



Us and them: Privileged emotions of Cape Town's urban water crisis

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ABSTRACT

Political ecology has already engaged with emotions in order to reveal the intimate, unconscious and unexplored power dynamics which characterise patterns of water use and control. Similar explorations have mostly focused on the emotional struggles of structurally disadvantaged people rather than on the emotions of those with privilege: the elite. This oversight becomes problematic when it conceals disproportionate shares of power and the implications that such power has on the sustainable use and just distribution of water resources. The 2018 water crisis which affected Cape Town's metropolitan area constitutes the empirical context of this paper, which sets out to address the aforementioned research gap. Focusing on the elite's emotional responses to Cape Town's drought and subsequent water crisis, this paper seeks to advance political ecology's understanding of urban water crises by retracing the emotional geography of Cape Town's most privileged urban dwellers. In particular, this work leverages the concept of subjectivity to explain the way emotions are constructed and come to materially and discursively reproduce historical power dynamics. These findings reveal that fear, anger, and a sense of pride felt by wealthier Capetonians results from and perpetuates the privileged conditions of those elite. Rooted in colonial and apartheid past, Capetonians' privileged emotions end up perpetuating the main causes of the water crisis and eventually excluding the most disadvantaged inhabitants from future use and control of water resources. Ultimately, by connecting with privileged emotions, it is possible to challenge certain subjectivities and create space for more just and sustainable urban-water imaginaries.

1. Day Zero: The water crisis of affluent Capetonians?

"We go through a process of change in the same way that we go through a process of grief so that (...) people (are) first shocked, then, they do not believe, gradually, they get angry, and eventually, they accept the reality. We went through those stages when responding to the water crisis. People were initially shocked and horrified, then, they got angry, they wanted to know who to blame [...] Then, they got to the point of "ok so the rain is not falling, we need to actually do something about that". So, people started adopting totally new behaviours and installing new infrastructure at their own cost"

Direct quote by: KSWC

"All these little things (change practices of water use) take more time and if you are not motivated emotionally, it becomes a burden. The fantastic thing of the drought in South Africa, was that we have genuinely felt the fact that we were going to run out of water. The drought made us see it as very serious, and understand it. So there has been a permanent shift.

People now really get it how water is important. This is the only shift that can be permanent, is that people got it emotionally not just intellectually."

Direct quote by: KKC

These introductory quotes describe the manner in which Capetonians have faced up to the water crisis that affected Cape Town urban area after 3 years of severe meteorological drought. KSWC insists that Cape Town's inhabitants have first lived the water crisis emotionally before reacting to it and eventually changing their everyday practices of water use. In particular, KSWC describes the emotions of fear and anger that prevailed amongst people refusing to accept the idea of future water shortages. Similarly, KKC also believes that if there has been a change in people's behaviour, that change was mostly a result of the emotions that people felt during the latest water crisis. The most intense emotional reactions were triggered on the 18th January 2018, when the executive mayor of Cape Town, Patricia De Lille, declared that unless residents drastically cut water consumption, the City would face a 'Day Zero' and run out of water on the 22nd of April 2018. Thankfully, after six months of severe water restrictions, on June 2018, the Municipality decided to

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suspend the Day Zero alert. According to local water institutions and international media, apart from an unexpected spell of rainfall, the city avoided a water shortage thanks to the sacrifice of local residents who complied with stringent water restrictions, altered their consumption practices, and paid heed to their daily water consumption (Baker, 2018).

One of the main aspects highlighted by national and international media about Day Zero was the fact that the water crisis had seemingly affected a large urban area of affluent inhabitants. According to predominant interpretations of Cape Town water crisis, well-off inhabitants were the main social group affected by the drought and sacrificed the most relative to other social groups (Warner and Meissner, 2021; Baker, 2018). Other in-depth analyses of Cape Town's water crisis reveal a more irregular and uneven picture of the crisis: where poor and black suburbs experienced heavy shortages while white and more privileged households pay for additional consumption and rely on alternative water sources (Enqvist et al., 2022; Savelli et al., 2021; Robins, 2019). Nonetheless, the water crisis provoked a significant emotional response among affluent Capetonians, who, as the initial quotes point out, had to adjust their everyday water use practices (Köhlin et al., 2018).

Political ecology and other critical studies have started to account for emotional responses, and the manner in which emotions reshape (the experience of) water use, access and control (Truelove, 2019; Sultana, 2015, 2011). Yet, those studies tend to focus on the everyday struggle of poor or low-income dwellers rather than on the emotions of the elite. This dominant focus becomes problematic when it limits understanding of the way elites can disproportionately control and use natural resources at the expense of the environment and less privileged social groups (Beaverstock et al., 2004). Thus, to provide a thorough interpretation of water crises, their genesis and future implications, this article enters the households of more affluent Capetonians, the elite, and studies their emotional experience of the drought and the water crisis. A focus on emotion is needed to make visible the most intimate, unconscious and unexplored dynamics which differentiate subjectivities and eventually reshape the everyday and extraordinary experience of water (in)security (Doshi, 2017; Truelove, 2019; 2011; Sultana, 2020). To make sense of emotions, this paper leverages the notion of subjectivity as it represents what neurologists would refer to as *emotion concepts* (Barrett, 2017). Emotion concepts designate reference models that the brain uses to categorize external sensations and in turn, construct emotional responses to the present from experiences of the past. In a similar way, subjectivities relate to the way people understand themselves and their relationship to their context (Mansfield et al., 2020; Morales and Harris, 2014; Blackman et al., 2008; Gill, 2008).

To study the privileged emotional experiences of a water crisis, this paper first unravels the theoretical background to frame the emotional experience of urban water crisis, and subsequently identifies the research gap this work aims to address. Then, this study describes the privileged emotional geographies of Cape Town's water crisis alongside discussing the socioenvironmental implications of the elite's emotional responses. Next, the paper elaborates on the materiality and temporality of privileged emotions to explain their genesis as well as their discursive and material implications. This work concludes by highlighting the scholarly potential of a focus on emotions and, in particular, the emotions felt by the elite. By revealing the unconscious, privileged emotions can help retrace the root cause of the unjust and unsustainable water practices of the elite.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Urban political ecology of water crises: From the urban to the body scale

Work on the (urban) political ecology of water has largely explained the production of urban water crises by politicizing understandings of water flows across intra-urban spaces (Loftus, 2009). Mostly concerned with water injustice, (urban) political ecology of water unearths the

power relations through which water resources are produced, distributed and transformed within a city. Across similar studies, urban water crises can be explained as mechanisms of exclusion from and access to water (Swyngedouw, 1997) or as material and discursive production of water scarcity (Bakker, 2000, 2003; Budds, 2004; Loftus, 2007; Mehta, 2010, 2003; Kaika, 2003; Otero et al., 2011; Millington, 2018). Overall, political ecological explanations of water crises, which encompass experiences of drought, water shortage, or uneven water access, are always produced within certain political spaces and thus result from prevailing power structures (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

Across the first two research phases (Heynen's (2014; 2016) progress reports), urban political ecology was not paying considerable attention to the subjective dimensions of urban water struggles whilst mostly privileging urban scales of analysis (Truelove, 2019; Doshi, 2017; Grove, 2009). Similar studies have often used Marx, Lefebvre and Harvey's theorizations of urban socrionatures to describe cities as sites of convergence for capitalist economies of production (Gabriel, 2014) and circulations of water as embedded in the "political ecology of power through which the urbanization process unfolds" (Swyngedouw, 1997, p.311). Thus, whilst the *urban* became the most significant scale to explore the capitalist production of nature, at the same time, capitalism became the main *metabolism* and power structure to characterize the urban sphere and urban water flows (Gabriel, 2014; Grove, 2009). This predominant urban focus has also entailed the inevitable disavowal of "struggles over meanings and practices of nature and the city that shape identities that make some forms of urban metabolisms possible while foreclosing others" (Escobar, 1999, p.209). Thus, to reveal the many dimensions of the urban water struggle, urban political ecologists have started exploring other scales of analysis—e.g. the households and the body— whilst also developing a closer engagement with post-structural theories (Gabriel, 2014). This post-structural turn has brought the attention of urban political ecologies toward discourse, environmental imaginary and subjectivity in the constitution of urban spaces (Doshi, 2017; Gabriel, 2014; Grove, 2009). In this way, urban political ecology has moved away from conceptualization of power that emphasize *power over* to capture instead, the way multiple or nonlinear power dynamics become embedded in complex assemblages or web of socrionatural relationships (Ahlborg and Nightingale, 2018). This multidimensional understanding of power conceives subjects as produced and existing within a set of socioenvironmental relations infused with power (Nightingale, 2011).

Subjectivity is largely conceived as the condition or the way subjects feel, perceive, believe, desire or experience themselves and their relation with the rest of the world (Mansfield et al., 2020; Morales and Harris, 2014; Nightingale, 2011; Blackman et al., 2008; Gill, 2008). Morales and Harris' (2014, p.706) refer to subjectivity as "what it means and feels like to exist within a specific place, time or set of relationships". Subjectivities reflect what people have experienced, learned about, and interpreted throughout their lives and prior generations (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Urban political ecology explains that subjectivities internalize the complex workings of power, thereby becoming active agents that shape and at the same time, are shaped by prevailing social, cultural and political spaces (Blackman et al., 2008). Through this power laden assemblage of socioenvironmental relations, subjectivity can either reinforce or resist domination (Blackman et al., 2008; Morales and Harris, 2014; Nightingale, 2011). Thus, by focusing on subjectivity, urban political ecology is able to highlight how different urban subjects can visualize (or not) different modes of interaction between the human and the non-human (e.g. water), thereby enabling the creation of one kind of urban environment instead of another (Gabriel, 2014).

Recently, the body, i.e. the place of subjective experience, has become a recurring scale of inquiry in the urban political ecology of water (Truelove, 2019). Doshi (2017, p.126) calls *embodied* political ecologies those studies that have enriched capitalists socrionatures with the "fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday". A focus on the body makes visible the intimate, unconscious, and power laden processes

which differentiate subjectivities and their everyday experiences (Doshi, 2017). For instance, it is within embodied experiences and everyday practices that the intersectional axes of gender, class, race, religion and other social differences become visible and produce subjective experiences. Amongst other feminist political ecologists, Truelove (2011) and Sultana (2020) have focused on the body to map the everyday struggle over access to water in India and Bangladesh respectively. Sultana (2020) relates daily water practices with gender, class and other vulnerabilities, to demonstrate that water access is essentially an embodied process. Similarly, Truelove (2011) focuses on the embodied experience of water insecurities to explain how and why inequalities perpetuate or exacerbate themselves, even when both water quantities and qualities are improved at larger scales — e.g. the urban. These examples of an embodied political ecology of water disclose undertheorized dimensions and dynamics in the production of water insecurities and inequalities (Truelove, 2019). Nightingale (2011) explains that attention to everyday, seemingly mundane, spatial practices gives insight into how people produce a particular relationship with ‘others’ including their environments, that are rarely ecologically neutral. Ultimately, a focus on embodied subjectivities serves to unravel the power-laden web of socio-environmental relations that produces urban spaces and in turn, facilitate more transparent and just political transformations (Doshi, 2017; Gabriel, 2014).

2.2. The place of emotions in urban water struggles

Inspired by post-structuralist ideas on power and subjectivities, urban political ecology is able to explore how different power relations and inequalities are continuously (re)produced throughout subjective imaginaries, perceptions, beliefs, and everyday interactions with socio-natures (González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2020; Nightingale, 2011, 2013; Sultana, 2009; Blackman et al., 2008). Theories of affects in human geography conceptualize this subjective process through the notion of affect, or the transpersonal capacity that a body has to be affected and to affect (Anderson, 2006). Affect is distributed between, and can happen outside, bodies which are not exclusively human, and might include technologies, things, non-human matter, or discourses (Curti et al., 2011; Lorimer, 2008; Massumi, 2002). According to this theory, subjectivities are then not contained within the body or the psyche, but emerge relationally. One way in which subjectivities emerge (and affects occur) is emotionally (Massumi, 2002). Precisely, emotions are the most intimate and intense way in which subjects experience and respond to affective modification to themselves (Lorimer, 2008; Anderson, 2006; Massumi, 2002). The human geographers Anderson and Smith (2001, p.7), define emotions as those “*key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made*”. This paper sets to unravel how emotions work through and, both materially and discursively, (re) shape socio-environmental relations (Askins and Swanson, 2019; Doshi, 2017).

Neuroscientists’ theory of constructed emotion offers valuable insights into the fundamental link between subjectivities and emotions (Barrett, 2017). Instead of subjectivities, these scientists use the notion of *emotion concepts* to define the past references that the brain uses to make sense of incoming sensory inputs and in turn, construct emotions. By this account, emotions are not uncontrollable or hardwired brain reactions but rather responses to external stimuli constructed upon past experiences or stereotypical conceptions of reality (Yowei and Natisse, 2017; Barrett, 2017; 2018). This understanding highlights that emotions would not exist without *emotion concepts* or subjectivities. Furthermore, this conceptualization is particularly useful to explain how power emerges through emotions and in turn, how socio-environmental transformations of the urban waterscape occurs. Hence, emotions and affects are crucial to explain issues of social and spatial justice (Askins and Swanson, 2019).

Despite being an integral part of the human world, the study of emotion in human geography and political ecology has largely been

silenced, belittled and undermined by both academia and in the public sphere (Askins, 2019). Emotions were judged as too personal or irrational and therefore irrelevant for the study of human geography (Davidson and Milligan, 2004). Thinking emotionally has been “*implicitly cast as a source of subjectivity which clouds vision and impairs judgement*” (Anderson and Smith, 2001, p.7). Nevertheless, Anderson and Smith (2001) argue that neglecting emotions as an object of study, generates an incomplete understanding of the world: one that overlooks a multitude of social relations that reshape every subjectivity and eventually produce the society we live in. Since Anderson and Smith’s (2001) “emotional turn” in geography, many scholars have started connecting with emotions and their intersection with subjectivities, power and ultimately, socio-natures (Askins, 2019; Askins and Swanson, 2019; Pile, 2010; Sharp, 2009; Bondi, 2014, 2006; Nightingale, 2011; Thien, 2005; Bennett, 2004, 2009; Davidson and Milligan, 2004). These scholars stress the fact that all human experiences and interactions with other people, objects or places are constituted through emotional geographies. As Bennet (2004) explains, every rational or irrational action necessitates a facilitating emotion to be initiated and therefore achieved. That is: without emotion there is no action. Thus, if on the one hand, emotions are essential because they create the lived experience (Bennett, 2004, 2009), on the other, emotions matter because they affect the way humans interact with places (Bondi, 2006). As Bondi (2006) argues, accounting for emotions allows human geographies to develop more nuanced and integrated understanding of the complexity of human relations with space.

Urban political ecologists have also started to consider emotions as their object of inquiry (González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2020; Truelove, 2019; Doshi, 2017; González-Hidalgo, 2017; Ryan, 2016; Sultana, 2009, 2015, 2011, 2020, 2021; Kearney and Bradley, 2009). In her plea for an embodiment of urban political ecologies, Doshi (2017) describes emotional geographies as fundamental to understand how socio-natures are materially and discursively produced at a body scale. Similarly, Sultana (2015) and Truelove (2019) reflect on the way emotions come to matter in the production of resources access, use, and control. They show that emotions are able to influence and therefore reshape the everyday water practices (Truelove, 2019; Sultana, 2020, 2015, 2011). For instance, emotional distress can affect women choices between drinking contaminated water or paying additional costs for slightly better-quality water (Sultana, 2020). Thus, these scholars emphasize the role that emotions play in re-negotiating and re-producing water-society relations.

González-Hidalgo and Zografos (2020) argue that emotions provide a conceptual ground for investigating environmental conflicts. González-Hidalgo (2017) builds on this idea, describing the relationship between emotions, power, and environmental conflicts in Chile and Mexico. According to her thesis, thinking emotionally reveals *how* and *why* certain subjectivities come to reproduce or subvert hegemonic powers and their actions. Askins and Swanson, (2019) explain that emotions reproduce the multiple and non-linear power relationships that have shaped subjectivities in the first place. They assert that oppression and injustice are, and have to be understood, as deeply emotional. In this sense, thinking emotionally becomes essential to fully grasp “the embodied and unconscious dimensions of oppression”. Bonilla-Silva (2019) takes this argument further, focusing specifically on racial oppression. He states that to eradicate racism it is necessary to uproot the visible component of oppression as well as to demolish its emotional skeleton.

Throughout these case studies political ecology explains how emotions are relationally produced through interactions between people and places (Sultana, 2015). Emotions represent the connective tissues that link human experiences with geographies of places (González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2020; Kearney and Bradley, 2009; Davidson and Milligan, 2004). More precisely, emotions mediate in a significant way the relationships between the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective, the human and the non-human. The significance of studying

emotions lies within this relationality. As such, rather than abstract concepts, emotions should be considered as connective medium that reveal the human relationships within others and with the context of these interactions (Bennet, 2009). The relationality of emotions also harmonizes with neuroscientists' theory of emotion concepts and constructed emotions, for it discloses the socio, cultural, historical and political milieu that produces them (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Ryan, 2016; Bennet, 2009; Pile, 2010). It is through such relationality that emotions reveal power dynamics and their *temporality*. Colonialism (Kearney and Bradley, 2009), racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2019), class discrimination (Beswick, 2020) and patriarchy (Sultana, 2011) are some of the legacies that emotional geographies have been able to retrace.

By highlighting the relationality and temporality of emotions, emotional political ecologies have shown that emotions can channel and reproduce deeply rooted power dynamics. In particular, this literature focuses on the emotions of *those that struggle* whilst largely neglecting the emotions of *those who don't*.

For instance, Kearney and Bradley (2009) engage with the emotional geographies of indigenous people in North-eastern Australia, whose lives have been profoundly reshaped by colonial invasions. Similarly, González-Hidalgo (2017) retraces negative emotions of indigenous people in the Mapuche territories of Chile to understand the way anger and sorrow enable local resistance to extractivism. Truelove (2011) and Sultana (2011) discuss the emotional violence, hardship, and distress that characterise water insecurity of underprivileged women. Overall, by exclusively exposing the struggle of the disadvantaged, these studies have left uncharted and in turn, undisputed the emotions of those who hold privilege and power. As Nyamnjoh (2012) argues, these scholars have provided an incomplete interpretation of the relationships and structures of dominance.

2.3. The need to connect with privileged emotions

The prevailing focus on the emotional struggle of the oppressed reflects the emphasis that political ecology and human geography have put on the study of those who live at the margins, as well as their relationships to *socionature*. Most of these works examine the experience of people who are structurally disadvantaged rather than exposing the lives and practices of those with privilege, the elite (Norgaard, 2012). An explanation of such tendency can be found in the work of the anthropologist Nyamnjoh (2012) who observed that white privileged South African have often been beyond ethnographic contemplation because they have the same genealogy as the majority of anthropologists. The glaring invisibility of the elite in environmental studies is often justified by the fact that (super)rich appear somewhat inaccessible to researchers or because privilege is also something that academic scholars often enjoy (Argüelles, 2021; Savage and Williams, 2008; Beaverstock et al., 2004). These aspects make critical analysis of privilege more difficult if not uncomfortable (Argüelles, 2021).

Nevertheless, some geographers, environmental sociologists and environmental justice scholars have begun to confront and analyse privilege along with its socioenvironmental entanglements (Argüelles, 2021; Norgaard, 2012; Savage and Williams, 2008; Freudenburg, 2005; Beaverstock et al., 2004). These studies have come to view privilege as both the exclusive accumulation of environmental amenities and the protection from those environmental harms that other less privileged groups are constantly exposed to (Park and Pellow, 2011; Freudenburg, 2005). Whilst examining the socially constructed and disproportionate patterns of access to and control of the biophysical environment, this research does not directly engage with the embodied or subjective experiences of privilege (Savage and Williams, 2008; Freudenburg, 2005). Similarly, urban political ecology has mostly considered privilege within processes of urbanization, suburbanization, or gentrification (Atkinson et al., 2017; Finewood, 2012; Otero et al., 2011; Atkinson and Flint, 2004). For instance, these scholars describe urbanization or development trajectories as elitist processes which accumulate advantages and

reduce risks for the privileged at the expense of the environment and disadvantaged communities (Finewood, 2012; Otero et al., 2011). Whilst crucial to expose elites' privileged conditions, these works do not yet reveal who elites are, how they think and feel, nor how they understand, justify, and maintain their power (Savage and Williams, 2008). In turn, urban studies have yet to reveal every dimension of power that coalesces into the elites' privileged patterns of control and use of resources. This paper attempts to address this research gap by closely investigating the emotional experience of privileged Capetonians, in order to examine "how" and "why" elites are able to perpetuate their privileges both materially and discursively, and ultimately exacerbate socioenvironmental injustices (Norgaard, 2012).

The importance of understanding privilege lies in the fact that the elites bear the utmost responsibility for reshaping the world we live in due to their disproportionate control and use of resources (Beaverstock et al., 2004). To study elites, then, is to study their material and discursive control over, value of, and distribution of resources (Beaverstock et al., 2004). Without accounting for this perspective, political ecologists and other critical scholars risk hampering their strive for justice by rendering invisible the disproportionate power of the elite and the socioenvironmental implications of this power (Argüelles, 2021; Freudenburg, 2005). As Norgaard (2012) claims, the denial or naturalization of privilege inevitably silences the needs and voices of the oppressed. Thus, by going from marginalised areas to places where privilege is enjoyed, scholars can advance their understanding of (environmental) injustice with insights about subtler forms of inequalities and the conditions that enable, justify and sustain those injustices in the long term (Argüelles, 2021; Park and Pellow, 2011).

3. Methodology

To delineate and characterize the privileged emotional geographies of an extreme water crisis, this paper refers to Cape Town's elite as the empirical foci for such analysis. The selection of Cape Town as a case in point is motivated first of all by the fact that from 2015 until 2017 the City has experienced a prolonged drought that in 2018, culminated in a water crisis whose implications are still visible at the time of this writing (Twidle, 2021; Maxmen, 2018). Secondly, the case of Cape Town is also representative of unequal urban development which manifested through accumulation of privilege and capital in white areas, and segregation of black or coloured inhabitants to the outskirts of the city (Lemanski, 2007). More recently, the rise of neoliberal ideology and policy-making, further concentrated development and investments in the richest and more profitable areas of the city, whilst neglecting the rest of the city's space and people (McDonald, 2012; MirafTAB, 2007; 2012). This unequal urbanization has led to the establishment of elitist neighbourhoods which are able to benefit from privileged locations sheltered from major urban risks, and enjoy relatively higher level of public services (MirafTAB, 2007, 2012). A focus on Cape Town's elites provides this study with valuable insights into how the emotional and social dimensions of a water crisis intersect with broader patterns of power and inequality in the city alongside their historical legacy.

The selection of the elites as study sample is based on the official Socio-Economic Index employed by the Municipality of Cape Town (COCT, 2014). The Socio-Economic Index classifies Cape Town's social groups on the basis of their income levels, education, type of housing, and access to basic services (COCT, 2014). Based on these variables, each neighbourhood attains different scores which range from very good, good, average, needy and very needy socioeconomic conditions (Fig. 1). This paper considers elites only the urban areas classified as "very good". The spatial representation of the Socio-Economic Index indicates that these elitist neighbourhoods are mostly located in the western suburbs of the city and their inhabitants enjoy very high levels of income. Usually, these areas enjoy a number of privileges which include larger houses, more than one car, gardens and/or swimming pools (McDonald, 2012). These amenities can lead to unsustainable

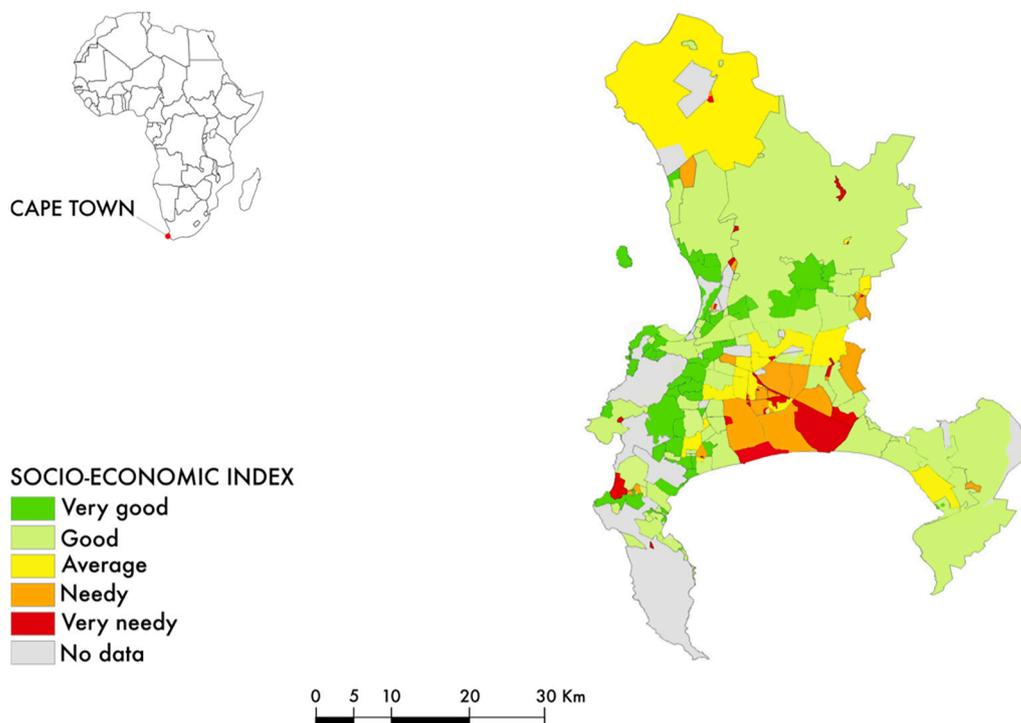


Fig. 1. Spatial representation of Socio-Economic Index of Cape Town neighbourhoods. Source: elaboration of the author using data from COCT, 2014.

levels of water consumption which most privileged households usually sustain with private boreholes or rainwater harvesting systems in addition to the municipal water supply (WWF, 2020; McDonald, 2012; Savelli et al., 2021).

This study combines sets of qualitative and quantitative data. Primary qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations carried out in Cape Town from May 2019 until March 2020. Overall, the researcher interviewed 32 affluent Capetonians. Despite post-apartheid policies of socio-economic integration, the social status of Capetonians continues to be deeply intertwined with race, and more affluent neighbourhoods remain predominantly white (Turok et al., 2021). In addition, about 7 additional interviews with water authorities provided a comprehensive understanding of the way the water crisis was handled and water restrictions implemented. The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore the personal and intimate experience of the participants during the drought. The questions focused on their daily water usage, along with experiences, coping strategies and emotions they felt throughout the water crisis. The participants were given ample time to reflect, delve deeper into their experiences, and share their perspectives.

Qualitative interviews were combined with recorded images or videos to provide a visual account of the context characterizing the water practices of elites in their households (see Fig. 2). Furthermore, this material account of drought experiences was enriched with quantitative assessments of daily water consumption (averaged annually) at the urban and household levels. Finally, primary data was cross-referenced with information obtained from recent literature and the City of Cape Town's data portal.

Throughout the entire research process, the author acknowledged her positionality and its effects on both data collection and data analysis. In general, the researcher remained reflexive and thus conscious of her white race, European origin and relatively privileged socio-economic status. To avoid that her subjectivity would overly affect the research process, she undertook most of the work based on the advice and support of local contacts: such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and South African academics. Filming the interviewees in their households also established a more collaborative research approach and

helped overcome certain power imbalances (Rusca, 2018; Castelán Cargile, 2016; Roberts and Lunch, 2015). The semi-structured interviews performed in low-income areas were mostly facilitated and supervised by non-governmental organizations. Instead, when working with elites, the researcher acted more independently. To gain access to elite households, she reached out to a number of residents and taxpayers' associations of different wealthier suburbs. With the help of these associations she contacted several potential respondents and continued her research using a snowball sampling technique. In addition, to ensure the trust and respect of these interviewees, the researcher had to establish her credibility and authenticity as a knowledgeable academic researcher whilst also conveying the importance of this research and the crucial role that the interviewees had in this process (Lillie and Ayling, 2021). Ultimately, whilst performing the interviews, the researcher deliberately chose not to discuss the opinions of the interviewees, in order to avoid making them feel uncomfortable by challenging their assumptions or preconceived ideas (Mason-Bish, 2019). To maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, the interviews are referenced in the main text and footnotes by using a unique code with name and neighbourhood initials of the interviewee.

In the next section, the analysis of these diverse sets of data will delineate the privileged emotional geography of Cape Town's water crisis. Whilst wealthy Capetonians did experience a multitude of emotions with different intensities and at times contradictory connotations, this paper analyses and focuses on the prevailing emotions that have more extensively reshaped their responses to the drought and water crisis. The first and more prominent emotional response reveals strong apprehension and fear. Secondly, privileged emotions further escalate into frustration and anger. Ultimately, a sense of pride and satisfaction seems to expand across most privileged households.

4. The privileged emotional geography of Cape Town water crisis

4.1. Fear and apprehension

Triggered by the news of an impending Day Zero, the primary



Fig. 2. Videography material used to characterize Cape Town's most privileged households and neighbourhoods. Image: The Author.

emotional response of the Capetonian elite was characterized by fear and apprehension. While the intensity of each such emotion was expressed differently, these emotions reflect the elite's anxiety linked to the prospect of having to temporarily give up on their relative level of accustomed comfort—in this case, access to a limitless supply of water within the premises of their household.¹ The interviews consistently show that the mere idea of standing in a queue with others, waiting for a tank to be filled, or carrying the water buckets home, elicited a sense of fear and apprehension among the Capetonian elite. As a white and wealthy woman openly declared: “I was thinking, how will I be standing in a queue and carry 25 L of water myself? I can't do that!”² In addition, having to become conscious of the need to ration water became a serious fear and a reality perceived as impossible by some elites.³ “We were worried of using buckets of water to flush the toilets” declared a father of two kids living in an oceanfront mansion.⁴ Whilst many well-to-do Capetonians expressed apprehension about the use of buckets to flush their toilets, or not having the option to take a bath or a shower,⁵ others were particularly concerned about their gardens and swimming pools.⁶ “The simple idea of not having water for a full bath, watering my garden or filling up my swimming pool scared me” said LKGP.

¹ Reference from interviews with: LCC; GCC; CNC; HMTL; BPC; GJGP; LKGP; SMGP; EHHB.

² Direct quote by: GJGP.

³ Reference from interviews with: GJGP; BPC.

⁴ Direct quote by: SMGP.

⁵ Reference from interviews with: CNC; LKGP; SMGP; EHHB.

⁶ Reference from interviews with: LKGP.

The sudden possibility of losing access to water and the urgent need to rapidly change their water use habits, had a profound emotional impact on wealthy Capetonian. However, in most instances, these intense emotions were not instigated by an actual shortage of water. In fact, this study found that while low-income households experienced recurring water shortages, wealthy households never faced any shortage of water, nor did they ever have their public water supply cut off. When asked about the material experience of the water crisis, a woman from a wealthy neighbourhood admitted “We (the well-to-do classes), only had restrictions, that's all! It didn't affect us much”.⁷ That said, even though each privileged household interviewed professed to never having experienced a time without access to water; fears and apprehensions continued to pervade their daily lives.

“We (the wealthy Capetonians) were frightened at the idea of queuing for water or waiting for (water) tanks like those poor people”.⁸ This quote exemplifies the fact that rather than the material scarcity of water, it was the prospect of becoming like *them*—the low-income dwellers that always struggle to access water—to amplify the fear of drought amongst the elite. It was such fear that compelled the elites to take urgent actions and avoid those unthinkable imaginaries. In fact, each well-to-do Capetonian interviewed declared to have found an alternative to the municipal water. A very wealthy man in Constantia admits that “When the municipality started with these restrictions, we decided to install our own systems”.⁹ Apart from stocking hectolitres of drinking water bottles in

⁷ Direct quote by: BMC.

⁸ Direct quote by: HMTL.

⁹ Direct quote by: APC.

their garages, wealthier Capetonians were able to install new infrastructure to increment their water availability. Depending on their financial means and the location of their households, some drilled new boreholes, whilst others added water tanks on their rooftops and purchased new water pumps or filters to ensure additional water would be suitable for consumption.¹⁰

Thus, the fears perceived by Capetonian elites carry with them the material power of reshaping the urban space. This study reveals how a palpable sense of fear and apprehension among elites triggered them to install new personal water systems, drill boreholes on private premises and, ultimately, transform Cape Town's hydrosocial configurations. Precisely, the emotions of fear prompted the unsustainable and unjust processes of enclosure and dispossession of common water resources (mostly groundwater) for the sole disposal and benefit of privileged users. A hydro-census performed by the World Wildlife Fund in Newlands, one of Cape Town's wealthier suburbs, reported a steep increase in the number of boreholes drilled by residents over the course of the drought and the subsequent water crisis, with around 50 % of boreholes surveyed in the neighbourhood drilled between 2017 and 2019 (WWF, 2020). Similarly, the owner of a water-well drilling company stated that, during the drought and the water crisis, all his clients had completely ceased to use municipal water and relied exclusively on borehole water. In fact, many of the new installations that his company completed during this period, consisted of water pumps or filters to ensure that all alternative water was safe to drink.¹¹ These hydrosocial reconfigurations of the city epitomize the link that emotions constitute between subjective experience and geographies of places (González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2020; Kearney and Bradley, 2009).

The other most prevalent fear and apprehension shared by the elite was related to the safety and the security of their property or physical person. Many interviewees declared to be worried about the possibility of having to share *their* water with other households.¹² A woman clearly stated that she was not worried to run out of water but only "*afraid of those people who don't have water*".¹³ Indeed, a young white businessman recalls the fear among his parents and neighbours "*because they were concerned that in time of drought, people might break into their properties just to try to take hold of their water*". The young man concludes that "*to prevent any aggression, these families decided to install screens to protect their boreholes and water tanks*".¹⁴

Once more, these emotions were not rooted in concrete experience of thefts, intrusion or aggression. Instead, the interviews revealed that the main source of fear and apprehension was the idea that scarce water resources may trigger envy and hatred for the elite by less privileged individuals.¹⁵ The elite imagined that their privileged access to additional water resources would raise envy and discontent amongst low-income groups. These fears and apprehensions seemed to persist and increase even after having secured new boreholes or additional rain-water tanks. Most elites would still fear intrusion, robbery or physical aggression during the water crisis. In turn, several elites decided to install alarms, video security systems, or other technologies to protect both homes and water infrastructure from the possibility of intrusion or attack.¹⁶ One privileged Capetonian even went so far as to suggest the need to create *water walls* which she imagined as physical barriers which separate each household's water source from other households.¹⁷ Ultimately, the fear that lower-income dwellers could attack or intrude upon the elite physical space, materially reshaped the properties of many

well-to-do Capetonians and eventually, reconfigured Cape Town's urban space.

Through the material transformations of elites' physical space and water access, the emotions of fear and apprehension end up reproducing and exacerbating existing urban inequalities in multiple ways. Firstly, by building private water systems, the elite can exclusively benefit from additional public water at the expense of the rest of the population and local water resources. Secondly, their exclusive water security can influence the urban water demand and eventually stop public policies that would instead benefit the entire population and the environment. Thirdly, the construction of security systems in the elites' households can create physical and social barriers, exacerbating a sense of exclusion from the wider community, while also leading to reduced investments in public safety measures.

4.2. Frustration and anger

Emotions of fear and apprehension amongst the elite gradually developed into and intertwined with emotions of frustration which often escalate to become anger. In general, these emotional responses were directed to the Western Cape government in part, but mostly *the townships, informal settlements or black neighbourhoods* as they were seemingly unable to save water the way they should. From the interviews it becomes clear how the elite was angry toward the government because it did not prevent the water crisis but in particular, as the government did not stop what the elite considered the disrespectful behaviour of the black low-income population.¹⁸ Some privileged Capetonians did share their concerns for low-income dwellers and their limited capacity to face such a crisis.¹⁹ However, most of the interviewees, directed emotions of anger and frustration towards "*these people*".²⁰ Irrespective of underlying dynamics of power and differences between identities, race, or social status, the elite wantonly accuse *them* of not complying to the city's restrictions, wasting water, being uneducated, not caring for environment or community, having too many children, and invading the city.²¹ By fuelling similar accusations, emotions of anger and frustration also contributed to reinforce racial and class dominance thereby exacerbating the pre-existing tensions between the elite and the black population.

A white woman, resident in the elite neighbourhood Clovelly, seemed frustrated at the idea that: "*In really poor areas [...] they are not going to turn the taps off even on Day Zero, (thus) other people get tense when they look at these people and think it is unfair that they sacrifice while these people get water without restriction*".²² Frustration amongst the wealthier Capetonians was caused by what they perceived as *uncivilized* water practices of poorest residents, whom, they argued, did not comply with municipal water restrictions. This perceived unfairness unsettled the elite, who felt they were trying their best to adapt to such an extreme situation, whilst *these people* (in townships or informal areas), would just leave their (communal) tap open, keep the water running, establish illegal connection and "*do what they like*" because "*they just do not care*".²³ A coloured and wealthy woman in Constantia bitterly declared that "*we are not all (raised) by the same system. It is unfair that we are saving water so that other people can waste it. We should all have the same mindset. (We should all be) saving for our city*".²⁴ The prevalent idea amongst the most privileged Capetonians was that every-one "*need(ed) to change their habits, not just the rich people*".²⁵

¹⁰ Reference from interviews with: GCC; APC; SWC; BPHB.

¹¹ Reference from interview with: SWC.

¹² Reference from interviews with: KKC; APC; CNC.

¹³ Direct quote by: KKC.

¹⁴ Direct quote by: SWC.

¹⁵ Reference from interviews with: KKC; ADC; SWC.

¹⁶ Reference from interviews with: SWC; KKC; APC.

¹⁷ Reference from interview with: KKC.

¹⁸ Reference from interviews with: GJGP; HMTL.

¹⁹ Reference from interviews with: HMTL; BLBFB.

²⁰ Reference from interviews with: ADC; GCC; CNC; KKC; EHHB.

²¹ Reference from interviews with: GCC; ADC; CNC;

²² Direct quote by: KKC.

²³ Reference from interviews with: GCC; BPC; LKGP; KKC; ADC; CNC; EHHB.

²⁴ Direct quote by: CNC.

²⁵ Direct quote by: GCC.

From such declarations one can sense how the elite frustration gradually escalates into anger toward other people's presumptive habits. Yet these emotions seem almost paradoxical when compared with real data on water consumption across Cape Town. A study found that whilst informal settlements use about 4 % of the total water available, well-off inhabitants account for almost 70 % of domestic water consumption (Robins, 2019). In an earlier publication, McDonald (2012) reports that, of the water consumed by affluent suburbs, 35 % was used to water gardens, and over 10 million litres per day to fill up about 68,000 swimming pools. Elite households very often exceed 2000 Litres per day, whilst households in informal settlements typically consume about 40 Litres per day (Savelli et al., 2023). Furthermore, during drought restrictions, a large number of township dwellers or low-income households were temporarily cut off from the water supply because they were unable to pay for increased water tariffs. Unlike the elite, these households could not rely on alternative water sources and very often ran out of water (Enqvist et al., 2022; Savelli et al., 2021; Robins, 2019, Millington and Scheba, 2021). These quantitative accounts, explain the manner in which privileged emotions discounted the elite of the responsibility they have in consuming the largest amount of water across the city (McDonald, 2012). In this sense, the anger and frustration felt by the elite seem to disavow existing inequalities, and eventually justify their unsustainable water consumptions. By doing so, these privileged emotions can reinforce the racial and class-based power dynamics that allow the Cape Town's elite to maintain their privileged status across the city.

The frustration and anger of the elite was also exacerbated by the fact that low-income neighbourhoods do not always pay for the water they use because they either access water by communal water points or receive a certain amount of water for free each month. Thus, they seemingly constitute a financial burden for wealthier households that have to subsidize water to low-income dwellers of Cape Town.²⁶ Some elites felt frustrated or even angry about the fact that the South African constitution accords the right to drinking water to every citizen. As this human right entails that the one that can afford "have to pay the water for"²⁷ the most disadvantaged population. A white and wealthy resident of Hout Bay is convinced that "The problem is amongst the black people who don't care because they don't have to pay for water. [...] black people have a culture of refusing to pay and (the government) cannot let them pay".²⁸ The frustration with black 'entitlement' to free water services often extends to other public services provided in informal settlements or black areas: "They think the government has to do everything for them. They get their grants. The young girls get grants when they are 18 [...] Then the whole family who is not working gets grants. 17 million people in this country get grants".²⁹ Beside racial bias, similar frustrations also reveal the elite neoliberal ideas about their city: a city where rights and power should belong to those who have capital. In the neoliberal city imagined by Capetonian elites, low-income dwellers should not receive any water if they are unable to pay for it.³⁰ It is only through the payment of water fees that one can understand the value of water and eventually saving it.³¹ According to their neoliberal ideology, water rights and other interventions aimed at fostering equality are considered either counter-productive or morally unacceptable.³² For the elite in Cape Town, it is the market that restores justice by making sure that every-one is rewarded for what they deserve.³³

Often, when explaining their anger and frustration, well-to-do

Capetonians point at the lack of education of informal settlers, townships or black people. What upsets and frustrates some privileged Capetonians is the fact *these people* are not well informed, uneducated, and as a result, they do not save water nor care for the environment.³⁴ As one young woman living in a wealthy neighbourhood stated "people living in townships and in other impoverished areas are not listening to the radio, and if they are listening, then they will not listen to the news but rather listen to the music".³⁵ From similar emotional statements, lack of education emerges as a human condition rather than a product of historical and unchallenged injustices. This lacking in education is also used to point to the high fertility rate and the 'higher' water demand amongst black townships or informal settlements. "The population is exploding amongst the black people"³⁶ says a white male living in Constantia who then adds with visible frustration "They produce children without having a care or concern about education, clothing, food, or water. They just produce children. Africa is extremely badly behaved and South Africa is not different". Similar to 'uncontrolled procreation', also migration represents a source of frustration amongst wealthier Capetonians. According to them, people coming from other regions or Southern African countries constitute an additional burden on local water sources. Another woman from Constantia concluded that "there are too many people living in the city [...] feeding into the poor water resources we have". She also added that "We don't have that many dams available for the influx of people coming into Cape Town [...] and using our water source, there is just not enough to go around for everybody".³⁷ Thus, some of the elite wish these people to leave and go back to their home.³⁸

Whilst frustration and anger seemed to prevail amongst the elite, elites gave space to more sympathetic emotional reactions toward black low-income dwellers. When explaining her interpretation of the Day Zero crisis, a white woman living in The Lake, a residential and affluent area in Noordhoek, declared: "the people living in townships were laughing at us (the elite). Domestic workers and shank dwellers where saying to me: now you know what does it mean living like us... You think (that) we throw away the water we use during the shower? We shower in a bucket and then we use that water to wash our floors or clothes. We use it three times before it goes away down the system".³⁹ To some extent such example reflects an awareness of the harsher conditions faced in black neighbourhoods. Similarly, another wealthier Capetonian living in the well-off suburb Fish Hoek, also mentioned the fact that people living in townships didn't know about the drought. She literally said that "the drought didn't really change anything (for low-income dwellers)" because "for them every day is a day zero".⁴⁰

4.3. Satisfaction and pride

When remembering the drought and the subsequent water crisis, some women described it sad or *heart-breaking*. This feeling was mostly generated by the fact they had to endure seeing the plants or lawns of their gardens dying. They describe pulling dead grass from their garden as a truly painful experience.⁴¹ Yet, besides these instances, wealthier inhabitants tend to remember the water crisis as an event that led to some positive outcomes. The reason being is that whilst taking the elite out of their comfort zone, the municipal restrictions also made them aware of the value of water and, ultimately, triggered them to prepare for future water crises.⁴² "The fantastic thing of the drought" says KKC

²⁶ Reference from interviews with: KKC; EEHB; ADC.

²⁷ Direct quote by: KKC; EEHB.

²⁸ Direct quote by: EEHB.

²⁹ Direct quote by: EEHB.

³⁰ Reference from interviews with: EEHB; CNC; APC; GCC.

³¹ Reference from interview with: EEHB.

³² Reference from interviews with: EEHB; CNC; APC; GCC.

³³ Reference from interviews with: EEHB; APC; ADC; GCC; KKC.

³⁴ Reference from interviews with: ADC; APC; CNC.

³⁵ Reference from interview with: CNC.

³⁶ Direct quote by: APC.

³⁷ Direct quote by: CNC.

³⁸ Reference from interview with: APC.

³⁹ Direct quote by: HMTL.

⁴⁰ Direct quote by: JWFH.

⁴¹ Reference from interviews with: LCC; BPC; KKC; EEHB.

⁴² Reference from interviews with: LCC; GJGP; KKC; LKGP.

“was that (Capetonians) genuinely felt the fact that (they were) going to run out of water. In this way, the drought made people see and understand how water is important”.

Most Capetonian elites felt a sense of pride and satisfaction when remembering about the water crisis. According to the interviewees, one of the triggers of such emotions, was the fact that the water crisis united the City against Day Zero, their common enemy.⁴³ However, this sense of unification did not involve every Capetonian. More than anything, what these wealthier Capetonians were feeling was a reunification of the elite which eventually deepened the already existing racial and class divisions. Many of the wealthy interviewees recall meeting with friends and neighbours either to better understand what should be done or to find common solutions to face Day Zero and future water crises. Some even recall their excitement in organizing events, interviewing professors or other responsible authorities as a way to gather useful information, thereby supporting their (privileged) communities.⁴⁴ In general, more than privileged, elites consider themselves *satisfied* with how easily they have escaped the water crisis without too much stress or sacrifice.⁴⁵ Privileged Capetonians acknowledge their *luck* of living close to alternative water sources,⁴⁶ the financial abilities they have to buy additional water sources⁴⁷ or in some cases, the knowledge they have acquired and that eased the installation of water technologies in their households.⁴⁸ Here privileged emotions reflect again the neoliberal ideology of well-to-do Capetonian, who persuade themselves that they have acquired their water security through merit, thereby ignoring the structural advantage that has helped the elite achieve their security (Harvey, 2007).

In most cases, Capetonians felt very proud of themselves for having helped the municipality to halve water consumption and avoid Day Zero.⁴⁹ Amongst the wealthier households, people felt particularly proud for having developed their own alternative water systems thereby achieving independence from the municipal supply.⁵⁰ In some cases, they justified such investments as conscious efforts or ethical choices in favour of the environment or less wealthier inhabitants.⁵¹ As the CEO of a water-well drilling company stated, “I think another factor influencing people’s decision to look for alternative water sources was that they are ethically doing their best to take their bit to take pressure off the grid, so if I can treat my borehole water [...] that every 50 L taken from my borehole is 50 L of municipal water that I can give to somebody else in the townships or in the more impoverished areas. So, I think there is that ethical play for it”.⁵² However, ‘ethical’ this choice might be, studies have shown that in the long term, the usage of private boreholes or off-the-grid water systems risks becoming unsustainable and threatening the future availability of water resources (Srinivasan et al., 2013; Otero et al., 2011). It was indeed this sense of pride for preventing Day Zero that reinforced the entitlement of well-to-do Capetonians to consume alternative water sources even when consumption was unsustainable, illegal, and lacked government authorization.⁵³ For instance, when asked by the municipal authorities to register his borehole, a wealthy man in Constantia refused to do so and told them “it is nothing to do with you, it is not your water, it is my water and I am independent of the council”.⁵⁴

By legitimising a *doing what I want* attitude, privileged emotions

reinforce elites’ neoliberal merits thereby producing hydrosocial reconfigurations that are both unjust and unsustainable. Specifically, the increasing use of private boreholes risks triggering what ecological economists and sociohydrologists define as the supply–demand cycle i.e. an unforeseen increase in water demand as a result of the expansion or construction of additional water infrastructure (Di Baldassarre et al., 2018; Kallis, 2010). In this case, the development of private boreholes by elites could produce a supply–demand cycle which in the longer-term, would deplete the local aquifers and in turn, reduce the future water available for the entire population. Ultimately, privileged emotions risk perpetuating a sense of entitlement among the wealthy Capetonians and contribute to a culture of individualism and exclusion that undermines collective efforts to address water crises and other environmental challenges.

5. Discussion and conclusions: the temporality and materiality of privileged emotions

The privileged emotional geography of Cape Town water crisis reveals the manner in which well-off Capetonians have hinged upon their subjectivities or emotion concepts to make sense of the water crisis (Barrett, 2017, 2018). What characterized privileged experiences of Day Zero with emotions of fear, anger, and pride was, I argue, the distinctive way the elite perceive themselves and their relation with the rest of the city. Thus, the emotions depicted in the previous analysis are neither hardwired reactions of the brain, nor indications of something objective about the crisis. Rather, they mostly result from the privileged conditions of the elite which bring about preconceived images or moral stereotypes concerning the city, its water resources and inhabitants (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). More specifically, this analysis has shown how the subjectivities of Capetonian elites are deeply ensnared by racial bias and neoliberal ideologies.

Race is central to understand the way affluent Capetonians perceive themselves and their surroundings. I argue that if on the one hand these racialized subjectivities originate from Cape Town colonial and apartheid history, on the other they also draw upon a disavowal of the same colonial and apartheid oppressions (Hook, 2005; Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005). What Hook (2005) defines *racist disavowal* is crucial here to understand the ways the elite refuse to acknowledge their unsettling past and in turn, persevere the acts of dispossession and segregation that started during colonial and apartheid regimes. For instance, the fearful ways well-to-do residents predicated their ownership of Cape Town water sources, their proud assertions of their rightness of doing, together with their angry rejection of black South African pre-eminence within the city, are but refusals of the past. The problem with such disavowal is not only the production of ill-founded emotions but also the fact that such emotions risk confirming and justifying the elite racial and class privilege. In this way, existing social injustices are reinforced and perpetuated into the future.

Along with racial bias, the emotions of well-to-do Capetonians also reflect a neoliberal image of society made up of self-interested individuals. Privileged emotions do not give space to collective or shared feelings but rather reflect individualized, competitive, and market-based ways of thinking. This neoliberal connotation is evident both in the anger felt toward low-income dwellers unable to pay for water as well as in the satisfaction that wealthier residents felt when isolating themselves from future water crises. Significant in this respect are also the actions triggered by privileged emotions like for instance, the enclosure of otherwise common water resources along with the development of off-the-grid households and gated communities which enabled well-to-do residents to avoid rather than address a shared problem like water shortage. In turn, such neoliberal emotions and the resulting actions help individuals to strategize for themselves, sustaining a society that will, in the long-term, only benefit those who are financially suitable whilst excluding the possibility of any collective transformation (Read, 2009).

⁴³ Reference from interviews with: KKC; LKGP; BLBFB.

⁴⁴ Reference from interviews with: KKC; LKGP; BLBFB; APC.

⁴⁵ Reference from interviews with: APC; SWC; SMGP; BMC; ADC; KKC.

⁴⁶ Reference from interviews with: BMC; APC.

⁴⁷ Reference from interviews with: SMGP; BMC; SWC.

⁴⁸ Reference from interviews with: KKC; GCC; SWC.

⁴⁹ Reference from interviews with: LCC; GCC; APC; SWC; KKC; LKGP; SMGP; ADC; EHHB; BLBFB.

⁵⁰ Reference from interviews with: KKC; GCC; APC; HMTL.

⁵¹ Reference from interviews with: SWC; KKC; HMTL; LKGP.

⁵² Direct quote by: SWC.

⁵³ Reference from interviews with: HMTL; APC; GCC.

⁵⁴ Direct quote by: APC.

An in-depth analysis of emotions and the subjectivities that construct them, reveals the temporality of emotions, which signifies the way the past emerges, surfaces in the present and it is projected into the future. By stretching emotion over longer time spans it is possible to consider them as conjunctures that emerge from certain power dynamics which have endured history and will eventually persist in the future (Beswick, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Holloway et al., 2019). Thus, I argue that the temporality of emotions helps on the one hand explaining their genesis, but on the other it also forwards emotions into the future by revealing the way they can repeat or create ruptures from the past (Holloway et al., 2019). In the case of Cape Town, for instance, stretching emotions over time reveals the ways they reassert the elites' privilege, and portends to future imaginaries of a deeply racial and neoliberal city. One that ends up excluding low-income dwellers from citizens' right on the basis of their race and financial inadequacies. Such future is also unjust because enables the elites to overconsume water at the expenses the most vulnerable population and the environment. By reproducing distinctive power dynamics and triggering unsustainable practices, privilege emotions risk shifting water crises towards the future eventually restoring the uneven and unsustainable hydrosocial configurations that have contributed to the water crisis in the first place.

Privileged emotions, have thus the potential to trap the future into past socio-natural configurations and eventually ruin it (Millington and Scheba, 2021). What is more, is that such a form of ruination does not only have imaginary potentials but also material implications. Indeed, the privileged emotional geography of Cape Town water crisis have shown the manner in which power laden emotions become imprinted in space when they materially affect surrounding people and places (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Fear, anger, and pride have reconfigured the elite's relationship with space and water resources for they have triggered amongst others, the enclosure and dispossession of common resources, the unsustainable exploitation of (ground)water sources, alongside the development of security systems and gated communities. Together, these material reconfigurations of private space end up endangering social justice and the future availability of water resources within the city.

Sultana (2015) had already shown the manner in which emotions come to shape the access, use and control of water resources in a city. Yet whilst she argues that emotions matter in the everyday struggle for resources (Sultana, 2015), here I argue that emotions matter and significantly, also in the extra-ordinary privileges enjoyed by the elite. What distinguishes privileged and extra-ordinary emotions from everyday struggles is both their power and intensity. Whilst the crisis makes socio-environmental changes occur more quickly and intensely, the disproportionate privilege of the elite marks the power of such changes. In fact, privilege emotions of water crisis have increased the control and use of water resources of the elite, whilst maintaining other social groups in their everyday racial and water struggles.

In conclusion, the focus on extra-ordinary and privileged emotions enables a thorough explanation of a water crisis, its genesis, and future implications. In turn, privileged emotional geographies can potentially advance political ecology's explanations of water crises in three meaningful ways. First, an engagement with emotions can help retrace the most intimate and unconscious manifestations of power dynamics which characterize patterns of resources use and control. Second, what I named here extra-ordinary emotions, mark a point of continuity (or discontinuity) of existing path dependencies. This entails that extra-ordinary emotions can reveal the manner in which distinctive power dynamics can be reinforced or resisted during a crisis. Lastly and most importantly, the exploration of privileged emotions is key to understand how the disproportional control and use of water resources is rationalised, justified and reinforced by the elite. Privileged emotional geographies ultimately reveal the power through which elites (materially and discursively) maintain their privileges whilst compromising the availability of natural resources for the less advantaged population and eventually intensifying environmental degradation. Only by connecting

with privileged emotions it is possible to challenge their subjectivities, dismantle the resulting imaginaries and give space to more just and sustainable futures.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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