Hunter (2005) refers to these men as men without *amandla* (power). Their sense of powerlessness became more vivid when one of the participants complained angrily about his inability to pay *lobola* and how he could not find a wife, as a result. Psychologically, it is

possible for the feelings of disempowerment and envy to turn into hatred and anger. One participant openly told us that he hated Mr. P (a councillor who drives a flashy Q7 Audi) because the councillor had taken his girlfriend. Related to the feeling of male impotence, a theme that was also dominant in the focus group was the perception that young girls also had failings as they only dated men who had money. The male participants were frustrated by the lack of job opportunities, and saw their failure partly as meaning that they would neither be able to find wives, or impress their girlfriends, compared with Mr. P who had access to multiple girlfriends and drove a flashy car, a theme we return to later. The participants expressed satisfaction that after their violent service delivery protests that some councillors who were accused of maladministration, corruption and incompetence were removed from their positions. It is possible that violence was used by disempowered young men as a means to reassert their lost power, particularly if the targets of their protests are men who appear to emasculate them, monopolising the available resources and opportunities (Dlamini, Langa and von Holdt, 2011). For example, one participant said:

“We all want to eat, but these guys are now monopolising all tenders and contracts in the municipality. So we had no choice but to remove them through violent means.”

Protests related to service delivery may be further understood within the broader politics of post-apartheid liberation social constructs of freedom that operate within structural political fields at both the macro- and micro-levels. Posel (2010) makes a similar argument in her assertion that consumption in post-apartheid South Africa must be read within a historically constitutive relation that regulates consumption differently amongst political officials. In other words, the conspicuous consumption of wealth enjoyed by a small elite of the emerging black middle class and the aspirations to the same enjoyment desired by marginalised black men and women is at the core of current constructs and meanings attached to liberation and freedom. For example, in 2007 the then head of communications in the South

African Presidency, Smuts Ngonyama, also official spokesperson for the ANC and former anti-apartheid activist, proclaimed in the midst of increased accusations of corruption that he “didn’t join the struggle to be poor” (*ibid*: 157). Posel refers to this and more examples of structural misappropriation of wealth as embodying a kind of “politics of consumption” (*ibid*: 160) that has both produced and fostered the idea of freedom and liberation as tantamount to wealth acquisition.

It also emerged in the research that the protests in Kungcatsha and Azania were about access to business opportunities in the municipality, linking with Brannon and David’s (1977, in Eagle, 1998) concept of ‘big wheel’ in which men are expected to aspire to power, status, and wealth. The struggle within municipalities between the new black elite and working-class men who experience exclusion in the new dispensation post-1994 is also about their failure to access state resources, against all the promises of a better life for all. The working-class men as illustrated earlier felt that they had no choice but to deploy violent means to remove those in the position of power, by drawing on the repertoires of militarised masculinities in what they described as a war with police who were called to quell violent service delivery protests which involved destruction of public and private property, as discussed in the following section.

Drawing on the repertoires of militarised masculinities to justify violent protests

The repertoires of protests in these two case studies followed a familiar pattern to those established during the anti-apartheid struggle, which involved *toyitoying*, blocking roads with burning tyres, singing struggle songs (which were modified to talk about current conditions post 1994), brandishing pangas, and sticks (Dlamini, 2011). In the two research sites, the participants mentioned that violence started after the police were called in:

“People would converge in public but the police would fire teargas and that made the people wild.”

"The cops started shooting at us and arresting others. That made people angry."

In retaliation, the participants asserted that they then started throwing stones at the police. According to young men interviewed in this study, they had to be brave and fearless in their violent clashes with police which lasted for about two to three weeks, with scores injured and others arrested for public violence and allegedly tortured in prison.

"We were prepared to die for the cause."

"Yes this was war."

The participants asserted that they also had to use sophisticated methods such as digging up holes on the road as traps for police vehicles, and once trapped, throw stones at them, in the process it is reported that some police officials were severely injured. Evidently, digging up holes on the road was the re-invention of anti-apartheid tactics in the battle against the special police units during apartheid (Langa and Eagle, 2008). Young men in this study (despite not living in the height of apartheid) seemed to be drawing on the repertoires of the past in their violent clashes with police, such as also singing liberation struggle songs. For example, in Azania, one of the popular songs that the protestors sung was "*fana ba APLA batraina ngamaphoyisa*" (translation: young APLA [the Azanian People's Liberation Army] men are using the police to exercise and build more muscles). The protestors said they will chant and parade like soldiers when singing this song; *abafana* in the song-means young men who are fit, strong, athletic, and powerful. The protestors were now using violence to assert their masculine power over male police officers. Whitehead (2005) has argued that it is through male-to-male violence that men are able to achieve a sense of manhood. In such contests, the man who is defeated is rendered unmanly.

Another popular song that was sung during the protests was: *dubula dubula, dubula dubula (chorus) ngesibhamu, bayasaba amagwala, bayasaba amagwala (chorus), dubula dubula, dubula dubula ngesibhamu (chorus)*. The protestors through singing this song mock the police and taunt

them to shoot at them, but they are not going to run away because they are not *amagwala* (Zulu word for cowards), but fearless men.

One protestor said:

"Singing give us power and energy."

By singing this song the protestors who stand in the forefront in the conflict with the police are seen as the brave and true warriors in the struggle against poor service delivery. Such individuals are also accorded the status of being 'real' fighters who are not afraid of the police. At rallies, the protestors often made gestures of themselves carrying guns as they reenacted President Zuma's popular and controversial song, *umshini wami*, during Zuma's address to the community. Interestingly, this performance was not an interpellation of Zuma as a struggle hero but rather as a symbolic figure of the 'new' oppression of post-apartheid South Africa. The inversion of Zuma and his government as agents of oppression and the appropriation of this specific song that is used specifically *against* Zuma is evident.

The significance of these performative acts further lie in the intricate ways that through song, both the performers and words contribute to enabling what Gunner (2010: 75) describes as a different "imagining of citizenship in the post-apartheid era in South Africa". This is particularly significant in terms of the resistance to the current meanings of 'consumption' attached to liberation as embodied through public political figures. Through protest and song, new meanings of 'true liberation' are enacted and introduce a new construct around what true citizenship might mean. Furthermore, the material and discursive spaces inhabited by these protestors is thus often contested and renegotiated by them, imagining new possibilities for citizenship. The reimagining of citizenship is further intertwined with other imaginings of manhood, in which economic opportunities will be available for them to achieve ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

For Gunner (2010), song in these instances comes to function as a form of 'mediation' that allows for new possibilities of masculinities to emerge both from and within contexts of violence. Through these struggle songs, masculinity is reimagined

and reinscribed. The freedom that is reimagined implicitly challenges the black elite masculinity that currently attaches to social meanings of freedom. For the young men, protest and the performative acts of singing come to be seen as acts of insurgent citizenship as they work in collaboration with others. This has created a sense of 'comraderie' amongst young men in both Kungcatsha and Azania:

"I was never interested in politics before the protest but now I see myself as a comrade. We are all comrades."

The construct of 'comradeship' became intertwined with 'legitimising' violence against state institutions, such as burning of municipality buildings and cars. Many participants, as illustrated in the extract above, called each other 'comrade' which gave them a sense of group identity, togetherness and oneness. Commenting on the violent behaviour of the youth in the early 1990s, Marks (2001) argues that labels such as 'comrade' create male bonding amongst young male protestors. This male bond, argues Horrocks (1994) develops due to the fact that they are in a crisis, fighting a common enemy, which in this case is the police, *othered* as the enemy because of their use of excessive force against the protestors. Young male protestors' bravery in confrontations with the police was widely celebrated in these communities. The same men who are often seen as having no social value or status, poor and unemployed, have reasserted their manhood through the act of protest, which may require public displays of violence in defending themselves. They perceived themselves as agents of change for their communities to gain the access to basic services, such as water, electricity and housing.

The issue of contested masculinities is seen to be bound up within contestations of material freedom and consumption that become almost inseparable.

Young men's opposition to foreign masculinities

The 'war' the young men saw themselves waging in the contest over power and

delivery of basic services required that they commit criminal acts. These included violent skirmishes with police, stoning cars, barricading a nearby highway and demanding toll fees from motorists, as well as the looting of shops owned by foreign nationals. Participants said:

"The looting of shops owned by foreign nationals is a criminal act."

"People were getting free groceries from shops owned by foreigners."

Some of the attacks were reminiscent of the 2008 xenophobic violence. What is evident is that foreign nationals are seen as easy targets due to their vulnerable and marginalised position within the community and the society more generally, and are often scapegoated for a multitude of problems for which they should not be held responsible. It goes without saying that scapegoating deflects attention away from the real causes of service delivery protests, which is corruption, nepotism, and cadre deployment of incompetent and unqualified councillors.

In justifying their attack of foreign nationals, some participants asserted that foreign nationals sell drugs, and also steal their women. Current conceptualisations of [black] masculinity are significantly played out in xenophobic violence in post-apartheid contexts. Dodson and Oelofse (2000) make a similar argument in their study on conflict between local residents and Namibian immigrants in the Mizamoyethu community in the Western Cape. In one of complaints reported by the local residents it is noted that the immigrants are perceived to be better off than locals because they "dressed smartly and 'flashed money around, thereby 'corrupting' local women" (*ibid*: 125). The issue of contested masculinities is seen to be bound up within contestations of material freedom and consumption that become almost inseparable. The anxieties implied in notions of "taking our women" are manifestations of what Ratele (2004: 151) refers to as "hetero-masculine anxieties". In other words, the implied meanings of masculinity are linked to economic and cultural relations of power that are best read in relation to historical relations of domination that continue to be reinscribed in the present-day. In

this context, power relations are played out between black masculinities (embodied in black South African and foreign nationals) through access to women. More significantly, black women's bodies become the site through which these contestations and anxieties are played out. Gqola (2008: 218) makes a similar point when she asserts that the "sexualisation of xenophobia" attests to the broader commodification of black women's bodies:

"Negrophobic xenophobic sentiment is often couched as a battle between two sets of men. This is very evident in the oft-heard retort, 'these guys come here and steal our women and jobs'.... Specific masculine entitlement and 'threat' are clearly encoded in this resentful articulation: black South African women and jobs are the entitlement of black South African men."

The reimagining of masculinity is thus enabled within a broader discursive commodification of women's bodies in which the female body merely becomes symbolic capital that attests to virile and powerful manhood. Black heterosexual masculinity is in conflict with other non-South African black masculinity in ways that allude to the contestations of hegemonic masculinity that is reinscribed through sexual prowess and material wealth. It is worth noting the very real continuity between the young men's anger towards elite councillors and their anger towards more well off male foreigners – in both cases it derives from the sense of their own disempowerment and emasculation. There is a sense of young men's masculinity being under siege from all sides – local elites, successful foreigners, and powerful women (see below) in relation to the hegemonic paradigm of masculinity – hence their response with a reimagined masculinity, which is characterised by violence.

Young men's opposition to women's authority to participate in local politics

In South Africa, political and economic systems have been changing and there have also been significant changes in gender

relations. Since 1994, government policies have been aimed at reducing some of the inequalities that previously separated women and men (Morrell, 2001), based on the ideal of shifting from a male-dominated patriarchal society to a new social order of equality between men and women. It is official ANC policy to increase the number of women in leadership positions in government structures, including municipalities. In Kungcatsha, the mayor was a woman and male protestors blamed her gender for the poor leadership when they remarked:

"We can't be led by a woman. Women are stubborn."

"Women are not good leaders. We don't want women as mayors or councilors."

Interestingly, the two mayors who were removed from their positions in both municipalities, were both women (Dlamini, 2011). It is possible that the female leaders were being targeted by young male protestors who were feeling threatened and emasculated by their positions of power, creating what has become known as a 'crisis in masculinity' (Reid and Walker, 2005). This 'crisis in masculinity' seems to involve the radical questioning or redefinition of the meaning of 'masculinity' which has occurred as a result of changes in social values, including the encouragement of women to participate in the public sphere, the job market and in politics (*ibid*). During the by-elections to vote for new councillors, many young men expressed sexist views in relation to potential female candidates:

"*Azibafuni abafazi* (We don't want women)."

"We don't want women in these elections to play games."

"We don't want another Thambi (pseudonym for the former mayor). Women are not good leaders."

Thus, the current political climate is characterised by generic violent forms of engagement that are also gendered as evidenced in the participants' abusive comments about women councillors. Female politicians are thus caught up in a gender

contestation that intersects with the broader violent practices. It is therefore not always clear the degree to which the protests against female politicians are imbued with misogynist feelings. While some female politicians interviewed spoke about their fear to even attend branch meetings due to the level of violence characterising some of these meetings, others demonstrated active engagement and participation within the political arena:

“Girls and women are scared to go to meetings due to high levels of violence in some of the meetings but I still go to the meetings. I’m not scared of all these guys who are making threats. I am a comrade and member of the ANC and SACP and have the right to go and attend these meetings.”

In both Kungcatsha and Azania, there were reports of people fighting in ANC branch meetings over the election of potential candidates for by-elections held after the removal of current councillors immediately after the violent service delivery protests. One female candidate spoke about receiving threats from male colleagues who were not happy about her appointment as a candidate for their ward. She said

“They kept on saying to me is your house insured. Is your house insured?”

The threat, that they would burn her house if she failed to deliver, suggests that intimidation against female candidates was becoming increasingly common in local politics in Kungcatsha and Azania and demonstrates the expectation that women fit in with masculinised political practices of violence. The female politician mentioned that she sometimes worries about the safety of her children because of her involvement in politics. Yet, this participant also demonstrates her agency in challenging this climate of violence against local women leaders:

“Yeah, I told them that my house is not insured and I’m not scared of them and I accepted the nomination to be one of the councillors despite all their threats to burn my house. We also fought for this democracy as the women of South Africa

and we must not allow men to intimidate us. We also have a right as women to participate in politics.”

Nonetheless, it seems the prevalence of violence in local politics has a gendered effect, peripheralising and discouraging other women from participation in politics (von Holdt, 2011; Dlamini, Langa and von Holdt, 2011). The ousted female mayor in Kungcatsha stated that:

“That ANC today has become highly competitive and it was the survival of the fittestI feel the ANC is abandoning us. Unfortunately, the Women’s League in the region, province and nationally has no voice.”

In the above quote, there is a sense that women politicians are feeling unsupported by the ANC, including the ANC Women’s League that is perceived as now redundant and voiceless in advocating the interests of women in politics. Female politicians are also feeling powerless in competing with their male counterparts who have political connections in all structures of the ANC. Today the ANC is characterised by violent power struggles and a matter of the survival of the fittest (Dlamini, Langa and von Holdt, 2011). The former female mayor saw an exclusive male culture where:

“the leadership of the ANC don’t drink totos with us. They don’t socialise with us, but the male mayors socialise with them.”

It was repeatedly asserted in the interviews that politics of today is not about skills or competence but about political connections with individuals in position of power. The problematic nature of political patronage was further elaborated by a group of young men interviewed who saw politics in their municipalities as sexualised as young women were perceived to get jobs in the municipality due to their sexual relations with powerful men in the council. This suggests that the men saw patronage practices as sexualised for women, while unproblematically politicised for men.

“It is difficult for us as *amagents* (guys) to get jobs here but all beautiful women and girls here are working in the municipality because they are dating all these councillors. It is wrong my man because these people don’t know anything but just pretty faces. This is the cause of service delivery.”

As discussed earlier, the men constantly compared themselves to men in the elite, and expressed open criticism at women for their willingness to trade jobs for sexual favour with men in power (Dlamini, Langa and von Holdt, 2011). A critical understanding of these narratives would need to emphasise that they are not raising opposition to sexism, but their anger was rather due to their inability to compete with men in the elite. Although they criticised women and girls for putting materialism first, it was observed that they also aspired to and had fantasies of joining the men in the elite and wanted to emulate their ability to own material resources and display their status through consumption of expensive cell phones, branded clothes and cars, and attracting multiple girlfriends. In this respect, working-class men may be accused of being somewhat hypocritical for condemning the black middle-class men for hiring their girlfriends as it was clear that their condemnation of these men was about envy and an accompanying sense of powerlessness in the current moment. The young men were also complicit in the objectification of women and girls as potential sex objects for men with power, status and wealth.

In *Masculine Domination* (1998) Bourdieu highlights the invisible domination that exists within fields that embody gendered hierarchies of power. This idea of symbolic domination was of similar interest to the socialist feminist Simone de Beauvoir. Writing in *The Second Sex* (1989: xxii) she notes that women:

“appear . . . to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he in reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.”

The ‘othering’ of female agents within the political field effectively reinscribes symbolic domination that decrees and legitimates political spaces as the exclusive domain of men with women reproduced within these spaces through sexualised constructs that once again reassert the commodification of women’s bodies. Furthermore, the relations of patronage that exist within these spaces are constructed within sexual frames of reference but also, women’s participation as citizens within the body politic is disrupted through reassertion of hegemonic masculinity.

Concluding remarks

This *Article* has discussed the subjective meanings attached to service delivery protests by a group of male protestors in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Constructs that reflect what it means to be a male citizen in post-apartheid South Africa are reflected in the resistances and reimagining of masculinity as tied to the ANC state and embodied in the process of service delivery protests and reenactment of key performative acts that both reinscribe and reject old and new meanings of struggle, liberation and freedom. Furthermore, these processes of protest reinscribe other social meanings of masculinity that reflect intricate and broader processes of dis/empowerment that are tied to economic power and which are often embodied in violent sexual inscriptions that construct a threatening sexualised ‘other’, in this instance black women and black male foreign nationals and local black middle-class men. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity allows for an understanding of the macro-structural influences on masculine identity and experiences, such as the intersections of gender and class within the post-apartheid context. The processes of this intersection have been highlighted as central to such an understanding and as a useful development of applications of the notion of hegemonic masculinity. The *Article* further demonstrates that the complexities of masculinities within this context is fused with other layers of identification that do not always exclusively centre on class dynamics. Merging the macro- and micro-levels of analysis to further engage this issue is recommended. Lastly, the experiences of women leaders

who are seen as 'invading' male spaces in local politics present some challenges to the entrenchment of gender equity within the political domain and to other aspects of engaging masculine identities in such an endeavor. Such a process must also account for the nuanced and varied processes and means that women themselves are utilising to counteract such hegemonic spaces and domination.

Notes

1. This Article is based on a research report entitled, *The Smoke that Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective violence and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa* (van Holdt et al, (2011)), in which in-depth interviews were conducted in eight communities that had violent service delivery protests, done in collaboration between the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at the University of Witwatersrand. The Article is based on interviews which we conducted in two municipalities in Mpumalanga. It would not have been possible without the support of Karl von Holdt, Nomfundo Mogapi, and Adele Kirsten.
2. The term service delivery protests is used to refer to a situation where community members decide to organise a public protest activity over lack of municipality services, such as water, electricity, housing and other basic services. More often than not these protests are characterised by violence.
3. The names Kungcatsha and Azania are pseudonyms for these municipalities in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in this Article, given the sensitive nature of the information the participants shared with us about corruption and power struggles in their municipalities.
4. *Lobola* refers to the amount of money that a prospective husband pays to the bride's family.

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