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8 July 2024

UCT academic's new book delves deeper into South Africa's water crisis

Asinamanzi details the daily realities of living with water scarcity and amidst raw sewage

A new book on the water crisis and social dynamics in South Africa offers a fresh ethnographic exploration of the politics of water in an unequal society, specifically addressing the challenges in Khayelitsha.

"Asinamanzi: Fluid Realities – Exploring South Africa's Water Crisis and Social Dynamics" by Dr Minga Mbweck Kongo, an anthropologist affiliated with the [Institute for Humanities in Africa \(HUMA\)](#) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), also examines the inequalities in water access in Cape Town. It highlights the inequitable development patterns and the strategies residents deploy to cope with inadequate water access.

Kongo is also affiliated with the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at UCT, a guest lecturer at Stellenbosch University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and a postdoctoral fellow at the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). His research interests include water sociality, mobility, urbanism, illness, and climate change.

Using incompleteness and conviviality as a framework, the book delves into the subjectivities created by the lack of water and its impact on various aspects of life, including medical, ecological, spiritual, and political dimensions.

South Africa is confronted with a quadruple threat of water scarcity, energy depletion, inflation, and unemployment, leaving politicians unsure of where to begin in minimising the damage.

"The book demonstrates the complex relationships and intricacies of water and how humans think about, relate to, and respond to water, particularly when it is lacking. Overall, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the complexities of water and its profound significance in different spheres of human life," explains Kongo.

Kongo says: "I wrote this book to explain the subjectivities caused by water challenges in South Africa, offer an alternative way of writing about informal settlement, and understand how people excluded from basic service delivery cope with water access."

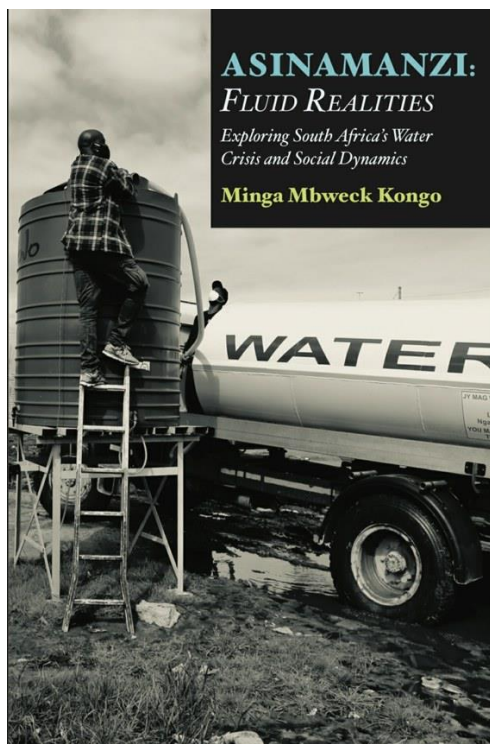
He says the book's appositeness will ring a bell in many marginalised societies in South Africa and Africa and remind policymakers, politicians and city planners of the overriding need to find more equitable and efficient ways to distribute water regardless of social status or residential codes.

"The government should invest in water infrastructure, maintain the basic infrastructure at the local government level, employ people with the capacity and relevant skills, reinforce existing legislation and policy, and be accountable," adds Kongo.

Associate Professor Divine Fuh, Director of HUMA, says: "*Asinamanzi* is a raw book about the impact that a lack of piped water has on people living in informal settlements in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. It describes a world of 'liquid sh*t' that assaults the senses and erodes the dignity and relationships of people living in it. Amidst this 'incomplete' existence, residents bravely struggle to establish a 'convivial' social life."

Antonádia Borges, Professor of Anthropology at Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ) in Brazil, says Kongo's excellent ethnography offers a rare account of the convivial relationships that structure everyday living and mobility in a place of 'liquid sh*t' in the midst of a precarity provoked by the sociopolitical absence of water in a city filled with water for everything, yet insensible to incompleteness as life-craft.

Ilana van Wyk, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Stellenbosch University, says: "*Asinamanzi* is about the daily realities of living with water scarcity and raw sewage running through streets and houses. The book examines the social, cultural, religious and health dimensions of water, and provides rich ethnographic insights into what it means to strive to live with dignity in settings characterised by the broken infrastructures of everyday life."



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Photo: Supplied

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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