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Expanding architecture from a gender-based perspective

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INVESTIGATING GENDER INEQUALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF INFRASTRUCTURAL INADEQUACY: A CASE STUDY OF DAR ES SALAAM AND NAIROBI

G Fig. 1 Structural conditions of the toilets in the settlement without doors. Mlalakua Informal Abstract Settlement, Dar es Tanzania Source: Author

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Basic sanitation is one of the most important developmental challenges with 2.4 billion peo-Salaam, ple still lacking access to improved facilities. Several studies reveal that one in three women still lack access to safe toilets worldwide and confront health issues, harassment, attacks, shame, and indignity. While extensive research exists on gender and sanitation focused on hygiene and health, it fails to capture the magnitude, scope, diversity of gender-based disparities and the lack of gender equality in the accessibility of sanitary infrastructure. My research claims that there is a need to examine injustice against women through infrastructural inadequacy by analysing the complexities, intricacies, and diversity of embodied and lived experiences of women. Therefore, in this paper, I aim to firstly detect gender inequality in urban spaces (manifested through sanitation infrastructure) and, secondly, investigate if women are engaging in practices that, without being clearly conscious, are changing the effects of existing gender injustices. By using data collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi with female residents of informal settlements, I highlight the coping mechanisms used by women residents of informal settlements to negotiate their daily fear and insecurity. Preliminary conclusions reveal that most women felt insecure and unsafe while accessing shared toilets at night in informal settlements. The findings of this investigation emphasize that sanitation is often determined by engineering and public health policies that are far removed from needs and socio-cultural practices of local women.

Keywords

Sanitation, Accessibility, Violence, Inequality, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi

Introduction

The global sanitation crisis is one of the most important developmental challenges in the 21st century with 2.4 billion people still lacking access to improved sanitation facilities (Unilever Domestos *et al.*, 2013). The lack of sanitation has been identified as one of the main causes of health problems among urban dwellers in African cities (Hendriksen *et al.*, 2011) and the promotion of basic sanitation is largely focused on hygiene awareness, health, and environmental benefits.

While the access to sanitation is currently measured globally by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, which is a key component to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals and uses internationally agreed definitions for 'improved sanitation', this monitoring currently does not provide a breakdown of access for men and women separately. However, poor sanitation most significantly impacts on the safety, well-being and educational prospects of women. Indeed, several studies reveal that one in three women still lack access to safe toilets worldwide, which is manifested in risking shame, health issues, indignity, harassment and even attack because of inadequate sanitary infrastructure (Unilever Domestos *et al.*, 2013; Abrahams *et al.*, 2006; Joshi *et al.*, 2011, Reddy & Snehalatha, 2011, p. 400).

Along these lines, research emphasizes the vulnerability of women to physical and sexual violence if they are forced to wait until early morning or late evenings to look for a secluded place to defecate (Reddy & Snehalatha, 2011, p. 390; Unilever Domestos *et al.*, 2013; Abrahams *et al.*, 2006). In addition, as several studies have shown, violence becomes more pronounced towards women of lower socio-economic strata living in informal settlements (Anand & Tiwari, 2006). Lack of sanitation, in addition, considerably contributes to poverty (Hendriksen *et al.*, 2011; Desai *et al.*, 2014) with the casting out of many sites, groups and practices of the urban poor as unsanitary (Desai *et al.*, 2014; Allen *et al.*, 2006; Joshi *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, problems of poverty faced by female-headed households in rural areas of Africa were shown to be caused, in part, by unequal access to essential resources (Porter & Sweetman 2005). This helps draw attention towards women who stand on an intersection of inadequate access to sanitation infrastructure, poverty, and gender violence.

In summation, while there is extensive research on gender and sanitation, it fails to capture the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and the inherent lack of gender equality in accessibility of sanitary infrastructure (Chant, 2013; Rakodi, 1991; Scampini, 2013). The studies show a dearth of empirical evidence regarding the intersectional relationship of poor women with sanitation infrastructure. Hence, in this article, I argue that there is a need to investigate gender inequality through infrastructural inadequacy. In the next section, I delineate the theoretical framework that enables me to explore gender inequality in informal settlements, manifested through sanitation infrastructure. I have organized it around the discussion of two themes: the discussion of gender (with)in the development agenda and the interactions between gender and technology by analysing women's experiences with sanitation infrastructure.

Placing 'women' in gender debates in development

Development as a concept and process is constructed, contested, and dynamic. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (1999 cited in Anand, 2002, p. 5) has poignantly stated that "Nothing, is as important today in development than an adequate recognition of political, economic, social participation and leadership of women".

Regardless of the various ways in which development has been envisioned and implemented, women and their rights are portrayed as being perpetually subject to marginalization, side-lining, and instrumentalization (Scampini, 2013). While the notion of gender equality began to enter the development agenda, it did not lead to equality but rather to strategies on how to incorporate women into incumbent models to engender the analyses, goals, and strategies (Scampini, 2013; Valentine, 2007; Reeves, 2002; Porter & Sweetman, 2005). Mohanty (1984, p. 344) elaborates on the problematic of use of 'women' as a group and as a stable category of analysis by stressing on the implicit assumption of "an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination". She further argues that such simplistic formulations can be reductive and ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions (Mohanty, 1984, p. 344).

Additionally, feminist ethnographers in the early 1990s also questioned the value of including women as an isolated 'category' and called for a shift away from an analytical lens from a 'women only' focus (Reeves, 2002, p. 198). These studies revealed that it was not possible to separate out multiple categories of gender, race, class and to explain inequalities through a single framework. Hence, intersectionality emerged as a concept to theorize on and empirically analyse the relationship between different social categories: gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and so forth (Crenshaw, 1993; Valentine, 2007, p. 10; Scampini & Raaber, 2013). Adherents to the concept of intersectionality stress the interwoven nature of oppressive categories and how they can mutually strengthen or weaken each other (Valentine, 2007; Winker & Degele, 2011; McCall, 2005). However, the intersectional approaches in social sciences have paid less attention to the significance of space in the process of subject formation (Valentine, 2007, p. 14; Fernandes, 2003, p. 309; Scampini & Raaber, 2013). Little research has also been conducted in rethinking intersections of systems of oppression and structures of power that frame social positions of individuals and gender inequality (West & Fenstermaker, 1995; Valentine, 2007). Mohanty (1984, p. 337) elaborates on the need for Fig. 2 Shared community toilet in the settlement, Mathare Informal Settlement, Nairobi, Kenya Source: Author



intersectional perspective on oppression by highlighting how western feminist discourses bind women through the normative sociological "notion of the 'sameness' of oppression" while ignoring the pluralities of different groups of women in diverse social classes and ethnic frameworks.

Lastly, the way these systems of oppression are mediated by socio-technical arrangements and women's unequal access to infrastructure services, has been largely neglected in the debates on intersectionality. Hence, the following sections focus on the interrelation of two categories namely gendered space and gender in technology.

Gendered Technologies of Sanitation: Spatial access and design

Earlier research often identifies space (where one lives) and gender (or the complexities of gendered identities) as two of the most critical aspects related to sanitation (Joshi *et al.*, 2011, p. 1). In addition to this, women have also been observed to give higher priority to sanitation than men because of health benefits and privacy. Some of the challenges women face with sanitation infrastructure are their need to look for a secluded place to defecate in poor areas (Reddy & Snehalatha, 2011) due to often inappropriately located services (Rakodi, 1991). This can deter the use or exacerbate maintenance problems of existing sanitation arrangements (Schlyter, 1988 cited in Rakodi 1991, p. 545). Thus, the failure to involve women in the design of infrastructure facilities may result in inappropriate standards and technological artefacts (Moser, 1987a cited in Rakodi, 1991, p. 541). In addition, an inadequate access to these services and existing infrastructure designs can also expose women to acts of violence, with reports indicating increased violence around sanitation infrastructures (Abrahams *et al.*, 2006; Unilever Domestos et al., 2013). Such gender-based violence has been observed to instil a mobilizing fear and insecurity in the public space (Ibid.).

Hence, what is provided as sanitation is often determined by engineering, environmental and public health concerns that are far removed from women's needs, their socio-cultural practices and existing gender constructs. Therefore, while sanitation needs are indeed universal, more research is needed on the gender-related constructs and implications in the design and promotion of basic sanitation infrastructure within diverse groups (Joshi et al., 2011).

In addition, discourses in gender and technology studies highlight how users, through different ways of interpretation, contribute to the social shaping of technologies. In this sense, a look to feminist studies of science and technology could bring an insightful perspective to analyse gender inequality in sanitation. Indeed, feminist researchers of technology have emphasized the need to focus on "women's 'lived experience' as a way (...) to give women a voice in the construction of new knowledge" (Fonow & Cook, 2014, p. 2218). Hence, the next section describes how women as users inform, interact and transform infrastructure and technology.

Gender in Technology

Technology is a significant site of gender negotiations where both masculine and feminine identities are constructed and deconstructed (Lohan, 2013 cited in Green & Adam, 2013, p.149), however, "women's everyday encounters with technological artefacts are rarely recognized" (Faulkner, 2001, p. 85). It has been argued that technologies gain gender identities when they "enter into our everyday structural relations and cultural meaning systems and can become actors in the practices of everyday lives" (Lohan, 2013 cited in Green & Adam, 2013, p.158). However, much of the available scholarship on women and technology fails to capture or explain women's ambivalence about the technologies they encounter.

Traditionally, users have been regarded as important actors in the diffusion and acceptance of new technologies (Von Hippel, 1976 and 1988 cited in Rommes et al. 2013, p. 191). However, most attention has focused on the role of innovators in the construction of technological

objects and they often construct many different representations of users and "objectify these representations in technological choices" (Rommes, van Oost & Oudshoorn cited in Green & Adam, 2013, p. 191). This results in technologies containing 'scripts', which assign specific competences, actions, and responsibilities to its envisioned users. Users of technology often tend to experience them as gendered and find them useful to articulate and perform their (gender) identities. Hence, when the scripts reveal a gendered pattern, they are called "gendered scripts" (Rommes, van Oost & Oudshoorn cited in Green & Adam, 2013, p. 191).

This research highlights how scripts can also contribute to the exclusion of specific users if the innovator's image of the envisioned users only represents a selective set. Donna Haraway (1997, p. 37 cited in Green & Adam, 2013) states that

if women do not 'fit' well within the new technological standards being developed, they find themselves being marginalized within developing social practices and forms.

This accentuates the innovator/user divide through the innovator's image of the users in contrast to the actual users of the infrastructure and technology.

Nonetheless, some studies have also shown that technology can aid female empowerment by appropriating individual technologies in practice. This is done by including wider gender contexts within which they are designed and used (Faulkner, 2001). Critical feminist technology assessment seeks to extend existing technology assessment procedures by giving voice to the full range of actors involved and by starting a critical debate about "what and whose needs are to be met" (Faulkner, 2001). Therefore, an intersectional approach could significantly augment and alter the injustice against women through infrastructural inadequacy by analysing the complexities, intricacies, and diversity of embodied and lived experiences of women.

In the next section, I describe the methodology used during fieldwork and I also provide some data collected that enable me to propose some conclusive remarks concerning the relations between gender and technology in the study of sanitation infrastructures.

Methodological Framework: Case Study and Interviews

To furnish the study with the voices and experiences of women, I approached the question of gender inequality in sanitation by conducting qualitative fieldwork in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in March-April 2015 and February-April 2016. The selection of these two research contexts was based on the fact that they are shaped by collaborative arrangements of informal and formal service provision. Additionally, both cities have been previous sites of infrastructure upgrading programmes led by the World Bank. However, despite the apparent similarities in the context namely the language, population size, and urban development trajectory, the cities also have a contrasting view of tackling the growing informal settlements and provision of formal services to its residents. Based on these rationales, I chose Mlalakua informal settlement in Dar es Salaam and 'A4' village of Mathare informal settlement in Nairobi as case studies.

I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews. I chose to firstly interview women residents of both the settlements to highlight the coping mechanisms used by them to tackle the safety and insecurity they face while accessing shared sanitation facilities. Even though I also interviewed male residents, for this article I chose to present the everyday experiences of women. Previous literature often tends to portray the distinctive voices of women as either stereotyped or add-ons in development studies. However, women's views and experiences should be central in informing urban development planning and implementation (Narayanan, 2012).

The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to understand women's experiences of using a shared toilet, the challenges faced (if any) in accessing the service with their children and their experience (if any) with gender-based violence. I chose firstly a focus group of teenage mothers in Mathare in Nairobi and, secondly, women residents of Mlalakua Sub-ward in Dar es Salaam. The interviews were conducted with the help of a female research assistant who also acted as a translator since I did not speak Swahili which is the native language in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. I felt that because of the existing sensitivity surrounding sanitation due to socio-cultural constructs, I needed a translator for the women to feel safe about talking about issues of sexual harassment and health-related problems (e.g. Urinary Tract Infection). It's imperative for my research that the women talk freely and feel comfortable while expressing their concerns and opinions. Hence, my female research assistants were able to make the discussions easier for the discussants in Swahili. The data collected was then transcribed and preliminary findings will be highlighted in the next section.

Insights: Mathare Informal Settlement, Nairobi, Kenya

I conducted two focus group sessions consisting of a total of 22 women from the Teenage Mothers Empowerment Programme run by the NGO Mathare Children's Fund (MCF) in the Mathare informal settlement over the course of two field visits in March-April 2015 and February-April 2016. The women ranged between an age group of 16-23 years and were all learning the craft of tailoring and stitching. Upon being asked if they were willing to sit down and discuss issues regarding sanitation, they all agreed to answer the questions individually while still maintaining the group discussion in parallel.

The discussants divulged firstly that most of them shared toilets with other households. All of them agreed that the toilets were not maintained and complained of contracting UTI. Secondly, most women also found it difficult to access the toilet at night with one discussant claiming to "not drink any water at night after 6 pm", the next one claiming to "take different routes to Open Defecation (OD) at night" and another stating the "lack of light at night" in the settlement as a challenge. All respondents stated their toilets to be unhygienic and then as a group discussed how the shared community toilets installed in the settlement were too expensive for them to afford. Thirdly, all women described in detail how they all have the phone number for MSF (Médecins Sans Frontiers) saved and call them to help victims of sexual violence. Lastly, upon inquiring about the coping mechanisms used by them to tackle the inadequate sanitation facilities, one discussant stated that she "uses the toilet at nearby school in day", another said she "uses a bucket at night and empties it in the open drain in the morning" and finally, one after hesitation said she used "flying toilet (when an individual defecates in a plastic bag, that is tied and thrown out of the dwelling space) at night".

Insights: Mlalakua Sub Ward, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

In Dar es salaam, using the same interview questionnaire, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with 32 female residents from the Mlalakua informal settlement over the course of two field visits as stated previously. Women residents were approached with the help of a local elected official and a female research assistant. The residents were first made aware of this research being an academic study and then based on their willingness to participate in the interview; they were posed the questions from the interview questionnaire.

Interviews revealed that a majority of women had access to only shared toilets which were squatting pit latrine. Hygiene issues like contracting a UTI were stated as the biggest challenge being faced by most of the women. Interestingly, one of the respondents' husband (who wasn't a part of the interview but was sitting nearby) stated that "his daughter complained of UTI" but was asked by his wife not to elaborate further. Additionally, most respondents stated that they usually asked "someone to accompany them at night" because it made them uncomfortable. What was striking was that most of the women, when asked what made them uncomfortable at night, stated: "it's dark at night". The women also discussed feeling insecure and unsafe going to the toilet at night due to a fear of being "attacked by robbers, men hiding behind trees and lack of light in the toilets". Furthermore, women responded by claiming that the toilets made them uncomfortable,

with one respondent claiming that the "toilet is uncomfortable because of how it is built, especially the door". In addition, all women preferred a "squatting toilet". One respondent stated that she was uncomfortable in "sharing a sitting toilet with so many people". Lastly, all women stated that they were responsible for collecting water, for drinking purposes and toilet usage, for their households. Most of the women were involved in informal economic activities like selling *Mandazis* (a homemade sweet from white flour and sugar) and one respondent stated that she uses the money she earns to "buy a 10-litre bucket of water for 20 TZS (Tanzanian shilling) per day".

Conclusions

The voices and experiences of women residents provide an avenue to investigate how gender inequality in informal settlements (manifested in the varied relationships women establish with sanitation facilities) could also be seen from the lenses of women's ambiguous relation with technology (as users but removed from design). However, their voices also pose some theoretical challenges to the complex question of women's access to sanitation. The interviews show the women to firstly be conversant with the challenges they face in their everyday lives while accessing these facilities. Secondly, they show how the women negotiate these everyday encounters by utilizing various coping mechanisms. The narratives of these women in informal settlements hence highlight on how women inform, interact and transform infrastructure in informal settlements.

In addition, the empirical evidence gathered in this study also corroborates with other studies highlighting the growing violence against women surrounding inadequate infrastructure. There has been empirical evidence detailed in cities of East Africa and South-East Asia (Anand & Tiwari, 2006; Narayanan, 2012; Reddy & Snehalatha, 2011; Arku, Angmor & Seddoh, 2013; Kareem & Lwasa, 2014) highlighting the presence of violence intersecting with inadequate infrastructure provision, namely of water, sanitation and transport. Hence, this leads me to argue for a more detailed analysis into urban infrastructure planning to see if these infrastructures are themselves turning into systems of oppression or whether this reported violence is an unintended consequence of reductive planning strategies.

Lastly, the study also highlights the need to incorporate women users in the design of technology and technical artefacts. Various coping mechanisms are described by women residents to negotiate the growing insecurity and fear of violence while accessing shared sanitation facilities. These demonstrate the role women users are playing in re-writing the gender-script of the sanitation infrastructure. Therefore, the shaping of infrastructure and technology by women as users requires a more in-depth interrogation through further research.

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The present volume MORE: Expanding Architecture from a Gender-Based Perspective. III International Conference on Gender and Architecture Proceedings collects the papers, lectures, video-essays and workshops presented during a three-day-session (26th to 28th January 2017) which took place at the School of Architecture of the Università degli Studi di Firenze (UniFi, Italy) and Figline e Incisa Valdarno. #MORE congress provided a meeting space for communication between professionals, researchers, educators and activists from an interdisciplinary approach. After two conferences held in Spain (ArquitectAs, Universidad de Sevilla, 2014) and Portugal (Matrices, Universidade Lusófona de Lisboa, 2015), the 3rd meeting was held in Italy to make visible and reinforce the work in South-European countries. The III International Conference investigates the application of feminist strategies to architecture and provides plural and integrated spaces for debate. The section LECTURES includes scientific products of various formats organized through four conference tracks - More than Objects, More than Cities, More than Academia and More than Humans—. The section CITIES BEST PRACTICES brings together the experiences of public administrators and other key agents in the design of the built environment who shared their knowledge and exchange examples of best practices during a focused session. Participants could learn about inclusive urban transformations from the examples of Vienna, Santiago de Compostela, Bogotá, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Florence and Sassari. Finally, the section WORKSHOPS presents a summary of AMORE Collective Action and the workshop held in Figline e Incisa Valdarno, which encouraged and fuelled the debate, creating an open space for performative actions and promoting a critical revision of urban spaces.

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