

# Shaping a township: self-connecting as ‘counter conduct’ in Umlazi, Durban

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*Abstract:* South Africa has high levels of protest. Protest actions are frequently linked to demands for ‘service delivery’, specifically the lack of access to housing, water and electricity in poor neighbourhoods. As a result, residents in these areas have resorted to informal, self-service provision in the form of illegal water and electricity connections. These self-services have assumed two narratives: the first, in official circles, as criminalised activities; and the second, by protestors and social movements, as gaining basic social rights. This article examines the various methods of ‘illegal’ water and electricity connections in the township of Umlazi, situated in Durban, South Africa. It draws on ‘counter conduct’ to understand illegal connections as ‘diffuse and subdued forms of resistance’. Techniques of counter conduct by Umlazi residents resist both *forms* and *quantities* of service provision through the act of self-connecting. Self-connections use the government’s own techniques against it while adopting its own governmentality. The article is based on a qualitative study comprising interviews with householders of Emhlabeni, Umlazi Section D.

*Keywords:* Protest, counter conduct, governmentality, resistance, service delivery, self-connections, illegal connections.

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## Introduction

South Africa has high levels of protest. It is estimated that between 2014 and 2017 there were 1,500 community protests per year, or an average of four community protests a day (Runciman *et al.* 2019: 392). Protest actions are frequently linked to demands for ‘service delivery’, specifically the lack of access to housing, water and electricity in poor neighbourhoods, including informal settlements and townships. Consequently, residents in these areas have resorted to informal, self-service provision in the form of illegal water and electricity connections. These self-services have assumed two distinct narratives: the first, in official circles, as criminalised activities; and the second, by residents, protestors and social movements, as gaining basic social rights. This article examines the various methods of ‘illegal’ water and electricity connections and the narratives around them in the township of Umlazi, situated in Durban, South Africa. It considers self-service provision, drawing from Michel Foucault’s ideas of ‘counter conduct’. Counter conduct goes beyond protest or direct confrontation (Rosol 2014: 2) and does not necessarily pose a hegemonic challenge to the state but is rather a form of resistance to processes employed in ‘conducting others’ (Foucault 2007). It can both resist and fortify systems of power (Death 2016).

## Conduct and counter conduct

Carl Death (2016) argues that examinations of protest, dissent and resistance should be expanded in the sense that they cannot be reduced to framings of movements opposing hegemonic structures, or movements offering coherent and progressive counter-hegemonic challenges. In this sense, individual, unorganised and non-strategic forms of resistance such as daily self-connections make up the ‘micro politics’ of urban struggle that do not fall into the ambit of social movement theory (Mayer & Boudreau 2012). Death (2016: 202) argues that resistance ‘can draw attention to modes of protest which form in parallel to techniques of governmentality; are deeply inter penetrated with the power relations they oppose; and which facilitate or enable the production and performance of alternative subjectivities through processes of ethical self-reflection: “ways of not being like that”’. Governmentality, or ‘the way in which one conducts the conduct of men’ (Foucault 2008: 186), refers to the ‘mentalities or rationalities’ of government (Death 2010: 236). It is understood as the practices and techniques through which people are governed (Mayhew 2004). Governmentality is a consideration of the ‘aims and aspirations, the mentalities and rationalities’ undertaken to steer ‘conduct’ (Massey 2013: 606). It is opposed by ‘counter conduct’ or ‘wanting to be conducted differently ... through other procedures and methods’ (Foucault 2007: 194). Counter conduct reflects ‘resistance to

processes of governmentality as distinct from political revolts against sovereignty or material revolts against economic exploitation' (Death 2016: 209). Counter conduct therefore attempts to understand 'much more diffuse and subdued forms of resistance' (Foucault 2007: 200). It is 'the struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others' (Foucault 2007: 201). Further, in as much as it does not employ direct confrontation or open protest, 'it is highly important for changing and shaping urban politics' (Rosol 2014: 72). Counter conduct emerges in relation to existing governmental rationalities and does not advocate radically different approaches (Gribat 2010). It is, often, an effort to manage a particular problem (Massey 2014: 291). It can also produce new norms that introduce new ways of being (Gribat 2010). Resistance in the form of self-service provision further intersects with constructs of entitlements and obligations of citizenship. In this sense, access to these services is 'bound up with questions of belonging and citizenship', which were central to the South African liberation struggle (Von Schnitzler 2013: 675).

## **Umlazi township**

eThekweni Municipality in Durban, South Africa has a population of approximately 3.7 million people and over 700,000 people live below the food poverty line (eThekweni 2017/2018). Its challenge is facilitating pro-poor interventions in the context of the dominant neoliberal pro-growth agenda. Inequality in housing in Durban has a spatial dimension with most sub-standard housing located on the city periphery or on marginalised sites occupied by informal dwellers (Georgiadou & Loggia 2016). The eThekweni Housing Unit promotes the upgrading of informal settlements through its Informal Settlement Programme, where it is advocated that informal settlements be integrated into the urban fabric to overcome spatial, social and economic exclusion (eThekweni 2015).

Umlazi township is located south of Durban with a population estimated at half a million people, making it the country's second largest township after Soweto. In the 1950s and 1960s, it housed Africans, Indians and Coloureds violently relocated from central Durban (Hunter 2015). The state stopped building township houses in the 1970s and 1980s, which saw a surge of extended rooms and backyard structures. By the 1980s, shacks occupied most of the vacant land (Hunter 2015). The research for this paper was conducted in Emhlabeni Ward 86, Section D of Umlazi. Ward 86 comprises formal housing provided by the state, such as the post-apartheid RDP<sup>1</sup> housing, as well as informal homes or shacks self-built with various materials. Residents access

<sup>1</sup> RDP housing is government subsidy housing originally set out under the post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Programme.

water through communal ablution blocks provided by the municipality as well as yard taps. Some residents in formal houses have in-house plumbing but their water has been cut off for non-payment of water bills. Some of these formal houses however do not have proper in-house plumbing. Residents in formal dwellings have therefore self-plumbed—erecting pipes that connect them to the main water supply which run in front of their homes. These pipes also serve many of the informal dwellings. Some residents in the formal houses have electricity connections and receive bills for their energy usage or have prepaid metres. These bills are high, however, and defaulting on payment has led to their being cut off. Likewise, the prepaid system provides expensive and limited access to electricity. In these cases, residents use the existing infrastructure to re-connect to the electricity supply. Residents in informal structures connect to electricity using their own cables.

### **The research methodology**

Emhlabeni Ward 86 was selected as a case study for this research as it is habitually targeted by eThekweni municipal officials due to the high occurrence of ‘illegal connections’ with respect to water and electricity. Ward 86 is 4.5 square kilometres and has a population of 31,745 people; 12.4 per cent of households are informal ([South Africa Census 2011](#)). Twenty-four households were purposively sampled to include both formal and informal dwellings and for the most part one resident per household was interviewed. Interviews were carried out with the help of a local guide familiar with the Emhlabeni community. Only householders who were willing to participate were interviewed. All participants were anonymised and the majority of them were comfortable about speaking openly regarding self-connections. Those who were less comfortable were given the opportunity to refrain but none of them used this option, seemingly satisfied that they did not have to divulge details such as names, contact numbers or identification references. Interviews were carried out using semi-structured questions and for the most part took place in English but in some instances probing took place in isiZulu to elicit a clearer response; this also put some of the participants at ease. Of the sample, 10 participants were male and 14 were female. Twenty-one participants were unemployed and the three that were employed were self-employed. This self-employment took the form of informal trading and householders stated that this income was precarious. Seventeen of the participants were social grant recipients, citing access to the Child Support Grant and the Pension Grant, which served as their main/only source of income. The majority of households comprised two to four inhabitants but households comprising as many as eight inhabitants were also interviewed. In these cases, it was noted that the household water and electricity consumption would be higher than an average household, impacting the cost factor. Although

this study is based on a relatively small sample, the data collected is indicative of self-connecting practices in Emhlabeni.

## **Conducting Umlazi**

The rationality of the state with respect to citizen access to services was reflected as early as 1995, a year after the transition to democracy, when the African National Congress (ANC)-led government adopted the 'Masakhane Campaign' to 'promote civic responsibility' in terms of encouraging South African citizens to pay rates and taxes. This followed a history of apartheid resistance where service payments were boycotted and expectations were that the new democratic state would provide equal and free services. This campaign attempted to deal with the 'culture of non-payment' for services which impact on municipal income. eThekweni Municipality, for example, reported that water leaks and illegal water connections cost in the region of R100 million a year (de Bruyn 2012). The national electricity provider Eskom reported that over the past three years, theft and vandalism of the electricity network cost as much as R188 million, excluding the loss of revenue (Naidoo 2020). The state has therefore attempted to 'regulate, manage and re-educate the poor into a "payment culture"' (Ruiters 2007: 487). These attempts have included various techniques, such as service cut-offs, aggressive cost recovery measures and prepaid meters. Such techniques have eroded citizens' constitutional rights (Dugard 2008) and forced the poorest to accept sub-standard levels of service (Ruiters 2007). This has continued despite the advent of free basic water and electricity policies, which guarantee qualifying households a basic minimum of water (6 kilolitres/month) and electricity (50 kilowatts/month) following a local government election campaign in 2000 where President Thabo Mbeki promised free amounts of water and electricity to alleviate poverty under the ANC banner 'A Better Life for All' (Joseph 2002). Attempts to 're-educate' the poor towards a 'payment culture' has resulted in popular resistance through community protest and social movements. This includes campaigns such as Operation Khanyisa, launched in 2001, where the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee illegally connected some 3,000 Soweto households to electricity. Likewise, in Operation Vulamanzi, implemented in 2003 and supported by the Anti Privatisation Campaign and the Coalition Against Water Privatisation, township residents bypassed water control measures such as prepaid meters and ticklers, re-routing pipes to access unlimited water for free.

This spirit of resistance is evident in Umlazi, where rationalities are centred on access to water and electricity as a means of survival and also as part of the promise of genuine citizenship following the transition to democracy. In areas like Emhlabeni the municipality has provided ablution facilities in modified containers comprising toilets, urinals, showers and basins 'to service approximately 50–75 households'

(Department of Economic Development Tourism and Environmental Affairs 2013). Households who are able to self-plumb, however, utilise these facilities to connect to the water mains, providing themselves with proximal connections. These acts of ‘vandalism’ have been described by municipal authorities as occurring ‘on an industrial scale’ (Etheridge 2019). eThekweni Municipality cites one of its main challenges to water provision in townships such as Umlazi as being ‘poor social behaviour’ leading to ‘massive amounts of illegal connections, tampering, vandalism and theft’ (Govender 2016: 25).

Residents have also been encouraged to utilise prepaid meters to access electricity. Those who have prepaid meters, however, complain about high electricity bills (having to buy more vouchers) and cut-offs, which officials blame on residents who ‘overload the system’ by connecting illegally. It seems that people with prepaid meters have also started self connecting ‘so the electricity balance decreases slowly in the meter’ (DUT 2020). In 2012, the Electricity Unit, Metro Police and a private security company stripped all the illegal electricity connections in Emhlabeni, resulting in the removal of 868 kilograms of cable from 350 homes. The manager of the municipal revenue protection division reiterated that ‘electricity theft is a crime’ (Mdlalose 2012).

### Counter conduct in Emhlabeni

The provision of services in Emhlabeni seeks firstly to limit the *form* of the service to poor people. In the case of water, ablution blocks and yard taps have been provided as the only way to access water for residents who have been cut off for non-payment or residents who live in informal dwellings. In the case of electricity, formal dwellings have been provided with connections to the main grid supply, while informal dwellings have no official access to electricity. The reasoning seems to be that electricity is a service that goes hand in hand with formal housing and will not be provided to shacks. Secondly, the *quantity* of services available is controlled in that water access will remain minimal, covering the basic constitutional right to water, if only accessible by a yard tap. Likewise, electricity usage will be cut off in the case of non-payment or controlled via the prepaid meter mechanism, preserving it as a revenue-generating service.

Techniques of counter conduct by Emhlabeni residents resist both *forms* and *quantities* of service provision by self-connecting to water and electricity. In this sense, self-connections act in relation to existing governmental rationalities as they do not advocate radically different approaches to service delivery (Gribat 2010). So self-connections use ‘the government’s own techniques against it while adopting their own governmentality’ (Massey 2014: 291).

*Since arriving here, we built our shacks and waited for the local municipality to build and distribute the RDP houses promised to us. While waiting we applied for water and electricity metres but were not served, as we are still living in a shack and a metre cannot be installed. (Participant 22)*

*In the beginning when we were promised RDPs, and the municipality found us there with our shacks, they built outside toilets first to mark the plot where the house will be, since then a small number of RDPs were distributed so now, we have outside toilets with houseplots numbers no houses to go with them. The toilets are made of concrete but don't have running water. (Participant 23)*

The two quotes above reflect frustrations incurred by shack dwellers promised formal services which have not been forthcoming. Consequently, this has led to the emergence of a new rationality by residents, which has 'changed and shaped' (Rosol 2014: 72) the Emhlabeni landscape. This landscape includes illicit water pipes connected to the municipal supply that run over-ground along the front doors of dwellings and a mass of unauthorised overhead electricity cables from which power is drawn. This infrastructure provides residents with access to unlimited water at the point of their homes and free broad electricity supply able to power cable (DSTV) television access in shacks.

Water self-connections resist forms and limited quantities of service delivery by expanding the ways residents can access water in that they can now draw unlimited water on their dwelling site, as opposed to having to collect limited supplies of water in buckets from the designated yard tap:

*There is a concrete standpipe where we draw water from and connect it with water pipes underground and draw water from there. We also have other sources of water e.g. the communal ablution blocks and community tap. (Participant 22)*

Likewise, electricity self-connections provide access to a full service rather than a restricted amount of electricity as per what may be available on the prepaid meter. In this way, shack living does not mean restrictions on electrical appliances or television/satellite connections:

*With our living situation we have had people in the area who are skilled in such things, there is a guy who is called a tuber who can work with cable and run it in the house, we have to buy the cables and extension cords and tubes for him to connect and run. He can also do the plug points in the different rooms in shacks and some RDP houses that were not finished and fully done by municipality. (Participant 21)*

Water self-connections in Emhlabeni involve community plumbing techniques, which have been cast as 'cunning water theft' and 'economic sabotage' by authorities (Von Schnitzler 2013: 684). What they also reflect are normalised practices that are intertwined with the 'power relations they oppose' (Death 2016: 202). Residents spoke of engaging the services of a municipal worker to self-connect. This person holds

plumbing expertise but is also familiar with the municipal water system, which enables him to best make re-connections. It was also noted that he works ‘alone’, ensuring discretion. Also, this work is ‘private’ and so removed from his obligations as a municipal agent—in this sense, municipal ‘responsibility’ blurs with ideas of community access:

*In cases like those we get the help of a known municipal worker who would know which fittings and pipes would work and be needed to run the distance and connect properly. He usually works alone and in private outside of his usual working hours. (Participant 22)*

Electricity self-connections in Emhlabeni draw on community networks of ‘electricity poachers’, ‘tamperers’ (Von Schnitzler, 2013: 684) or *iziNyokanyoka*. Translated from isiZulu as ‘snakes’ in the pejorative, *iziNyokanyoka* in fact reflect embedded community networks of trust. This is suggested in relationships among the connectors and the community served—‘knowing each other’ resulting in a small fee for labour rather than an exorbitant one. Further to this, safety issues that centre on electricity cabling, especially informal cabling, are taken into consideration, suggesting a level of care:

*He is a known skilled electrician, a guy who lives off doing such piece jobs in the area and other parts of Umlazi. We have grown to trust him since we know he can do a good job where the connection is relatively safe and looks legit. Since he knows us, we don’t have to pay him a big amount, but we do pay him for his work. (Participant 21)*

Access to more complete services through self-connections are threatened by municipal interventions. Part of the process is re-connecting once again, as explained by a resident: ‘usually the place will be full of police and municipal members coming to cut off but we wait for them to leave and we connect again’ (Participant 11). Counter conduct in Emhlabeni is embedded in community solidarity. This form of solidarity is a key feature of Durban township life reflected in the Durban Kennedy Road settlement, for example, where householders erect ‘illegal’ dwellings without fear that they will be destroyed by authorities on the basis of the sheer number of shacks (Mottiar 2019). There is a strong social fabric of neighbours who stand together in their experience of a common struggle and who understand there is power in numbers:

*For me as a single woman parent, I am sometimes scared of the illegal connection and fear that one day we’ll get caught and put away, then on the other hand I am reassured by the number of people doing the same thing and the neighbours assured we will stick together should things get severe and rough. (Participant 21)*

*Being in this area we are comfortable with the setup because as a community we know each other and know how we all struggle for services, so we are not scared of the municipality should they come and cut our connection, we trust that the authorities cannot arrest all of us. (Participant 22)*



### **'Not being like that'**

eThekwini's governmentality is underpinned by a neoliberal, market-driven approach, where citizens are entitled to their constitutional rights to water and electricity but are also 'consumers' from whom revenue can be extracted. This is evident in the nature of service provision in Emhlabeni and in official remarks that cast self-connections as 'vandalism' and 'crime'. There is also the sentiment that 'residents must be patient' (Madlalose 2012). Residents of Emhlabeni resist this, taking the view that self-connections are necessary: 'people are desperate for things and need to get them to survive' (Participant 3); 'they [self-connections] are all we can do to stay with lights on in our homes' (Participant 8). Formal services further present financial challenges, residents argued, 'we can't all afford to pay for lights and water' (Participant 6). Counter conduct is thus framed as community agency—participants noted, 'when we need things to be done, people can do what they need to do' (Participant 1). This agency also includes the power to hold authorities to account; according to residents, 'they [self-connections] also need to happen so that government will know they need to do work' (Participant 7). In this sense, residents who self-connect understand their conduct as appropriate action, acknowledging only technical drawbacks as problematic; for example, 'no, they [self-connections] are not wrong but they are dangerous and cause more problems in the power grid' (Participant 2).

Resisting payment for services is implicit in self-connections. Most residents argued that services should be provided for free. In some cases this argument was tempered with suggestions that 'some' services be free or that fees should be negotiated: 'they should be free for people who can't afford them – we know it is expensive to make electricity' (Participant 2); or 'taxes can be used to pay for water and electricity' (Participant 3); and 'maybe we should talk about how much we pay for each of these services' (Participant 4).

Resisting payment in Emhlabeni reflects 'ways of not being like that'. Even residents with service connections (i.e. those who have secured a degree of formality of living) have bypassed their prepaid meters to access water and electricity for free. Reasons for this are centred on the expense factor in that their water bills had been too high and they were cut off for non-payment and prepaid electricity was too costly. The fact that self-connecting options are accessible and normalised makes them a default option. Tracing the micro politics involving township residents, municipal officials and engineers, Antina Von Schnitzler (2013: 673) has argued that 'technologies and infrastructures are not merely symbols or tools for political expression but rather [they become] the political terrain for the negotiation of moral-political questions'. These questions were critical to the liberation struggle in South Africa relating to 'the limits, entitlements and obligations of citizenship'. Across South African townships, Soweto being a notable example, infrastructure is not 'a neutral conduit for the

provision of services’ but rather integral to ‘questions of belonging and citizenship’ (Von Schnitzler 2013: 675). Infrastructure is a way in which the violence of apartheid would be reversed by ensuring access for the previously denied. Indeed, during the apartheid struggle, township residents withholding payment for rents and services formed part of the campaign to make cities ‘ungovernable’, transforming disconnections into sites for political struggle (Von Schnitzler 2013: 684). Township residents in South Africa, and this is reflected in Emhlabeni rationalities, continue to approach the ‘service delivery’ terrain as one in which their struggle for access is being played out through a low-intensity conflict with municipal officials and city engineers; centred on ideas of post-apartheid citizenship, they are ‘residents with political problems’ (Von Schnitzler 2013: 684).

The struggle ‘against the processes implemented for conducting others’ (Foucault 2007: 201) is reflected in attitudes towards self-connection infrastructure. In evading detection, Emhlabeni residents are careful that self-connected electricity cables ‘look legit’. This is a reference to ensuring that cables are run neatly from the roof and along the wall inside the dwelling—and so are, to an extent, hidden and removed from the mass of overhead cables which characterises South African townships. Wiring which runs along the ground and connections made up of different sizes and colours of cables are a give-away that the connection is illegal. Likewise, piping used to re-connect to the main water supply is laid over-ground in horizontal lines in front of dwellings. This way it cannot be detected unless it is felt underfoot and as a resident claimed, ‘[because] the municipality is disconnected from the community – they would hardly walk around here’ (Participant 2). Self-connected water pipes are ‘bent to look like a tap’—the pipe is bent to restrict water but straightened to allow the flow of water when in use. In this sense, counter conduct applies a different governmentality to infrastructure—‘playing the same game differently’ (Massey 2014: 295). So counter conduct is adopted to ‘manipulate and benefit from what is available’ (Massey 2014: 295).

In terms of quality of self-delivered services, residents highlighted the dangers of self-connections, citing potential electrocutions: ‘cables run across the open space where children play’ (Participant 3). Furthermore, there is a high element of unreliability in self-connecting where the service may fail or the municipality may come in to disconnect, and so residents said: ‘we have to go back to the bucket system or be in the dark while trying to buy new cables’ (Participant 3). Opinions as to how services should best be delivered are instructive of Emhlabeni residents’ frustrations accessing basic services over the years. They argued that service delivery processes required a participatory approach, ‘with full community consent and participation’ (Participant 16). In this sense, counter conduct reflects township residents accessing services on their own terms and in ways that suit their needs, as opposed to accepting an already decided package of services from the municipality according to the municipality’s

timelines—'ways of not being like that'. There was also a sense among residents that service delivery should work as a mechanism for empowerment and that the process could reflect community ownership and pride: 'I think services should be delivered by local people who know and understand the community' (Participant 12). Following long experience with the quality and unreliability of self-connections, it was not surprising that Emhlabeni residents stressed that services should be provided according to a good standard of quality so that 'people with correct skills and qualifications are given the job' (Participant 1). It did seem that there would be a preference for the government to provide these services, suggesting that, despite protest action in the area, there remains a fair amount of faith in the possibility of equitable state delivery: '[services should be delivered] in a fair way and on time by qualified people working for government' (Participant 4). Indeed, the 2016 local election results returned an overwhelming victory for the ruling party, the ANC, in Ward 86 with 86.83 per cent of the vote (IEC 2016). Certainly there was an emphasis that residents required accountability from public officials—protest action 'for service delivery' frequently includes allegations of local-level mismanagement and lack of accountability by politicians and officials; it was argued that: '[services should be delivered] by people we know so that we can easily hold them accountable' (Participant 17). Finally, views about how best services could be delivered reflected Emhlabeni residents' disappointments with ANC promises of 'a better life for all', with residents stating that: '[services should be delivered] fairly, where the poor and old are taken care of first – certain things can be done faster then we don't have broken projects and half-built roads' (Participant 2).

### **'Poor social behaviour'**

Death (2016: 202) has argued that understanding the politics of resistance requires an examination of 'the sorts of counter conducts which reproduce and are themselves produced by prevailing forms of governance and governmentality'. For him, counter conduct is a form of conduct which subverts 'dominant techniques for the production of responsible subjects' (Death 2016: 202). 'Poor social behaviour' in Emhlabeni reflects this. Residents resist frames such as 'vandals', 'tamperers' and 'criminals' to normalise self-connections on the basis that 'not everyone can afford to pay for lights and water'. There is 'the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price' (Death 2010 quoting Foucault 2007: 75). This is given impetus as residents note that the entire community 'struggles for services' and stands together safe in the knowledge they 'can't all be arrested'. Further to this, self-connections are argued to be a method to remind officials that 'they need to do work'—as long as people who cannot afford water and electricity have to self-connect, the state is deemed to have failed on its promises to secure full citizenship to the under privileged in South Africa.

Counter conduct in Emhlabeni reflects the micro politics of South African township life. Here politics does not only take conventional forms such as direct confrontation or open protest but also disapproval and resistance, which is ‘non-confrontational, unorganised and non-strategic’ (Rosol 2014: 81). In this sense, counter conduct does not undertake collective action or oppositional tactics such as those regularly employed by local protest events. Residents referred to protest in their ward, saying: ‘we engage in protest – and we toyi-toyi’ (Participant 1); ‘we do protest and we like it’ (Participant 2). Protest action is also linked with organised structures such as movements: ‘there are people who engage in protest and hit the streets like members of Abahlali baseMjondolo and Mayine Azanian Movement and also SDCEA’ (Participant 9). Residents mentioned the ‘empowering’ aspects of protest in the sense of ‘standing up’ and ‘doing something about it’. Furthermore, organisations like Abahlali baseMjondolo (the shack dwellers’ movement), the Mayine Azanian Movement (a socialist movement), and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) present opportunities for a counter-hegemonic challenge. But this form of politics occurs in parallel with everyday counter conduct undertaken to ‘survive’ rather than to transform the status quo. While Emhlabeni residents stand together on the acceptability of self-connecting, the action is undertaken in a more discreet fashion at household/dwelling level across the ward. It is a form of resistance, ‘often overlooked but still highly important for changing and shaping urban politics’ (Rosol 2014: 71).

The clash of rationalities between the state and citizens struggling for access in South Africa has resulted in the attempted control and discipline of township residents such as those in Emhlabeni. The official narrative leans towards the obligations of democratic citizenship where there is a responsibility to pay for services and, if this is not possible, to consume less in the way of services. The counter conduct narrative however centres on demands related to material and political conditions rather than criminality. Here citizenship is gained through ‘poor social behaviour’, which elevates customers to citizens and disputes water and electricity as commodified goods. The infrastructure that serves as an instrument of control and discipline is adapted to serve the rationality of citizens without access.

## **Conclusion**

The long wait for ‘a better life’ as promised by the ANC has resulted in residents of South African townships such as Umlazi adopting their own social values and norms. These rationalities are based on the need for survival but also reject the below par level of services mapped out for the poor, especially those who reside in informality. This rejection has resulted in the creation of a different way of being, which involves wider options for forms and quantities of services. This includes accessing water nearer the

dwelling site and electrifying shack residences. In this sense, there is a disjunct around narratives of self-services which are viewed as 'criminal' in official quarters but as acceptable social behaviour among township citizens, who use it as a mechanism to assert agency and demand accountability regarding their rights to basic services. 'Poor social behaviour' or 'illegally' connecting to water and electricity reflects ways in which techniques for the shaping of 'responsible' subjects are subverted to normalise self-connections. Counter conduct through self-connections is a daily form of resistance, effectively 'delivering' the services that parallel forms of resistance such as social protest continue to demand.

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