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Water, skin and touch: migrant bathing assemblages

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Abstract

This paper offers a contribution to cultures of urban water research through household ethnographies conducted with 16 participants who migrated from Burma to Sydney, Australia. We draw on a strand of corporeal feminism and offer the concept of bathing assemblages to interpret how watery skin encounters provide clues to how participants washed themselves in their 'home' country may persist, transform or stop. Our analysis maps how dimensions of the self (ethical, gender, class, ethnic, national faith and others) are constituted by, and generative of, the felt intensities of watery encounters through different bathing assemblages. This paper illustrates how bathing practices are shaped as much by emotional and affective intensities as by reasoned activity. We show the utility of corporeal feminism not only for theorising subjectivity, but also for household sustainability politics.

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Water, skin and touch: migrant bathing assemblages

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This paper offers a contribution to cultures of urban water research through household ethnographies conducted with 16 participants who migrated from Burma to Sydney, Australia. Inspired by a strand of corporeal feminism that offers a notion of subjectivity engendered relationally through skin encounters, we offer the concept of bathing assemblages to interpret why how migrants washed themselves in their ‘home’ country may persist, transform or stop. Our analysis maps how dimensions of the self (ethical, gender, class, ethnic, national faith and others) are constituted by, and generative of, the felt intensities of watery encounters through different bathing assemblages. This paper illustrates how bathing practices are shaped as much by emotional and affective intensities as by reasoned activity. We show the utility of corporeal feminism not only for theorising subjectivity but also for household sustainability politics.

Keywords: feminism, corporeal, post-humanism, ethnography, Burmese, Sydney, Australia

Introduction

Questions around bathing as part of everyday urban lives in the Global North are increasingly a concern for critical sociologists, geographers and historians (Allon and Sofoulis 2006; Lawrence and McManus 2008; Sofoulis 2005; Davison 2008; Shove 2003; Kuijer et al 2013; Browne et al 2014). These questions correspond with evidence troubling the capacity of current metropolitan water catchments and reservoirs to ensure future resource security (Pullinger et al 2013). Scientific consensus is that current water consumption is not sustainable (Troy et al 2005; Sanford 2015). As metropolitan populations continue to grow, so will the intensity of environmental, economic and social problems. Against this backdrop, as strongly advocated in the cultures of urban water literature, a business-as-usual approach cannot continue.

The cultures of urban water literature prioritises conducting ethnographic work to better understand routine doings, rather than conducting qualitative or quantitative surveys that measure behaviour, attitudes and knowledge. The expanding cultures of urban water terrain are woven out of diverse theoretical and methodological threads. A short list includes Shove's (2003) reading of Andreas Reckwitz and Theodore Schatzki; Head and Muir's (2006) reading of Bruno Latour, Erik Swyngedouw and Sarah Whatmore; Day et al's (2016) reading of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum; Pink et al's (2013) reading of Tim Ingold and Doreen Massey and Strengers et al's (2015) reading of the concept of 'muscle memory' in the biophysical sciences, amongst others. As Strengers et al (2015) argue, one potential for this work lies in new ways of thinking about sustainable futures when the site of intervention is shifted from individuals to socially shared practices.

In this burgeoning field, we draw on recent feminist thinking on skin encounters that is in dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to offer an alternative thread. We follow the work of feminist philosophers Braidotti (2002) and Probyn (2000) to think about how the

social categories that define us are made, remade and unmade relationally through the felt intensities of watery bathing encounters conceived as assemblages. If we think of washing skin in more affective terms, then the embodied histories of what water we allow to touch our skin, or not, literally and metaphorically ‘gets under the skin’ to make possible, or close off, modes of bathing. Beyond thinking of skin as a demarcation surface of inside and outside the biological body, bathing assemblages are one way to think about the material and discursive in theorising of self and world. Our central argument is that to conceive of bathing as an assemblage it asks what are the social and material entities that constitute subjectivities. What then becomes important are how we may seek out specific arrangements of watery encounters to help human capacity for self-realisation; the ways in which affective intensities move and circulate; and, how intensities register on bodies as a feeling. The presences of a bath, shower or bucket points to the social norms that constitute watery encounters as a mode of cleansing the body. Furthermore, the affective intensities of a splash of cold water droplets on the skin can assign identify values by bringing up a reminder of a religious ideology, a biographical moment, a painful or joyful collective past. Bathing assemblages are at work when and where a person can detect who and what belongs, thereby making felt their subjectivities. We offer the bathing assemblage to deepen our understandings of why certain practices move, persist, transform or cease.

The aim of this paper is to better appreciate bathing and subjectivities as a shifting, dynamic relational arrangements through affective intensities that traverse situated watery skin encounters. We do so by focusing on an ethnically diverse group of 16 first generation migrants from Burmaⁱⁱ who consented to participate in domestic water ethnographies in metropolitan Sydney, Australia. We are interested in the concept of assemblage to think how our skin alongside ideas and things play a role in interpreting why these migrants’ less resource intensive practices of bucket bathing persist or diminish in Sydney, Australia. This

meant asking participants to reflect upon their personal bathing biographies, and to show us their current ways of washing skin. Following the lead of Ahmed and Stacey (2001), thinking through skin enables feminist scholars to avoid privileging 'the body'. We contribute to a burgeoning geographical literature that conceives skin as a fruitful mode of inquiry into the relationship between spaces and subjectivities (Price 2012). We argue that, in respect to environmental politics of urban water, the focus the affective intensities of watery skin encounters provide us with an invitation to think about the decisions that build our lives around specific modes of cleansing our skin. Our argument is divided into three sections. First, we outline our conceptual framework. We ask the question: how does thinking through watery skin encounters as bathing assemblages advance scholarship in relation to urban water? Second, we offer an outline of how our methodology enabled us to focus on the pre- and post-migration intimacies of washing skin *in situ*. Next, our analysis focuses on the affective intensities of fleshy moments of bathing encounters that help constitute subjectivities that work towards stopping, transforming or persisting with washing with a scoop and bucket. It seems that the affective intensities of how the bucket bathing assemblage brings together water, skin and social norms, participants come to know themselves as Burmese and Buddhist. The bucket bathing assemblage becomes taken for granted amongst those seeking to recreate a sense of themselves as Burmese in their adopted home country. We conclude by discussing potential avenues of how the affective intensities of watery skin encounters may offer new ways of imagining household sustainability policies.

Thinking through the skin

To think *through* the body is fashionable among many feminist philosophers (Gallop 1988; Butler 1993; Grosz 1994, Braidotti 2002). Although these feminist philosophers have

different views, it was a call to feminism to recognise how bodies take form, rather than if bodies are already pre-existing (as nature).

Corporeal feminism acknowledges ‘the body’ not as a static ‘thing-like’ entity, but as both fluid and multiple, made up of many bodies, movements and connections. No longer is the figure of the body conceived as a container of social difference, but instead difference emerges relationally through the connections and disconnections between social and material entities. In making this shift, corporeal feminism recognises not only the politics of the human that informs and produces knowledge, but also how bodies register forces of the nonhuman as intensities of feeling and are understood as central to the constitution of social life. Corporeal feminism provides critical geographers with a means to attend to the relationality of social spatial life thinking through the body (see Slocum 2008, Colls and Fannin 2013, Waitt and Stanes 2015).

So, what of skin? How do we know skin? Skin can be understood in many ways (see Cataldi 1993; Cheng 2011, Connor 2004, Segal 2009). Here we pay attention to literature within feminist theory that thinks through skin to complicate universalism and pays attention to how ‘skins’ come to be marked by difference (scars, tattoos, make-up) as well as a marker of difference (ethnicity, gender and class). One strand understands how ‘skins’ are lived and produced through how uneven geometries of discursive power hold bodies in place, or not. For example, Ahmed (1998) offers an account of racial confrontation in suburban Adelaide to illustrate only those figured as white had legitimacy to walk these streets. Johnston (2005) reads the leisure practice of tanning skin on beaches in Aotearoa/New Zealand as the enactment of gendered, sexed and racialized difference in relations to whiteness and heteropatriarchy. Whereas Straughan (2010a) uses interviews with managers and employees in beauty salons, alongside Foucault’s concept of the clinic, to investigate the production of

the skin surface as a problematic site through medical and health discourses of the clinical gaze.

Another strand attends to work that draws on Didier Anzieu's that offers a psychoanalytic approach to thinking through 'skin as ego'. As Walkerdine (2010, 95) and Pile (2009; 2001) argue 'skin ego' is an inherently spatial concept, given how sensations connected to the skin are conceived to provide "an affective sense of our boundaries", including a sense-of-self. For example, Adams-Hutcheson (2016) draws on Anzieu's (1990) work to rethink how trauma experienced through the body during the 2014 Christchurch earthquakes becomes embedded into and breaks the ontological security sustained by the spatialising skin.

Skin encounter is another important way in which feminist and other critical scholars are rethinking lived embodiment. The notion of skin encounter allows us to think about tactile sensations. Skin is no longer reducible to a container, surface, organ or racialized border. Nor is the skin simply a textual surface that can be read for health or race. Instead, the skin is tactile. Thinking through skin encounters brings to the fore haptic knowledge practices (Paterson 2009; Dixon and Straughan 2010). For example, Hetherington (2003, 1399) draws on Josipovici's (1996) notion of 'praesentia', as a way of thinking about the way place is made through skin encounters of fingertips 'where the distinction between the experiencing subject and experienced object dissolves'. Hence, to focus on haptic knowledges, is not to work within the binary of bodily inside/outside or to privilege textural qualities over other sensual experience. For instance, Paterson (2009) uses the term 'somatic sensations' to argue that tactile skin encounters are not reducible to 'touch' alone, but combine with the way in which touch proceeds alongside other sensations through the body, felt as sensations of movements, balance, pain, temperature and muscular tension. For example, Sheller (2007), and Waitt and Harada (2016) explore the haptic and kinaesthetic geographies of becoming a

car driver; while Spinney (2006) investigates those of becoming a bike-rider and Straughan (2010b) those of becoming a scuba-diver.

Recent Deleuze-inspired work under more-than-representational theory and corporeal feminism turns to questions of touch as way of thinking about the relations between discourses and material practices (see Paterson [2007] for a discussion of therapeutic touch). This work builds off Merleau-Ponty (1968) and his notion of ‘intercorporeality’ that considers the reversibility of touch. For Merleau-Ponty touch involves a multiplicity of sense perceptions. Thus, the experience of embodiment is never a private affair but always made up of multiple interactions with other bodies, both human and non-human that troubled the Cartesian mind/body dualism. While more-than representational theory is framed around a concern for ‘embodiment’, ‘sensuousness’ and the ‘precognitive’, as Hetherington argues (2003,1937) touch offers us ‘a way of knowing the world that is both inside and outside knowledge as a set of representational practices’. For example, drawing on Thrift’s more-than-representational theory, Waitt and Cook (2007) illustrate that touch is never reducible to, or outside of language. With a focus on moments of encounter, rather than representation, they illustrate how the subject of ecotourism emerges from knowledge of how and where to touch alongside the performative and generative knowledge of bodily touch. Likewise, Obrador-Pons (2007) employs Thrift’s (2004, 64) more-than-representational notion of affect as ‘a sense of push in the world’, to provide ‘a language to approach the unspeakable and invisible sphere of life on which the practice of nudism draws’(Obrador-Pons 2007, 130). While, Obrador-Pons (2007) encourages us to think about how subjectivities emerge through encounters between skin, sand and sunlight, as noted by Johnston (2012) he overlooks the racialized, gendered and sexualised politics of touch.

A key strand of feminist geographical research on touch pivots around a critique of social difference as solely ‘cultural’; that is, in terms of how discursive constructions,

performance, language and representation intermingle. For instance, recent feminist geographical work on touch draws on Grosz (1994, 2005) to emphasise how gender, race and ethnicity emerge through encounters as an embodied phenomenon. For example, working through the material feminism of Grosz, Slocum's (2008) analysis of a Minneapolis farmers' market illustrates how race is in part, made and remade, through both material (things, objects) and expressive forces (ideas, affect, emotion, desire) that propel bodies to touch certain produce and not others. Likewise, Grosz's work is fruitful for Johnston (2012) to investigate how gendered and sexed differences emerge through how bodies are always open to touching and being touched. Her work with drag queens illustrates how the visceral experiences from the tactile encounters of touching, and being touched allow for the resilience and rupturing of bodily and spatial boundaries associated with existing gendered and sexed social classifications. Echoing the affective character of such skin encounters and building on corporeal feminism that engages with matter and embodied subjects as engaged together in on-going process of transformation while embedded within social norms, we next outline our conceptual framework.

We offer the concept of bathing assemblages to advance a conceptualisation of subjectivity understood as produced through watery skin encounters is an engagement with material and social worlds in which neither the space nor the subject are ontologically prior. We build on Braidotti's (2002) presented in *Metamorphoses* and those of Probyn's (2000) ideas outlined in *Carnal Appetites*. After Braidotti (2002, 62) we conceive of subjectivity as 'embodied, embedded, assembled of agentic sub-materials within; and through encounters with the material and more-than-human world'. Building on this point, we posit that washing skin is an on-going process of identity-making. We conceive of how washing skin may transform, stop or continue, by how subjectivities emerge in part through powerfully effective encounters with ideas of purification or cleansing on the one hand, and with the material

world on the other. The affective aspects of simultaneously touching, and being touched by water is conceived as an intensity: what happens to us when we sense the touch of water. Affect is not the meaning of washing with water, but the response it prompts. The sensations from a splash of cold water on the skin may evoke fond memories, or to recoil in discomfort. Before water can act as a signifier with meaning, such as ablution, cleanliness or health, there must be an investment in the forms of intensive difference. Hence, rather than the practice of bathing being understood as solely grounded in meaning, washing skin becomes an affective force. After Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we consume in culture not the meanings invested in water, but rather the investment in intensities that may be felt as relaxation, invigoration, freshness or cleanliness. Before water is signified with meaning, desire works to connect skin with water within a specific arrangement or working order. The skin is conceived here as a material and expressive force that assembles bodies again and again, opening-up new avenues or recalling with force existing categories of class, gender and nation.

In focussing on the embodied, relational and affective dimensions of subjectivities we draw on the concept of assemblage. Building on the work of Probyn (2000) we conceive of assemblage as a relation, an ordering that work to achieve a set of expectations. To conceive of bathing as an assemblage means thinking how material things (or parts of things) and expressive elements (discourse, affect, emotions) come together in a working order with one another to achieve relaxation, purification or cleanliness. At its most basic, assemblage thinking asks us to pay attention to the subjectivities that emerge through material, discursive, emotional and affective dimensions of watery skin encounters of bathing. Here, we draw on the idea of assemblage as a means of attending to how: ‘bits of past and present practice, openings, attachments to parts of the social, closings and aversion to other parts’ (Probyn 2000, 18). After Probyn (2000), we are interested in the ways that we can detect an

assemblage is at work when sorting processes are brought to the fore. In turn, these processes can provide insights to what and who belongs or not.

Hence, informed by material feminist philosophy, we recognise that when people arrive in a new country, how they come to understand themselves is conceived as embodied, assembled of affective intensities, and through encounters with the material and social worlds. One way migrants come to know themselves is produced through the affective intensities that traverse the more-than-human bathing assemblages. Opportunities arise for migrant subjectivities to be made, remade and unmade through the felt intensities of the coming together of the material, cultural and social dimensions of bathing practices.

The study

Our paper is based on a larger place-based project investigating the environmental knowledge of ethnic minorities. We follow the lead of Maller (2011) and Klocker and Head (2013) who argued that strategies for more sustainable cities could glean important insights from the cultural capacities of diverse migrants. Our project design focussed on enabling a group of first-generation migrants from Burma to share their relations with water; that is, talking about water, thinking about water, ingesting water and how washing dishes, clothes and bodies is done. Each participant had experienced water insecurity in their country of origin. Since 2010, Burma is one of the largest 'non-traditional' source countries of new immigrants to Australia. In 2015, there were approximately 23,500 registered Burma born migrants in Australia. Approximately half were granted Australian permanent residence in the past five years, primarily through humanitarian visa programs (ABS 2016).

Both of us are 'white' Australian British migrants. Mindful of the work of Avis (2002) and Falconer Al Hindi (1997) we understand that the notion of white British visiting the home of minority ethnic participants and asking about intimate practices of washing oneself requires critical reflection. Hence, our project embraced the notion of the co-

production of knowledge; that is researchers and participants working collaboratively. The appointment of two research assistants, or cultural liaisons, assisted with actioning this collaboration within the project design, recruitment and delivery. Mya is female, from Burma, and migrated to Australia in 2014; and, Min Si is male, from Burma, and migrated to Australia in 2014. Our own experiences of bathing, and that of our cultural liaisons, shaped interviews and we shared stories of washing our skin in the United Kingdom.

Recruitment occurred through various refugee support networks, Burmese associations and the social networks of our cultural liaisons in metropolitan Sydney. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms were translated into Burmese. A total of 16 people (11 households) consented to share insights on the different ways water was important to them in and around their domestic living environment. All participants spoke English, but Burmese was normally the first language spoken at home. None of our participants intended to ‘waste’ water. They shared an understanding of water as ‘precious.’ As first-generation migrants, they had experienced different systems of household water provision than in metropolitan Sydney including rivers, wells, rainwater-tanks and mains water. For those with mains water in Burma, disruptions were frequent, particularly during summer droughts. Participants clearly differentiated bathing by ‘the Western way’ and ‘the Burmese way’. Most participants understood showering bodies alone, indoors and in private as a ‘Western’ practice, whereas scooping cold water from a bucket normally collected from a well or river, outdoors together with others, was understood as ‘Burmese style’. Only four had lived in Australia for more than five years. Six participants were men. Ten participants were women. Within the sample there was diversity of socio-economic status, migrant histories, ages, religious beliefs, employment and ethnicities. Six of our participants migrated to Australia as refugees. Ten arrived in Australia with either a student, family or skilled migration permanent visa. They ranged in age from mid-20 to early 70 years-of-age. Nine claimed a Burman

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3 ethnic nationality, three a Chin, two a Karen, two a Shan and only one a Chinese-Burman
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5 ethnic nationality. Four of the participants were full-time students, three were full-time
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7 mothers and one worked part-time. Six were in full-time paid employment, and two were
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9 retired. If bathing is conceived as an assemblage where subjectivities emerge through water
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11 skin encounters then we required a method alive to the swirling of things, ideas, affect,
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13 emotions and memories embedded in place. Semi-structured interviews and home insights
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15 offered a mixed-method approach to engage with understanding research participants'
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17 embodied knowledge of the intensities (soft and hard, short and long) of how water 'gets
18
19 under the skin'. Conducted in January-February 2015, the aim of the semi-structured
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21 interview was to enable a collaborative process of sharing knowledge around water. Hence,
22
23 the semi-structured interview was divided into two sections. The first section focused upon
24
25 getting to know participants and the ways in which their bodies are disciplined through water.
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27 Questions in this section asked about living in Burma, migrating to Australia and making
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29 Australia home. Bathing is not just representational. Bathing involves skin, soap, water, taps,
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31 buckets, scoops, pipes, textures, taste, smells; feeling clean, fresh, invigorated or fit; and the
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33 longing to be 'in place'. Hence, the second section was structured to facilitate the sharing of
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35 participants' and researchers' embodied knowledge of bathing. The aim of the home insights
36
37 was to access affective intensities, conveyed through body language, tone and speech, as
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39 participants showed us around their house, re-enacting everyday routines (including bathing)
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41 and answered conversational ad hoc questions. The home insights provided possibilities of
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43 documenting the more indeterminate affective dispositions and responses from human bodies
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45 encountering water in different rooms, including bathing.
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53 To prevent insights from visiting participants' homes becoming intimidating, on all
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55 occasions just the cultural liaison and one researcher visited. When we arrived at a
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57 participant's house we normally were guided to the family room. Here we explained the
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research aim and methods. Participants were first asked: How long have you lived in Australia? Where did you live before? After getting to know the participant we then asked more specific questions about water such as: What does water mean to you? When have you talked about water before? While this paper focuses on bathing, we asked participants to share narratives of drinking water, washing-up dishes, laundry, gardening and toilets. With participants' consent, we then moved to the kitchen, bathroom, laundry and garden. Each room provided provocation to ask follow-up questions. Overall, participants appeared more tense and embarrassed when asked to talk about, and show us, their toilets. Echoing the arguments of Young (1990) and Longhurst (2001), sharing stories about the use of toilets that involved bodily fluids was understood as taboo. In contrast, participants appeared more relaxed as they spoke and often re-enacted the movements they used to wash themselves.

The semi-structured interviews and home insights were conducted in English and Burmese. English translations were provided by the cultural liaison. The terms 'home', 'showering' and 'bathroom' were continually 'troubled' by both the researchers and participants during the semi-structured interviews and home tours. We did not want to take for granted that the participants would necessarily wash themselves by showering in a bathroom or have a singular understanding of home. Both the talking and showing sessions were recorded and transcribed, lasting between 60 – 120 minutes.

Our analysis employed Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) rhizomatic cartography or rhizoanalysis. While mapping provides an indication as to terrain that is to be travelled, the way in which is travelled is open to possibilities. Hence, rather than attending to thematic codes or meanings, our rhizoanalysis attends to the possibilities of the unfolding felt intensities, ideas and materialities of washing skin. We acknowledge the methodological challenges in not only how to represent the unspeakable and unquantifiable affective intensities, but how to locate the indeterminate and emergent within daily life. To guide our

analytical task of rhizoanalysis we paid attention to four interconnected registers: materials (including water, buckets, showers and baths), skin, bathing social norms and conventions, the spatial and the affective (articulated as pleasure and sadness, bodily gestures or tone of voice). Our analysis began with repeated listening of the interviews, mapping the different social and material elements that comprise different bathing assemblages. Our mapping moved beyond, behind and beneath representational registers of thought, revealing how subjectivities emerge within the shower and bucket bathing assemblages that enhance or diminish participants' capacity to belong. The next section presents our rhizoanalysis. Our finding suggest that the sensuous watery encounters of bathing is a process determines who and what belongs, and thereby which subjectivities emerge. Our interpretation illustrated how participants organised material and social elements to wash their bodies in different ways that facilitated different lives. Despite inconveniences, bucket bathing in Australia was retained by those building lives in Australia to retain a sense of themselves as Burman and/or Buddhist. Likewise, the choice of showering reflects decisions about their sense of self as professional and Australian, alongside the felt comfort and convenience of showering.

The bucket bathing assemblage that struggles to come into being in Australia

For some participants, on migrating to Australia the 'Burmese way' of bathing from a bucket no longer felt right and either stopped or became transformed. For example, Tin spoke of her embodied pleasures of showering rather than bucket bathing in Australia. Tin, is aged in her 30s, had a wealthier background in Burma, and migrated to Australia in 2007 as a skilled migrant. In Burma, Tin bathed by scooping cold rainwater water from a bucket, replenished by a rainwater tank at the start and end of the day. In Australia, the affect of touching and being touched by warm flowing mains shower-water made comfort and convenience tangible:

[In Burma] we use water from the tank, so the tanks are going to your wash room but they do that using not shower. We used with a tank and small bucket. So, this one [a shower] is very comfortable here, you know, over there [in Burma] you use, you have to think about, you need to save your water. So... showering, here is much better. Much more comfortable. I really enjoy that one [the shower] ... Here water is more comfortable, you don't need to think about, it's just easy, everything easy, you don't need to think about shortage, everything's just so much different. Much easier now and much more comfortable and then you can enjoy the water. Over there ... But anyway, when I go back, I don't mind.

Consistent with previous research Tin's practice of washing skin changed when she migrated to Australia through the ready availability of mains water, showers and water-heaters (Maller 2011). As argued by Allon and Soufalis (2006) the socio-technological regime shields Tin from water scarcity and becoming a 'waster'. Instead, the routine skin encounter with the physical sensation of warm flowing shower-water felt as comfort confirms Tin's ideas of Australian mains water being in a seemingly endless supply. Tin reminds us how comfort may be conceived as an affective force that circulates through both bodies and water (see Bissell 2008). Such an anticipatory sense of comfort enables Australians to bypass questions of water scarcity, by disconnecting people from subjectivities, experience and practices that respond to rainfall, seasons and water flow through river systems. Likewise, Tin illustrates how an anticipatory sense of comfort offered by showering the frequency and duration may change in Australia when exposed to new cultural conventions around self-presentation and body odour.

Most of the winter season is only once [per day in Burma]. Summer it's twice. ... [In Australia] I always like to shower before I go out again, like if I've done uni and then

I'm going out to meet friends I'll have a shower again. I don't spend much because of the, how will I say, I just normally, five to ten minutes, that's it clean and refreshed.

As Hand et al (2005) argue, showering is integral to the sequencing, coordinating and personal scheduling. For Tin, showering is a transitioning practice between different parts of her life. When thought in these terms, showering comes with sets of requirements for meaningful engagement, which has consequences for the time required to shower. The shower assemblage enables Tin a particular kind of life that involves her moving quickly between different subjectivities – as a student, professional carer, sister and friend. The concept of assemblage enables us to offer an interpretation of how the affective force attached to the shower, and expressed as comfort and convenience, makes frequent showering appear legitimate, despite being resources intensive. Like, Tin, Khin explains how the affective intensities of showering operate as an assemblage that are connected to feelings of being 'clean' and 'at home' in Australia. Khin illustrates how bathing when conceived as an assemblage, watery encounters provides insights to the emergence of gendered and responsible subjects. Khin is aged in her twenties and was granted asylum in Australia in 2013, having been forced to migrate from Chin State, Burma, because of teaching Christianity. Khin articulated a preference for showering in Australia. She spoke of bucket bathing outdoors in Burma that helped constitute responsible subjectivities.

Sometimes yes, we [women] carry water at home, to home and then we just pour, we scoop water and pour on our body. So, it is really, we save water but sometimes we can, we can go to the river and take a bath. We have a bowl and a cup, so we scoop and then pour it on our bodies. Some people throw on their back when they hurry, so people will say: 'Oh, you are wasting water!' So, you have to pour on your body so that you will not waste water. That's how we save water....

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3 Khin understood a river system in Burma through the embodied knowledge of collecting
4 water over her life-course. Khin reveals those who wash skin quickly by throwing bucket-
5 water collect daily become wasters. Normalised practices of pouring water not only serve
6 pragmatic ends – keeping bodies clean and limiting bucket water use – but help to constitute
7 responsible subjects. Yet, Khin went on to illustrate that bucket bathing is not without its
8 constraints.

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17 Outside, it is outside. No privacy! So, we use our longyi [a sarong-like tube of fabric]
18 and we covered it up. Yes, we wrap around here. For men, they can just wear the
19 undie ... to avoid getting cold, so they just pour from knee to their legs, and then their
20 arms ... we don't have bathroom in our house; it's outside you know, so when we pour
21 water on our body, so the wind comes and our skins crack ... it's painful. Sometimes,
22 heels crack and blood came out.

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31 While advocating a responsibility to care for water, Khin's account illustrates the how the
32 physical and affective intensities of bathing outdoors in Chin State diminished her capacity to
33 belong; specifically when semi-naked skin is exposed to cold winter weather, alongside
34 gendered surveillance.

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39 In contrast, Khin's illustrates how the affective intensities of the shower assemblage
40 increased her capacity to belong through feelings of bodily comfort. Khin replied when asked
41 how she went about washing herself in Australia:

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46 I just take a shower. Normally once a day, twice in summer. If I wash my hair it takes
47 15-20 minutes. If it just shower, it's maybe 7 minutes. It's totally different. I can't use
48 cold water here. Even in summer I feel a bit cold, so I mix warm water.

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53 Khin makes a choice how to shower, and the choice to shower at least once daily with warm
54 water reflects decisions about body odour and her sense of self as belonging in Australia. In
55 Australia, the pipes and reservoirs shield her from the physical intensity of gathering water.

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3 The shower cubicle guards her from the unpleasant affective intensities of cold weather, and
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5 gendered gaze. For Khin, the shower assemblage is an ordering that sets up expectations of
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7 bodily comfort based on discourses of privacy and warmth sensations. At the same time, the
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9 shower assemblage disconnects her from how water flows through the Sydney catchment
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11 system.
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14 Nevertheless, Khin volunteers a preference for bucket bathing during an Australian
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16 summer:
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18 I still want to scoop water and I, I feel something you know, when I pour water on my
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20 body, especially when it is hot. I prefer those things to scoop water and then pour it on
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22 my body instead of using the shower when it is hot.
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25 In summer, Khin tried to circulate the sensation of comfort by reproduce the bucket
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27 assemblage during hot weather by standing in the shower and scooping cold water over her
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29 body. Khin points to how bathing practices need to be understood in relation to the
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31 arrangements of social and material entities we put together to enable particular lives. For
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33 Khin, the affective intensities attached to bucket bathing is only made legitimate in summer,
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35 by enabling her to derive a certain kind of bodily comfort derived from the pleasant appeal of
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37 cold watery skin encounters.
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41 Likewise, Chit only showered in Australia, but incorporated habitual bodily movements
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43 from bucket bathing in Burma. Chit is 21 years of age and a student. In Burma, domestic
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45 water was supplied by a well in the grounds of his parents' home. He arrived in Australia in
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47 2013 on a student visa. Chit grew up in Rangoon, thinks of himself as Burmese, and is from a
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49 relatively affluent and highly educated family. When Louisa asked Chit about how he washed
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51 himself in Burma, he replied:
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54 We didn't have like the shower tap, so we used like a cup and you know... Yeah, we
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56 had a bucket and we throw the water there and we used the cup to shower. 20 scoops,
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30 in summer... When I was like fifteen. So, like we started having a shower tap. ... Prefer the bucket. Majority still prefer the scoop. It's like, you can feel that the water goes into your body and you feel fresh! ... And, also, because, weather is hot right, so you can really feel your body heat. So, one, we scoop from here, left side, left leg and then the right leg, left body, right arms and then from the head. So, like the heat comes off slowly and out of your body. ... Whereas if you just shower here the heat is hidden somewhere and it affects your body ... You know, in my country, in my home, they still practice that way even though we have like a shower. Feels like the best way for you to clean yourself.

If bucket bathing is to be understood as an assemblage, Chit illustrates how to wash is an ongoing process comprised of both materials (water, seasons, weather, technology, bodies) and expressive forces (comfort, freshness and cleanliness). For Chit, watery skin encounters of bucket bathing register not only as affective intensities but also an ethical form of bathing; that is how one ought to wash skin. In his words 'feels like the best way you to clean yourself.' Chit unsettles the contemporary Western dominant assumption of cleanliness aligned with medicalised risks of and responses to pathogens. Instead, his understanding of cleanliness has a particular spatial logic connected to the climate and social relations in Burma. Again, in Chit's words '20 scoops, 30 in summer'. Yet, Chit went onto explain how the material design of showers often worked against creating a domestic bathing space that felt 'best' to his migrant body. When asked how he washed in Australia, Chit replied that:

No choice – the shower. ... It's too small for me. ... I can't scoop the water, it's impossible here. Let it flow here, then on the right said and the left. Then you to the right. You move; your body manually.

The design logic of the shower disrupted the ritualised movements of bucket bathing. Chit provides one example of how migrants are resourceful and adaptive in finding ways to

resituate the ethical migrant subject by how affective ties with 'best practice' are created by the movement of his body in the flow of shower water touching his skin. When explaining that he often showered more than once a day Chit said: 'I did an internship at the city so I don't want to smell like a pig.' Chit illustrates Waitt and Stane's (2015) argument that washed skin helps constitute the public domain in the Global North, positioning the unwashed as cultural outsiders (pigs). Chit reminds us that the smells of unwashed bodies turning up to work can trigger shared moral sentiments of what people think of as 'good' in relation to health, gender, class and ethnicity. Yet, unlike Tin, Khin and Chit, some persisted to wash skin in Australia following the cultural conventions of the 'Burmese style', despite the enabling materials infrastructure, new regulations and new shared ideas.

Bucket bathing assemblages that work in Australia

Some participants reported fluctuating post-migration between 'the Western way' and 'Burmese way'. Those participants who shared narratives of persisting to wash skin with a scoop and bucket in Australia illustrate how bathing histories become lodged under the skin. Participants who continued to exercise the frugality and constraint of bucket bathing shared biographical moments including childhood memories of familial relationships in Burma. For example, Mynit illustrates how family histories and places in Burma can surface from the affective intensities of the touch of water poured from a scoop and bucket. Mynit is aged in her forties and spoke of a relatively affluent family background living in Rangoon. She arrived on a family reunion visa in 2010 and lived with her extended family in a privately-owned house. When we asked about washing herself the affective intensities lodged in her body from bathing in Burma surfaced. These were conveyed through our cultural liaison Min Si,

So, when she would stay at old [grandma's] place, they use the well. And they bucket it [water] from the well. And take the water and shower. Scoop it. ..., start from the knees to the lower parts and to the upper parts of body. ... It's like a river shower. No bathroom. ... Whereas in big city they shower like Western style ... She likes the traditional way.

Assemblages that form Mynit's experience of bathing in Australia highlight the importance of bodies, materials, representations and aesthetic registers to individual and collective geographies of washing oneself. Mynit said that although she showers in Australia, she persists with scooping water over her body so: "I don't forget my country. I miss the well, my grandfather." Mynit's words suggest that the affective intensity of the touch of water scooped on her skin connect her to family, her faith and places in Burma. Min Si conveyed the intense pleasure that emerged from bucket bathing in Australia:

She feels very pleasant throwing the water. So, it was taught by parents and grandparents to offer the cold, clean and chilled water, to Buddha because ... that kind of Buddhist teaching embedded in the heart. ... water, it's kind of like visualising, so whenever she has a hard time, by offering it [water] represents clean and also wash away the greed, hatred, impurities, mind impurities and then she do the chanting and pray for the others.

Mynit illustrate how pleasure is attached to water and how the touch of droplets of water from splashing fosters an intensification of emotion and affects. Following Ahmed (2004, 26), Mynit illustrates how bucket-bathing emotions and affects can be argued to align individuals with collectives - or bodily spaces with social space – through 'the very intensity of their attachments'. For Mynit, the touch of cold water splashed on her skin by scooping is about helping reconstitute and situate the migrant subject; it is about reconnecting with family, Buddhism and Burma. Bucket bathing can thus be understood as bound up with

embodiment, affects and emotions that are 'performative; they both repeat past associations as well as generating their object' (Ahmed 2004. 32) Such theorisation helps interpret Mynit's reasons to bucket bathe in Australia as way to connect with the past, ideas, family and Burma. According to Buddhist principles, water represents the aspiration to achieve the virtues of Buddhist enlightenment; calmness, clarity, compassion, generosity and purify the inner person (Sponsel. and Natadecha 2003). The touch of cool clean water being splashed over her skin, often in a systematic pattern taught by her grandparents, revealed a sense of embodied knowledge generated through hands-on experience. Mynit points to how performing bodily acts of washing by scooping, and throwing water, rather than showering provide a means to heighten calm along with social and shared affective belongings to Burma and connective to family. The intense affective character of these watery skin encounters and how they may alter existing moods is echoed in work examining the therapeutic qualities of touch (Paterson 2007, Straughan 2010b). Like dance, the rhythmic and repetitive movements of washing skin can be thought of as a performance of the nation (Nash 2000); and a way of making the absent present (DeSilvey and Edensor 2013). We suggest the bucket-bathing assemblage that forms Mynit's embodied experiences of the self and the world is pertinent as a performativity of events she employs to takes on the everyday challenges of living in Australia. For Mynit, bucket bathing facilitated 'ethical' interactions of belonging, spirituality and an important space-time for reflection.

Like Mynit, Soe persisted with bucket bathing in Australia. Like Mynit, bucket bathing enabled Soe to live in Australia, by how he arranged baths, buckets, scoops, mains water, his body and ideas in his Sydney apartment. Soe is aged in his forties and grew up in a relatively privileged family in Rangoon, and was employed as a teacher. He was forced to leave Burma following the military coup. He secured asylum in Australia in 1988. Soe reports on the challenges of performing bodily washing following the Burmese way in

Australian bathrooms. The bucket assemblage did not translate easily into the design logic of the Australian bathroom. The bucket assemblage struggled to come into being in Australia because of how bathrooms are stratified for particular kinds of watery engagements, favouring those with restricted movement below a shower-head. The built form of the shower anticipates standing bodies that barely move. Soe sits in the bath to scoop water over his skin.

For Soe, the bucket bathing assemblage, including, the rhythms, frequency and duration of washing, was an important way for him to stay connected with Burma. When we asked Soe how often he washes himself, he replied: ‘Not everyday, maybe two days, once a time ... only 2-3 minutes. That’s it.’ In these terms, Soe is particularly helpful in highlight how the bucket bathing assemblage facilitates suspension of ‘Australian’ social norms of cleanliness. He then went on to explain the differential frequency of washing his body in comparison to others:

It depends on the country. Because here you know the Australian people, they use to eat the raw meat or something like that as you know. ... Not too much sweat—Burmese; more sweat and smelly Australians. My point of view is most of the Australia I should not say all, mostly a lot of raw meat. ... Too much they eat. And all the raw meat is more when they coming out sweat from their body. More smelly and they need more showers. In our countries are not like here.

Soe’s opinions about Australian diet as relating to bodily odour makes frequent showering more appropriate. Soe actively created a ‘sense’ of difference through the sweaty aromas of bodies. Like Chit, Soe notes how the smell of sweat must be eradicated from bodies to enable particular working lives in the city. Bodily odours can prompt strong affective reactions that function to often mark people as negatively ‘different’. People have ‘bodily ways of judging’ (Hayes Conroy and Hayes Conroy 2008). This comment was not said with any malevolence.

Indeed, the participant is a supporter of 'multiculturalism'. Yet, it does indicate as Pink (2004) suggests that olfactory conventions are deeply embedded in cultures. The quotation illustrates the ways that power works through bodily sensations, through the affective and emotional. As Longhurst et al (2009) argued, embodied experiences, including smell, cannot be ignored when attempting to understand political divides. Soe suggests how the affective intensities of bodily smells and bathing can create a sense of difference and enables belonging to collective situations. Soe had many intensely painful memories of loss of his home in Burma. Perhaps for this reason, to maintain a body that smelt familiar and remained affectively and emotionally connected to Burma, Soe retained the arrangements of bucket bathing in Australia. Whatever the case, for our participants bathing arrangements offers a sense of 'belonging' and allows relations with religion, strangers, colleagues and nations.

Conclusion

Australia is comprised of ethnically diverse migrant households who hold valuable environmental knowledge. We draw on material feminism to attend to the embodied water knowledge of first-generation migrants from Burma living in Sydney, Australia. After Ahmed and Stacey (2001), Probyn (2000) and Braidotti (2002) we think through bathing assemblages and watery encounters to bring a feminist perspective to conceive of the arrangements of material and social entities that are put in place enable particular kinds of lives. Following this provocative theoretical proposition, subjectivities emerge out of forces, connections and reciprocity; that is how the skin registers and 'remembers' intensities of a feeling within material and discursive environments. We illustrate the potential of paying attention to the affective realm and how skin, water, buckets, scoops, showers and other actors and actants come together as assemblages to constitute bathing and subjectivities has the potential to better understand the persistence, transformation and stopping of practices. Such evidence directs attention to the individual embodied experience of different forms of

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3 bathing at different times and different places, and how they are affected by embodied
4 identities (age, ethnicity, gender and faith), materials (buckets, showers, scoops, alongside
5 temperature, hardness and clarity of water) and the physical layout of spaces to wash
6 (opportunities to move, stand or sit). To conclude, examples are provided of how affect,
7 embodiment and emotion can help household sustainability politics.
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14 Participants talk in detail about the ways in which washing skin offer both a sense of
15 ‘belonging’ and allows connections with family, colleagues and strangers. The sensation of
16 how water contacts the skin becomes an expressive and material force in a myriad of
17 assemblages, where gendered, classed, ethnic, religious and national bodies are made and
18 remade over again. For those participants who stopped bucket bathing the flow of shower
19 water on the skin sustained the intensities of a feeling articulated as ‘comfort’ and ‘relaxing’.
20 The affective geographies of showering are bound up with ideas of water security, and the
21 experiences of the shower becomes a device to help constitute professional identities and
22 public selves, alongside managing hectic schedules and spatially fragmented lives. This
23 experience positions those who shower daily as part of ‘the public’, enabling them to interact
24 with people and place in ways that are intimately connected to ‘Australian’ social norms. For
25 those who persist with bucket bathing the intensities of pouring cool water on the skin opened
26 possibilities of affective ties enabling migrants to connect with Burma, grandparents and
27 religious beliefs. For these participants scooping water from a bucket to wash their skin
28 helped to maintain an embodied sense of themselves as not only ‘fresher’ and ‘cleaner’ than
29 showering but also as ethical through a recognition of the mutual interdependence with water.
30 The watery skin encounter with a scoop and bucket offered possibilities to build affective,
31 emotional and material connections between Burma and Australia through a very sensory
32 geography. Our participants illustrate how the everyday sensuous watery skin encounters of
33 bathing are employed to manipulate affective, emotional and embodied experiences, and
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3 while these experiences vary between individuals, nevertheless fashion collective body-
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5 worlds.
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8 Given these results, how can thinking through the skin become a focus of household
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10 sustainable politics? Shove and Spurling (2013) and Strenger et al. (2015) provide valuable
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12 insights to how practice theories challenge education intervention strategies which have come
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14 to inform policy programmes. Educating people about saving water measured in litres is out
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16 of line with people's embodied knowledge of bathing and urban life. For example, Kuijter et
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18 al. (2013) identifies the potential energy and water savings in Kilojoules and litres of a
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20 cultural shift of bathing practices reliant upon the flowing water of the shower to 'splashing'
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22 from the contained water of the bucket bath. We argue that while water security must be
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24 addressed, our findings suggest that efforts to connect with people should not stigmatise those
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26 with showers as 'wasters', but rather offer more salient campaigns that relate to the ways that
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28 people already conceive of bathing. Our research makes evident that bathing is never 'just
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30 washing'. We argue what becomes important is how the concept of assemblage can help
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32 understand how the water, skin, ideas and things are organised are always contingent and are
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34 arranged or rearranged to enable particular kinds of lives. Thinking through the bathing
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36 assemblages, our rhizomatic framework can help inform intervention policies by helping us
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38 better understand how subjectivities are assembled in different contexts. For many people the
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40 scenario of washing skin from the touch of cool water splashed from a bucket, rather than the
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42 flow of warm water for a shower, may raise a series of alarm bells precisely because it
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44 challenges habits and routines of deeply embedded racialised, classed, aged, gendered and
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46 ethical norms that stabilise white, healthy, classed bodies and western public spaces as
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48 showered daily and therefore deodorised.
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54 Everyday watery skin encounters illustrate the capacities of sensuous bodies to affect
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56 and be affected by water, combining and coalescing different ideas, embodied histories and
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bodily judgements; thereby making, unmaking and redoing bathing assemblages. To inform household sustainability policy we also need to understand how the experiences associated with practices - being touched by water, touching water and feelings associated the touch of water - are important components of ethnic, gendered and religious subjectivities and places. Clues to different ways of bathing with water are perhaps found in the myriad of relations that help constitute a multitude of subjectivities from the touch of water on the skin that are embedded materially and historically in earth process. Our findings could assist policy-makers by encouraging others to rethink social conventions about showering that are presently configured around notions of abundance that spiral us closer to systemic breakdown. Following the social media success of the Ice Bucket Challenge, that generated awareness of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), people could be invited to bathe by scooping water from a bucket rather than shower. The Bathing Bucket Challenge is necessary to open debate on the unsustainable urban water culture of showering that is ontologically and materially disconnected from earth processes. The felt intensity of the Bucket Bathing Challenge may provide productive moments in the politics of sustainability to encourage people to reflect on social norms of bathing excess and our connections with river systems. Bound up in the bodily and affective intensities of washing skin are possibilities for people to experience, negotiate and perform ongoing subjectivities and emotions tied to frugality and constraint. Understanding more about the embodied knowledge and the affective intensities and how they operate in both individual and collective experiences is an important research agenda for geography and the politics of household sustainability.

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45 ⁱⁱ In 1989, the military government of the Union of Burma changed the official name to the Union of Myanmar
46 to better reflect the ethnic diversity and sever from the British colonial past. The United Nations accepted the
47 name change, although those opposed to the military government questioned the imposed changes. At the
48 same time, many of the geographic names were changed from English to confirm with Burmese spelling, for
49 example Rangoon to Yangon. Mindful that the act of naming is always political, this paper reflects the
50 participants' use of the terms 'Burmese', 'Burma' and English geographic names
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