

Cape Town and Her Dignity

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MES Analytical Essay

Cape Town is located in South Africa and has a history of drought but none as severe as the one they are currently experiencing. Cape Town was going to be “the first modern city in the world to completely run dry” (Baker, 2019) and was on the brink of reaching “Day Zero,” due to that extreme ongoing drought. Day Zero meant that the city would turn off all the municipal water for more than four million people without exception (Welch, 2018). In an effort to delay this catastrophic event the government of Africa enforced a strict water guideline on the community of Cape Town. These guidelines put the sanitation levels of all the people, regardless of gender, to the bare minimum of 13 gallons per person per day (Leahy, 2018). This overlooked the needs of women and how their access to water would indirectly lead to the decline of their health and sanitation while assuming that males and females require the same amount of water. Through these policies, the community was forced into reducing their amount of water usage, “even though residents aren’t responsible, the burden of making sure it doesn’t happen rests largely on our ability to cut down on water usage,” (Baker, 2019). These guidelines disproportionately affected women and their hygiene because it was constructed on the basis that all people have the same amount of basic water needs and did not include the personal hygiene of women apart from their duties to their family.

Men do not have the same responsibilities as women, yet they are responsible for creating the policies that heavily affect the daily life of women and their families, “men should not be the ones dealing with the struggles and issues of health and sanitation that women face, as they lacked an understanding of what it is like to be a woman” (Ngalo, 2018). This lacks procedural

justice because it is not fair that men can decide the needs of women without fully understanding what it is like to be a woman nor understanding what a women's responsibilities are to their family, not just for themselves. Women are expected to provide water for their families while only having 13 gallons of water to do so, yet men were given the same amount of water without the responsibilities of women. This disproportionality affected women because of their household duties that relied on this water such as cooking, cleaning, washing cloths, while not including their personal hygiene such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth or daily needs such as brushing their teeth or showering. This lacks distributional justice because they are expected to make the 13 gallons of water per day to last through all these activities yet men were given the same amount of water without having to deal with the needs of household chores. This resource allocation does not provide fairness to the women in Cape Town.

Women take it upon themselves to use their personal 13 gallons of water to support their families but this is not taken into account when creating these policies, in fact, the “Government has dragged its feet when it comes to dealing with the health and sanitation needs of women” (Ngalo, 2018). “Women still bear a disproportionate lack of access to water and sanitation” (Ngalo, 2018), the government of Africa is not distributing water effectively and lacks the perspective of what it means to be a woman in a drought. By assuming everyone's needs are equal they are unintentionally overlooking the needs of these community members.

Their regulation was broad and did not include how much women relied on fresh water to use, instead their regulations accounted for everyone as a unit without differentiation of their individual needs resulting in an injustice of distributive justice. Apart from household duties, Women's long term needs include, “menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, and not having

water or access can put them in discomfort and distress, [it] can make them more susceptible to disease” (Ngalo, 2018). This regulation disregarded how heavily these women relied on fresh water and instead focused on how to avoid Day Zero. Women were left to fend for themselves when it came to their sanitation and personal hygiene.

Another issue women faced was their lack of ability to use the restroom without scrutiny from the community (Sim, 2012). Women already had to choose between their household duties that required water and their personal hygiene but with this new regulation they now found themselves unable to relieve themselves without losing some of their dignity (Ray, 2016). During our lecture, we were given the example of how women can lose some of their dignity for using the restroom or showering during the day and how they were forced to do these necessary actions during the night (Sim, 2012), even if that put their safety at risk. These women have always faced issues about the scarcity of water and how it related to their hygiene but these conditions were exacerbated by the new regulation they found themselves expected to follow. This regulation affected them because they were expected to have the same sanitary conditions while reducing their resources to do so.

This lack of access to necessary amounts of water has put women in a position where they must put the needs of their household before their own sanitation. This is an issue of sanitation justice because it affects the lives of women within Cape Town and how their sanitation needs are not met. They are not met because the government has made a broad policy that all must follow, ignoring the fact that women have a higher need than that of a male. These women must also deal with the injustice of not being able to relieve themselves during the day because of community norms and lack of water to do so. Sanitation justice involves more than

being able to access fresh water, it relies on being able to use this water for your personal sanitation needs while also being able to fulfill your daily duties. Sanitation justice means you will have access to water that will increase your health, increase your sanitation while also having enough to finish all your household duties without having to choose between them. Water and sanitation justice are not linear and should not be treated as such.

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