Racial Infrastructure vs Life in Common: Searching for Commons in South Durban, South Africa, 1902—1972

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INTRODUCTION

The production, defense, and destruction of 'commons' have preoccupied a variety of contemporary intellectual and political debates. Much hinges on the concept of 'the commons' in these works: from submerged histories of subaltern conviviality to a post-Leninist notion of militant praxis.[1] Linebaugh and Rediker have written on the making of the Trans-Atlantic world with an attention to subaltern insurrections that preceded the iron cages of 'labour', 'nation' and 'race', as well as the revolutions across the Atlantic littoral; and they have inspired comparisons between past and present activist networks.[2] DiAngelis proposes that commons are immanent in all acts of collectivism, and that 'commons production' persists despite relentless commodification and dispossession. A 'commonist' project is fostered, he argues, through everyday forms of mutuality un-fettered by capitalist measures of work and value.[3]

All these thinkers view commons as conflictual, and their defense in the wake of enclosure as generative of the conditions of life in common. This paper questions this assumption from the city of Durban, between the end of the South African War and the deepening of political and economic crisis in the 1970s. It will not come as a surprise that zones of decommodification and mutuality in South Africa have been fundamentally racialized. What might be surprising is that similar forms of expert knowledge and practice have been drawn both to the cause of segregation as well as to the fight for universal access to the means of

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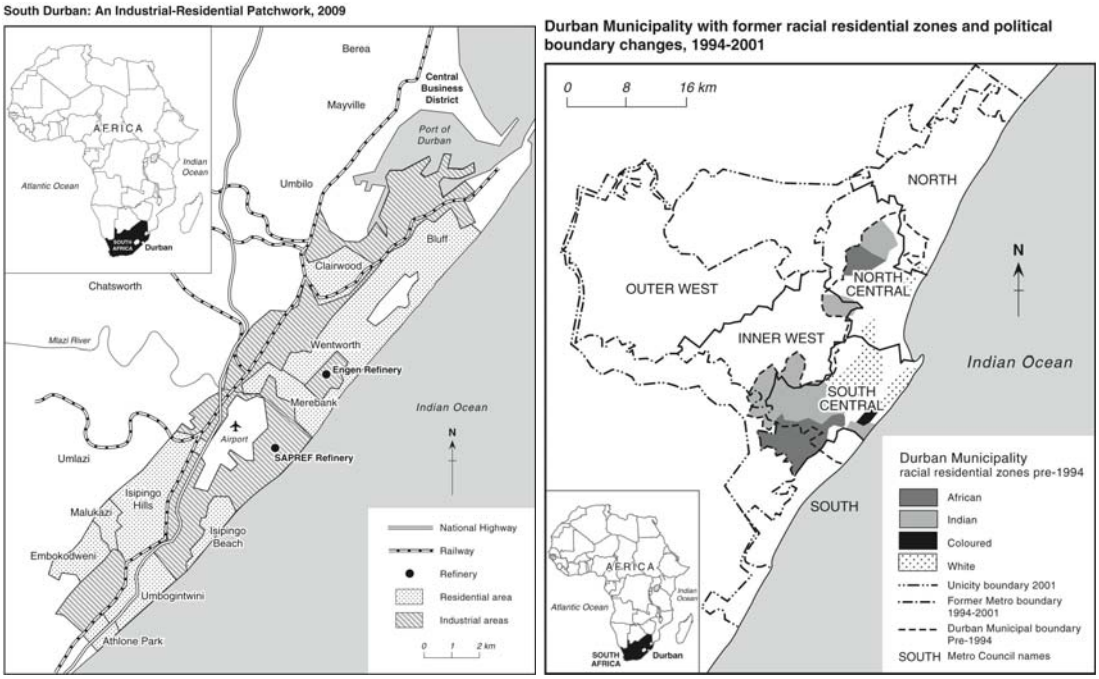
[1] P Linebaugh and M Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra, Beacon Press, Boston, 2000; M Rediker, P Linebaugh , diAngelis 2004, Mezzadra 200x.

[2] D Featherstone 2009

[3] DiAngelis Beginning of History. In effect, this valorization of 'commons production' recasts as a political opportunity the classic radical argument that non-capitalist domains subsidize the dominant mode of production, keeping peasant-workers in perpetual livelihood insecurity and political disfranchisement; see K Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte; H Wolpe ed Articulation of Modes of Production 1982, A deJanvry, The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America, 1982; J Breman, but also S Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Society Structured in Difference' in UNESCO ed Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism, UNESCO, Paris, 1980; G Hart, 'Interlocking Transactions: Obstacles, Precursors or Instruments of Agrarian Capitalism?' Journal of Development Economics 23, 1986: 177–203; W Roseberry 'Agrarian Questions and Functionalist Economism in Latin America' In Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History and Political Economy, Rutgers University Press, Rutgers, 1989.

life. This paper explores this argument from the vantage point of the industrial-residential region of South Durban (Map 1, and Map 2, in relation to other parts of Ethekwini Municipality), an area that has invited considerable scholarly and activist interest, principally for leading the main community-based environmental justice movement in South Africa.[4]

MAPS 1 and 2 – South Durban, and Ethekwini Municipality



Credits: Mina Moshkeri, LSE Design Unit

My primary research focus has been on the historical geography of Wentworth and Merebank, neighborhoods situated between oil refineries and other polluting industry, and on the divergent histories of racial infrastructure and

[4] The foundational source on South Durban's historical geography remains D. Scott 'Communal Space Construction: The rise and fall of Clairwood and District' PhD, University of Natal, Durban, 1994, which, among other things, writes with struggles to defend an Indian commons in South Durban. Also important are D. Scott 'Creative Destruction: Early Modernist Planning in the South Durban Industrial Zone, South Africa', Journal of Southern African Studies 29, 1, 235-259; S Sparks 'Playing at Public Health: The Search for Control in South Durban 1860-1932', History and African Studies Seminar, Department of Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 2003; 'Civic Culture, 'Environmentalism' and Pollution in South Durban: The Case of the Wentworth Refinery' History and African Studies Seminar, Department of Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 2005; '"Stink, maar uit die verkeerde rigting": Pollution, Politics and Petroleum Refining in South Africa, 1948-1960' History and African Studies Seminar, Department of Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 2004; B Freund 'Brown and Green in Durban: the evolution of environmental policy in a post-apartheid city' in International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 25 4, 2001; D Wiley, C Root and S Peek 'Contesting the Urban Industrial Environment in South Durban in a Period of Democratisation and Globalisation' in B Freund and V Padayachee eds. (D)urban Vortex-South African City in transition, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2002; S (Bobby) Peek 'Doublespeak in Durban: Mondi, Waste Management, and the Struggles of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance' in D McDonald ed Environmental Justice in South Africa, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 2002, 202-219.

opposition that these places have fostered. My focus in this paper is with periodizing the long history of spatial segregation and confrontation which set the conditions under which the demands for spatial justice came to a head in the 1970s and 1980s. While the rising tide of community, labour, civic and underground activism within the country in the 1970s was differentiated, it involved critically renovating forms of expertise, intervention and subjectivity put to use in building segregated infrastructure early in the century.

In the following section, I turn to the ways in which 20th century South Africa has been shaped by the colonial history of biopolitics, a slippery concept that I explain through historical materialism.[5] In what were thought of at the turn of the 19th century as 'white men's countries', expertise and intervention with respect to vital processes were harnessed to the task of building racial infrastructure, differently across contexts. These interventions under colonial and successor postcolonial regimes faced periodic breakdown and conflict, fracturing the production of space, and producing specific kinds of catastrophes. The 'poor white problem', and the flood of dispossessed Afrikaners to South Africa's cities after the 1910s required specific forms of state intervention. When anti-racist opposition began collectively to call this racial infrastructure into question, they began to draw on similar forms of expertise, to decolonize the city and its allegedly common amenities.

In the subsequent section, I turn to a periodization of spatial planning in South Africa, with attention to the way in which South Durban has been differently shaped, leading up to the conditions for urban political and economic crisis in the 1970s. While the leadership of liberation movement organizations were exiled, jailed, banned or underground, this moment of possible urban revolution sparked tremendous political creativity among the rank and file. To understand their search for common access to the means of life requires understanding the concentration of expertise at the beginning of the 20thcentury, when notions of health and vitality were first drawn into the making of welfare for some, and for building this exclusionary biopolitics into the landscape.

[5] I owe this understanding to conversations with Keith Breckenridge and Catherine Burns on the history of colonial biopolitics.

THREE VICTORIAN EXPERTS AND A NEW MODE OF POWER

The *Courland* sailed into Durban harbor in 1897. On it, a 28-year-old M.K. Gandhi was returning from an attempt to build support in India against the tide of anti-Indian sentiment in the recently self-governing Colony of Natal. Rumors circulated that Gandhi would return with a flood of 'free Indians.' As it happened, a ship arrived at the same time carrying about 600 Indian passengers. The recent outbreak of the plague in Bombay provided a pretext for quarantining both ships, but fears of contagion ran deeper. The Durban Town Hall was packed with people demanding repatriation. When the quarantine was lifted, the Colonial Patriotic Union demonstrated at the docks, and explained their views to the *Natal Mercury*: "A grave crisis has been reached in our history. From the time Natal acquired her autonomy, it was hoped that, beyond any of the neighboring States, she would be a white-man's and for the most part, an English-speaking Colony".[6]

This idea of 'white men's countries' emerged through late 19th and early 20th century networks connecting places and people wrestling with reconciling imperial racism with the allegedly 'Teutonic' invention of responsible self-government.[7] The Scottish Presbyterian James Bryce was a key authority in these networks of Anglo-Saxon expertise, and he followed with keen interest techniques for restricting Chinese immigration in California and in the Australian colonies of Victoria and New South Wales. In his recollections of a trip to South Africa, published in 1897, Bryce makes reference to the political struggles that had activated Gandhi. The 1894 Franchise Law Amendment Bill restricted electoral franchise to those who had come from contexts in which they already enjoyed self-government: that is, not Indians. Bryce reflects on the underlying problematic in this issue:

> To make race or colour or religion a ground of political disability runs counter to what used to be deemed a fundamental principle of democracy and what has been made (by recent Amendments) a doctrine of the American Constitution. To admit to full political rights, in deference to

[6] Natal Mercury Jan 14, 1887, in Lake and Reyolds 2008: 126

[7] This idea of 'Teutonic' ingenuity would become particularly important for reconciling English- and Afrikaans- speakers following the South African War. See S Dubow A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820-2000, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006: 6.

> abstract theory, persons, who, whether from deficient education or want of experience as citizens of a free country, are obviously unfit to exercise political power, is, or may be, dangerous to any commonwealth. Some way out of the contradiction has to be found and the democratic southern States of the North American Union and the oligarchical republic of Hawaii, as well as the South African colonies, are all trying to find such a way. Natal, where the whites are in a small minority, now refuses the suffrage of both Indians and Kafirs, while Cape Colony, with a much larger proportion of whites, excludes the bulk of her coloured people by the judicious application of an educational and property qualification."[8]

Several elements of the times come to light in Bryce's text. South Africa was unlike other 'white men's countries'. Natal's whites numbered about the same as its free and forced Indian immigrants. Bryce's cautionary words about the extension of democracy were made in relation to another 'white-men's country', the Southern US, as it sought to adapt state-sanctioned racism after universal suffrage. Avoiding 'deference to abstract theory', Bryce turns to the task of determining populations unfit for democracy. He saves his praise for immigration restriction in Australia as a means for delicately balancing racism and democracy. The common sense shared by Bryce and his interlocutors was that there were two types of colonies in the British Empire – temperate 'white men's countries' fit for responsible self-government, and tropical countries populated by 'coloured people' who must be ruled from the Colonial Office. The idea of 'white men's countries' would remain an awkward idea in South Africa at the dawn of the 20th century. Rather than confirming the making of an international racism, what is important are the comparative experiments with techniques for excluding populations unfit for democracy.[9]

Gandhi, in contrast, remained convinced that the British promise of rights to all imperial subjects ought to be upheld against this decidedly un-democratic, and un-Christian bad faith. He argued in vain that Indian villages – no 'Teutons' there – had long practiced an indigenous form of self-government. He simultaneously retained a faith in imperial rights through Britain's war with the

[8] J Bryce, Impressions of South Africa, Macmillan and Co Ltd, London, 1897: 363. Lake and Reynolds
[9] Thanks to Keith Breckenridge for this caution, Jul 21, 2009.

Boer Republics, a faith that appears to have been shaken only through fierce confrontation with indentured Indians about the virtues of biometric regulation through fingerprinting.[10] Unlike subaltern Indians, Gandhi took considerable time to realize that he was witnessing political innovations that required his regulation, not his political participation.

A third Victorian helps bring debate over the new political toolbox into sharper relief. Emily Hobhouse was drawn to relief work in South Africa despite the great barrage of anti-Boer propaganda in the early years of Britain's war with the Boer Republics. 'Miss Hobhouse', as she was called, moved from England to Minnesota and on to Mexico, where she lost love and her modest fortunes, then back to England, where she researched the conditions of children in factories, and on to South Africa in 1900, where she represented a distress fund for women and children suffering from scorched-earth warfare. She stumbled on civilian detention camps for Afrikaner women and children, and broke the news of 'concentration camps' to the press. In a climate of heightened patriotism, following the relief of the siege of Mafikeng in 1900, Hobhouse was reviled as a 'Boer lover' and traitor.

Hobhouse's collection of testimonies of the sufferings of Boer women and children plays on the emotions in a way that is very much of a piece with Victorian pathos for the plight of the poor.[11] What is interesting is that it uses sentimentality to call for public support either through taxpayer pressure on government or through charitable relief. Either way, she calls for improvement of conditions in the camps "by judicious management", rather than making the seditious proposition that they be closed down altogether.[12]

Little, if anything, was known about the camps until Hobhouse's investigations.[13] She was cognizant of the prevailing climate of martial law and its silencing of dissent, and also of the limits of testimony from people still traumatized by farm burnings, looting of livestock, destruction of grain stores

[10] Breckenridge 2009

[11] E Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell, Menthuen, London, 1902; L Neade, Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London, Yale University Press, New Haven; S Koven, Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Late Victorian London, Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ, 2004.

[12] Hobhouse, January 26, 1901, in J Fisher, That Miss Hobhouse, Secker and Warburg, London, 1971: 129

[13] She later said that only the Port Elizabeth camp was known of in England. See B Roberts, Those Bloody Women: Three Heroines of the Boer War, John Murray Publishers, London, 1991: 120-1, 135

and eviction of families.[14] She nevertheless collected, translated and compiled testimony, and gave evidence to government and the press. As a consequence of this work, the British government was forced to appoint a commission, entirely made up of women, and led by the elite suffragist Millicent Fawcett. Hobhouse was sidelined for her sympathy for the enemy population. She protested, was denied permission to go to South Africa, and boarded a ship all the same, ostensibly to visit British refugees in coastal towns. However, she was not allowed to disembark, and was deported without setting foot in Cape Town.[15]

The 'Ladies Commission' confirmed Hobhouse's findings but shifted their valence. The suffering of Boer women and children would now be seen, as the Jews of London's East End had been, as populations needing reform in matters of health and hygiene. The camps themselves, and military authority over the lives of enemy civilians, would be exempt from critique. Hobhouse continued to write, and noted with some regret that black[16] inmates, who she never properly studied, were entirely absent from the report of the Ladies Commission. The findings of the 'Ladies Commission' were not only premised on Hobhouse's findings, they added support to them, in detailing "overcrowding, poor and inadequate rations, polluted water, neglect of the elementary rules of hygiene, a shortage of beds and mattresses, sick children sleeping on the ground, failure to isolate contagious diseases, " and so on.[17]

The Fawcett Commission visited the 'Burgher Camp' at Merebank, south of Durban, in December 1901. They found 5,154 people forced to use a single bathhouse, with ten baths for women and two each for men and boys.[18] The Commission's main concern was the disregard of hygiene by camp inmates, in apparently preferring to use a polluted river rather than wells, in not boiling water, in reusing dirty puddles for washing clothes, and in poor sanitation and lack of disinfection in the hospitals. They asked government to attend to

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[14] Hobhouse 1902: 46
[15] E Hobhouse, War Without Glamour. Or Women's War Experiences written by themselves, 1899-1902, Historical Records Collected and Translated by E. Hobhouse, Nasionale Pers Beperk, Bloemfontein,1924: 4-5
[16] I attempt to treat all racial categories as historical and colloquial terms, while I use black in a generic sense as substitutable with non-white, realizing that this concept has its own historical and sociological presumptions. I use 'African', 'Indian' and 'Coloured' as these terms harden alongside histories of segregation and apartheid. At the time of Hobhouse's investigations, 'Boers' were treated as a racially-inferior population, not members of the same white family. Camp hospital records show ethnic affiliations rather than generalized racial typologies.
[17] Roberts 1991: 192
[18] Roberts 1991: 193

overcrowding, better food and hospital care, and, most crucially, to shift the camp to a more suitable site than mosquito-infested marshland.[19] The commission ends with the case for charitable funds to improve sanitation, water, housing, provisions, and, among other things 'discipline and morals'.[20]

Hobhouse welcomed some aspects of the findings, while strongly criticizing the presumption that Boer women's ignorance, superstition and 'dirty habits' lay behind the lack of order and hygiene in the camps.[21] The obvious difference between Hobhouse and Fawcett is that the former faced imperial government as an irritant, and the latter as benefactor. The Fawcett Commission presumes that civilian concentration camps must be militarized, and movements must be strictly regulated because political risks only add to those having to do with disease and immorality.[22]

Hobhouse noted the failure of the Fawcett Commission to do what she felt guilty for not doing herself: "to investigate the conditions or personally carry relief to the native camps." [23] Thousands of black inmates' suffering remained unworthy of study, let alone intervention. As Brian Roberts notes, there was no Sol Plaatje to document their dispossession.[24] Black camps were also thought of in terms of wartime requirements for labour, and were situated along railway lines in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. The problems of black refugees were just becoming apparent to after Hobhouse reported on one of the first 'Kaffir' camps in February 1901.[25] By June, a separate Native Refugee Department was established in the Transvaal, both to secure mineworkers to replace men who had been forced to move from gold mines to the army, and to house women and children.

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[19] Roberts 1991: 65. The official response was said that "though the camp was near marshland, the town of Durban was also practically surrounded by marshes", that malaria was rare, that "the site was open to cleansing winds from east to west", and that most of the site was deemed healthy by 'several doctors' (Roberts: 66). The Government of Natal, Sir Henry McCallum assured Sir Alfred Milner that "the Ladies Report had exaggerated the disadvantages having seen the camp at its worst after two days of non-stopsoaking rains. The camp would not be abandoned; instead all people living in tents who could not be accommodated in the huts.. would be transferred to a smaller site at Jacobs" (66-7).
[20] Fawcett et al, Command Paper 893. Concentration Camps Commission. Report on the Concentration Camps in SA by the Committee of Ladies appointed by the Secretary of State for War, 1902: 1
[21] Roberts 1991: 204-205.
[22] Fawcett et al 1902: 8
[23] Roberts 1991:206
[24] Roberts 1991:210
[25] Roberts 1991: 211

What we can say about this Victorian interest in the 'concentration camps' is that, on the one hand, it shows a profound erasure of black suffering. On the other hand, Afrikaners are dealt with through a mixture of sentimentality, morality, and a technical concern with deficiencies in camp infrastructure and services. Clearly, these were not what concentration camps would mean to us, for whom the term is anachronistically overdetermined: they were not 'death camps', as the Governor of Illinois in the US called them. They were mismanaged and ill-equipped to deal with civilians, particularly children, and they were beset by problems of sanitation, food shortage, overcrowding, and insufficient medical facilities, all of which exposed concentrated populations to premature death.[26] In this sense, to think of matters of health and hygiene was not inappropriate. Both Hobhouse and the Ladies Commission drew on Victorian techniques of apprehending and intervening in these matters of vitality, while attending differently to their broader social basis.

I have taken this detour through Bryce, Gandhi and Hobhouse to concretize the historical event that Foucault refers to as the birth of biopolitics. Foucault's writings have posed how, within a European frame, biopolitical expertise, intervention and subjectivity emerged within the seemingly self-limiting character of liberal democratic government. Foucault argues that different European traditions understood limits to government differently: English republicans through utilitarianism and pragmatism, French revolutionaries through an axiomatic insistence of inalienable rights.[27] He argues that 20th century renovations of liberalism in Germany and the US emerged as a challenge after practical innovations in ways of measuring and managing the vitality of populations in the late 19th century.

Foucault also sees the irony that as the tools of biopolitical government become instruments of state welfare, we see the hardening of state racism, as biopolitical instruments are used to differentiate populations whose lives must be defended from others who embody a threat. While he sees biopolitical

[26] Roberts 1991

[27] M Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures and the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008: 39-40. See also M Foucault *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, 1980, and *"Society Must Be Defended" Lectures and the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, Picador, New York, 2003; and T Lemke, 'The Birth of Bio-Politics – Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality', Economy & Society, 30, 190-207. online at http://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/

government harnessed by sovereign power in the great state racisms of the 20th century, it is surprising that he doesn't make much of the class and imperial, or anti-imperial, projects that these tools are harnessed to, particularly in 'white men's countries' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and in the movements against them.[28]

I follow Keith Breckenridge's cue in tracking trajectories of biopolitical government through networks of 'progressivism' and 'social politics' in the North Atlantic world between the 1870s and 1920s.[29] Historians of these phenomenon who don't cite Foucault have identified a Trans-Atlantic world of middle-class experts building and contrasting new kinds of knowledge about immigration controls, public health, urban life and planning, workingmen's insurance, cooperative farming and rural reconstruction.[30] Crucially, this 'social politics' was not led by Oxbridge Dons, but by 'tinkerers' less concerned with what Bryce calls 'abstract theory', than with experimental concepts and interventions focused on the vitality of populations.

These historians, in other words, attend to what Foucault calls the birth of biopolitics, and they do what Foucault fails to do, which is to see 'progressivism' as a class project – a Victorian middle-class project, to be precise – peopled with characters critical of both the late 19th century oligarchs as well as of proletarians and revolutionaries. Their knowledge and practical programs were about saving the poor from both death and communism, and they found various titillations in places like the settlement houses of London's East End to play out their real and imagined social and sexual liaisons with the poor.[31] These practices of expertise, intervention and subjectivity with respect to the vitality of populations set the stage for what welfare states claim to do in the twentieth century.

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[28] A L Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1995.
[29] Breckenridge "The Biometric Obsession: Trans-Atlantic Progressivism and the Making of the South African State." First Network Workshop on "The Documentation of Individual Identity: Historical, Comparative and Transnational Perspectives since 1500," University of Oxford (26-27 September 2008). Online at www.history.ox.ac.uk/identinet/documents/PositionPaperBreckenridge.pdf, accessed 25 January 2009.
[30] D Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age, Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1998.
[31] Koven 2004

The relevance of the biopolitics concept in colonial and decolonizing contexts has proven to be particularly complex.[32] In the colonial world, biopolitical government often found neither native middle-class experts, nor expertise, nor governmental tools, nor the political expediency to intervene in the reproduction of native populations. Where biopolitical intervention did become important was precisely in late Victorian settler colonies, where the consent of a white working class became a pressing issue for imperial control.[33] Settler colonies places witnessed fierce debate over in immigration controls, fingerprinting systems, labour regulations, agrarian transformation and urban cleanup. Most African colonies, subject to what Sara Berry calls 'hegemony on a shoestring', could hardly afford to regulate the various aspects of life, sex, work or movement that biopolitics implies.[34]

If the 'commons' concept is to make concrete sense in relation to 20th century societies, it ought to be understood in relation to histories of biopolitical government purportedly invested in common conditions of life. The crucial question is: when do biopolitical instruments support the means of common life rather than of differentiated welfare? This is the question I pose in the title of this paper, in pitting racial infrastructure against struggles for life in common.

As a short caveat on infrastructure, it is unusual, though necessary, to think about spatial objects in social terms. It remains unobvious to think of space as built, fought for, differently lived, and unequally lost or revived, as is commonplace in thinking about histories. We tend, as Henri Lefebvre lamented, to think of space as either a passive, physical container, or as a psychological 'mental map'.[35] Social space takes specific epochal forms, Lefebvre argues. Capitalist space mirrors the fetishism of commodities, in which what seems given, like the market, is in fact a product of contested social relations. The city under capitalism is precisely such a fetish object, an anarchic concentration of capital, people and resources that presumes to have an intrinsic rationale. The

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[32] With respect to South Africa, see K Breckenridge 'Verwoerd's Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid' *History Workshop Journal,* 59, 2005, 83-108, and A MacDonald 'Durban-bound: Chinese miners, colonial medicine and the floating compounds of the Indian Ocean, 1904-7' *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 23, 2005, 94-128.

[33] A L Stoler 1995, and A L Stoler *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002.

[34] S Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*

[35] H Lefebvre The Production of Space, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001 [1974].

'right to the city' – Lefebvre's political clarion call – does not refer to struggle over a given spatial containers, but rather calls for a questioning of what cities ought to be. In the account that follows, I suggest that the remains of biopolitical expertise that was part of the building of racially segregated cities, is drawn on by black residents who imagine a different kind of urban life.

STRUGGLES OVER SPACE IN 20TH CENTURY SOUTH DURBAN

In 1977, Maynard Swanson published the foundational essay on the origins of urban segregation in South Africa, at the same time that Foucault was lecturing on biopolitics as crucial to western liberal capitalisms.[36] Swanson argued that public health, specifically infectious diseases, provided social metaphors for the radical exclusion of Africans from Cape Town between 1900 and 1904, and that this 'sanitation syndrome' set a precedent for urban segregation to come. Swanson's argument was remarkably prescient both in addressing a blind spot in prevailing Marxist historiography – the role of scientific expertise in national and class projects – and in noting a turning point in South Africa's history of space when biopolitical expertise could be drawn to attempt to exclude Africans from urban life.

In turning to the history of spatial planning in 20thcentury South Africa, with a focus on South Durban, I use a chronology developed by progressive planners and geographers who worked in solidarity with the web of civics, unions, and banned and underground liberation movements in the turbulent 1980s.[37] These intellectuals were part of the renovation of biopolitical expertise as a site of struggle distinct from activism centered on discipline, sovereignty, or on possibilities for accumulation in a post-apartheid dispensation. The chronology begins after the South African War with the kind of Victorian expertise brought to bear on the 'Burgher Camps', and in the transition from colonialism to the Union of South Africa in 1910, when ideas of planning were

[36] M Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909' in Journal of African History 18, 1977.
[37] D Smit, The political economy of urban and regional planning in South Africa 1900–1988: towards theory to guide progressive planning practice, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989; McCarthy and Smit 1984

still fresh, as was the possibility of transforming space to reflect the hope of a 'white man's country'.[38]

1902-1923 – Post-War Reconstruction and the Poor White Problem

The first two decades of spatial planning in South Africa were shaped by the requirements of post-war infrastructure for accumulation and administration, alongside the structured neglect of the majority of the population. In the 1910s, the exception to this structured neglect were 'poor whites' dispossessed by war, capitalist agriculture and the depression of 1906-09, and whose residential conditions were increasingly protected in industrial cities.[39]

Vying to become the main port for industrial Witwatersrand, early 20thcentury Durban sought also to maintain a colonial urbanism that saw the city as essentially modern and white, while trying to contend with various 'non-whites' as different kinds of temporary residents.[40] A cosmopolitan working-class remained a nagging problem for city government attempting to manage labor for a putatively white city. With Africans relegated to 'locations' and shack settlements outside city limits, early segregation was aimed at Indians.[41] Rather than creating more African 'locations', Durban developed a mechanism for financing the control of African movement through a municipal monopoly on the brewing and sale of sorghum beer. This 'Durban System' would receive praise as an innovative form of municipal self-financing of 'native control,' a kind of municipal socialism for the colonial city.

The transplanting of new ideas about city government and planning from Britain was complex, political, and partial. The British victors of the South African War sought to consolidate power and presence through urban local authorities. To this end, Milner, Governor of the Transvaal, imported a group of British men engaged with what were considered avant-garde ideas of local government and town planning.[42] One such figure, Lionel Curtis, became the

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[38] J Foster Washed with the Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh PA, 2008.
[39] S Parnell, 'Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation' in Journal of Southern African Studies, 19, 3, 471-488: 476.
[40] B Freund 2007: 109
[41] M Swanson 1968, 1976, 1983; Maharaj 1992.
[42] P Harrison, A Todes, and V Watson, Planning and Transformation: Learning from the Post-Apartheid Experience, Routledge, Abingdon OX, 2008: 22.

Acting Town Clerk of Johannesburg who extended city boundaries, put down an electric tram system, and removed 'natives' from 'insanitary areas' slated for redevelopment, depositing them in the first municipally established township, in the vicinity of today's Soweto.

Ideas of 'planning' as something to do with cities were still new at this time, adapted from the scientific management of industry to the science of subdivision design. Self-described 'planners' offered services through governmental and professional bodies, to optimize subdivision design through graphic representations of infrastructure and population that linked spatial and statistical data in new ways.[43] In colonial and post-unification South Africa, politics intervened to prevent the adoption of these ideas and practices. In the Transvaal, colonial government showed little interest in increasing municipal power over urban questions. Township Boards, created in 1906, provided sites and services in 'townships' with raised land values that favored white, well-off residents; private interests in the Township Boards were loath to regulation of land-use, limiting their transformative capacities.[44] The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 appeared to launch an era of state intervention in time for the 1910 Union of South Africa, with the Township Boards under the new Union Department of Lands. However, the Lands Department faced divergent regional politics and provinces, and, in 1913, gave in to provincial demands, particularly from Natal, over township formation and administration.[45]

Despite these obstacles to town planning, important transformations in urban space were effected in the name of health. Widespread tuberculosis in African locations, exposed in the 1914 Tuberculosis Commission Report, along with the influenza epidemic of 1918, which killed 500,000 Africans, smoothed the passage of the Public Health Act of 1919. One consequence of this and the housing act was African exclusion along the lines of Swanson's 'sanitation syndrome.' The other aspect of the state's dual strategy of intervention in public health and housing was to stabilize dispossessed Afrikaners migrating in

[43] Keller Easterling shows how subdivision designs were treated as 'practical inventions' in early 20th century US, and how they cited sources as wide as Taylor and Kropotkin. See Easterling, Organization Space: Landscapes, Highways and Houses in America, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 1999: 130-1.
[44] Parnell and Mabin, 'Rethinking Urban South Africa', Journal of Southern African Studies, 21, 1, 1996, 39-61: 50
[45] A Mabin and D Smit, 'Reconstructing South Africa's cities? The making of urban planning 1900-2000', Planning Perspectives, 12: 2, 1997, 193-223: 196

growing numbers to cities of the Rand.[46] The 'poor white problem' took on a specific political urgency in the period before the First World War, as it brought possibilities of nonracial labour militancy and various kinds of vice presumed to accompany slum life, such as illicit liquor, prostitution and crime.

In Johannesburg, Charles Porter, the city's first Medical Officer of Health, advocated for African eviction to protect the white industrial city from the ills of rent racketeering and overcrowding.[47] Porter drew selectively from British anti-slum and public health legislation, and from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Movement, which sought to bring 'the country' into working-class neighborhoods. Unlike his metropolitan counterparts, Porter argued against re-housing on site following slum clearance, rather than on cheaper peripheral land. Through figures like Porter, ideas about municipal power, public health and slum removals were drawn into a colonial dynamic of investment in white spaces and populations, with neglect of the black majority.

The devastating influenza epidemic of 1918 broadened concern for urban reform to wider public opinion, particularly through the Labour Party, which made poor whites and urban slums key issues in the national elections after World War I.[48] The Public Health Act of 1919 and the Housing Act of 1920 were seen in racially-neutral terms because Africans had been written out of their frame of reference, and would be governed by parallel legislation in the long battery of acts to dispossess them and treat them as migrants to the city.

The militant strike by white miners in 1922 clinched the use of biopolitical tools for 'resolving' the poor white problem. Fighting the introduction of African mine workers by the Chamber of Mines, the general strike was put down brutally by the military. Johannesburg's white housing scheme proposals in 1923 were a response to this crisis, even if they did not come into being. African removals were an alternative to the construction of new housing stock for the white working class.[49] By the 1920s, white working class populations in various parts of urban South Africa had secured the means to maintain their place in the city, and to keep Africans out. The Natives (Urban

[46] Parnell 1993, 488
[47] Parnell 1993: 480
[48] Parnell 1993: 485, 487
[49] Smit 1989: 59-60

Areas) Act of 1923 further entrenched the distinction between planning for Africans in 'locations' as opposed to for the rest of urban South Africa.[50]

What would also become apparent in the first decades of the century was that only certain populations would have the benefit of using biopolitical expertise purportedly for the common good. This was apparent early on in Durban's southern periphery, when white residents petitioned the Attorney General for a Justice of the Peace to deal with what they saw as an overpopulated and disorderly landscape populated by black squatters.[51] After a series of outbreaks of infectious disease, white civic groups tried to use the provisions of the Public Health Act of 1901 to get South Coast Junction and Sea View incorporated into the city under the Boroughs Boundary Commission of 1919, in order to bring these areas under municipal control.[52]

The Commission set up Public Health Boards, and encouraged members of the landholding, white public to participate in administration financed through rates for services, and fines for non-compliance. Indian residents in nearby Clairwood organized in the early 1920s in parallel ways to refuse rates, and struggles ensued between Indian and white bodies about who could represent the 'public' in public health. Public health knowledge in white civics appears to become authorized biopolitical expertise linked to stabilizing working-class white residents and to holding out for long term industrial possibilities.[53]

Turning to conditions of livelihood in the southern periphery of Durban, as of 1906 only three blocks of land had been subdivided for residence on the Bluff, The rest of Wentworth and Fynnlands, in today's Bluff, was divided into 40-acre farms which Indian market-gardeners had made into an "unplanned, densely settled…maze of shanties, houses, market gardens, winding dirt paths and roads" with new place names like Wireless, Bodha's Gardens and Bob's Place.[54] While some Indians could buy land for residential purposes in Clairwood and Merebank in the 1920s, most leased land for a combination of

[50] Mabin and Smit 1997: 199, Smit 1989: 54
[51] Sparks 2003:3
[52] Sparks 2003:4
[53] Sparks 2003
[54] Scott 1994: 135

residence and farming. A mixed population of subalterns occupied the low-lying Crown lands adjoining the bay and in the marshy interior.[55]

Africans appear to have been tenants and brewers on the southern periphery, though increasingly insecure, particularly following the 1913 Land Act. In one instance, a resident of Merebank complained that:

> 'The Native Lands Act of 1912 [sic] is being – and has been for some considerable time back – contravened with impunity by Indian and other landowners in the district of Merebank by taking new Native tenants on their properties. The last case which has come to my notice is that of three Natives to whom the Storekeeper on the Merebank Estate has just let an acre of land. The land is absolutely unfit for cultivation, and I have proof that they are already brewing Native beer. You know what class of Natives live in this locality – They are the 'riff raff' of every part of Natal and Zululand – They know that Merebank is just outside the area within which the quantity of beer they brew can be restricted – They do no legitimate work and simply live on the Beer traffic. Their close proximity to the Borough enables the Town Natives to flock out there and as a consequence the drunkenness and immorality is a perfect nuisance to the neighbourhood.[56]

The consequence of this case was a fine or hard labour for the Indian landlord, Hassan Goolab, and two 'Natives' Jacob Mcunu and Madakisa.[57] What is interesting is that the initiative taken by the white resident of Merebank involved not just a claim about illegality but about immorality. The biopolitical imperative to attend to matters of vitality and vice, and to exclude Africans on these grounds, is supported by recourse to the law. In another case, an attempt is made to secure a beer license in 1919 for Edward DaSilva, a 'Native' infantryman returned from France, and the representing solicitors suggest that a licensed beer hall might stem widespread illicit drinking in the area.[58] The attempt failed,

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[55] Scott 1994: 168

[56] Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Letter from Payet of Lorna Doone, Merebank to Sergt. Margotts, Magistrate's Office (3 Feb 1915), appended to Margotts, Magistrate's Office, to the Public Prosecutor, Durban (5 Feb 1915). [NAB PMB 1]

[57] PAR, Letter from the Attorney General, Natal to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg re 'Contraventions of Natives Land Act, 1913, by Indians and others at Merebank' (3 May 1915).

[58] PAR, Letter from Henwood and Britter, Solicitors, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg (5 Sept 1919)

and the Chief Magistrate of Durban responds that 'the reference to illicit Beer drinking in and around Merebank is hardly justified', as appropriate agencies have attended to 'suppressing the evil.'[59] There is not the slightest mention of the possible moral authority of a black veteran of the Great War.

By the 1920s, market gardening oriented to subsistence and locality reached a peak, after which the possibility of an 'Indian peasantry' on the urban fringe was squeezed out by segregation and market forces.[60] Proletarianization had pulled Indians out of the possibility of making a living from farming alone, as they took jobs in the corporation, the Natal Government Railways, hotels in town and on the beachfront, domestic servitude and in the early workshops springing up between Congella, Rossburgh, Jacobs and southward to Merebank.[61] Many continued as peasant-workers, holding onto market gardens, dairy, poultry and fishing as partial sources of livelihood. While the labours of black worker-peasants were crucial to transforming the geography of the southern periphery, their expertise and subjectivity were disqualified by the authorized forms knowledge through which these areas were drawn into the expanding Borough of Durban.

1923-1953 – Dispossession, Industrialization, Segregation

The three decades between the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and beginning of apartheid under the Nationalist Party witnessed deepening urban segregation, but also the making of collective opposition, such as the Defiance Campaign of 1952. During this period, professional town planning turned to technical questions concerning circulation, with the exception of public housing provision for 'poor whites'. The distinction between infrastructure for the white city and black exclusion became stronger following the Urban Areas Act, which cast Africans as 'temporary sojourners'. In the 'native reserves', the state employed minimalist 'betterment planning', purportedly to support subsistence production and consumption, but without the means to stem widespread rural and urban livelihoods crises which would fuel an upsurge of black political activity at the

[59] PAR, Letter from the Chief Magistrate, Durban, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg (13 Sept 1919)
[60] B Freund *Insiders and Outsiders* 1994
[61] Padayachee, Vawda and Tichman 1985, Scott 1994: 217

end of this period. Limited agrarian reform would not prove consistent with keeping Africans out of the city.

In the 1930s, South African town planning increasingly posed segregation and industrialization as technical issues. Town plans were largely concerned with the layout and efficiency of new infrastructure. Shifts in ruling-class alliances from mining capital to the Pact Alliance of agricultural and manufacturing capital brought in a period of import-substitution industrialization (ISI) in which town planning found new ways to facilitate industrial accumulation. Planned industrial towns were one such opportunity in 1930s. Vanderbijlpark, the site of the South African Iron and Steel Corporation's new steelworks, concretized post-war ISI planning and provided a testing ground to bridge ideas about rational spatial organization with ethno-racial social engineering; for instance, a light engineering zone was located as a buffer between black and white residential areas.[62] Later planned towns like Sasolburg, Richard's Bay and Saldanha would draw from Vanderbijlpark, as would industrial decentralization to the north and south of Durban in the 1940s. By the end of the 1930s, the Pact government cemented its alliance with the urban white working class through state investment in suburbanization and public transport.

Durban's geography transformed through this period by retaining a white center with ethnic enclaves surrounded by a 'black belt' of shacks, with new white areas 'leapfrogging' beyond along the main arterial highways.[63] As the city incorporated 'Added Areas' in 1932, including today's South Durban, the Chamber of Industries eyed the southern areas for industrial expansion. The Slums Act of 1934 gave local authorities new powers to demolish and re-plan existing housing, to dredge marshlands for industrialization along Maydon Wharf and south of the bay, and to clear the 'black belt' sprawled around the Borough.[64] Urban cleansing began in the central ethnic enclaves, then spread to Cato Manor, Springfield, Mayville and South Durban, but there was little will to

[62] Smit 1989: 79
[63] Scott 1994: 65
[64] Mabin and Smit: 202

re-house displaced populations, thereby deepening the crisis of housing for Durban's black working-classes.[65]

The state did invest in limited spaces for African middle-class life in the 1930s, in Durban's Lamontville 'African village' and Baumanville, as in Johannesburg's Orlando East. Lamontville and Chesterville were funded by the 'Durban System', but far from met the massive demand for housing for Africans living in shacks, in one estimate, at 27,000 in 1948.[66] These schemes were eclipsed by public housing reserved for whites, and by the actual needs of an urban black population.

However, the city's spatial strategy had begun to internalize the interests of capital. Leaving control of the port and railways to the central government, the Durban City Corporation (DCC) specialized in acquiring land and making it available for industry.[67] After incorporating the 'Added Areas', including the southern periphery, the DCC planned for sewage and waste disposal, water supply, Indian and African housing, roads, mosquito-breeding prevention and public health, as well as for industrialization in South Durban.[68]

Industrialization required massive infrastructural overhaul. The Southern Sewerage Works, built between 1959 and 1969 in the middle of Merebank, became the main treatment plant for a massive sewerage system across industrial and residential areas.[69] The swampy alluvial flats of the South Durban basin were drained, the Umzinto, Umhlatazana and Umlaas Rivers canalized, and the Amanzimynyama and Mobeni estates cleared of shack-dwellers, leveled, and engineered for industrial use by the early 1950s. What remains forgotten in the historiography of infrastructural change are the labours *of* primitive accumulation involved in creating a capitalist landscape.[70] An older resident of Merebank pointed with pride to the cut in the hillside where the Umlaas Canal reaches the ocean and said his father had dug it out of the ridge.

Indian part-time farmers continued to occupy a niche in the class and spatial structure in South Durban in the 1930s and 1940s. Some funneled

[65] Scott 1994: 66-7
[66] Durban Housing Survey 1952: 347
[67] McCarthy 1986, Freund 1994: 14
[68] Scott 1994: 243.
[69] Scott 1994: 256
[70] Linebaugh and Rediker (2006)

income as waiters, plumbers, shop assistants, shopkeepers, butchers or tinsmiths, into landed property in Clairwood and Wentworth in the mid-1930s.[71] Part-time farming, livestock rearing and fishing provided some household security, particularly during the Great Depression, as Billy Juggernath writes in his memoir.[72] Indian 'community leaders' like Juggernath also invested in the welfare of the community. 'Government-Aided' schools, while drastically underfunded and insufficient, were one kind of social investment in the place of state funded schools. Homes for children, the elderly and the infirm, as well as other forms of social welfare in the guise of 'cultural' institutions compensated for the deficiencies of a racially-differentiated welfare system constructed in the 1940s.[73] These racial-communal welfare institutions would shape very different social possibilities for Indians through subsequent decades.

The city had accepted by the 1930s that some 'non-whites' would have to be stabilized as industrial workers in South Durban. The Merebank-Wentworth Housing Scheme, later called the Merebank-Wentworth Indian and Coloured Housing Scheme, and subsequently the basis for separate racial zones, was built between 1942 and 1962 on land acquired in the 1930s, and over which there was considerable debate. 1050 acres were set out for Indians, and 235 acres for Coloureds, on a new cadastral layout with roads, sewage, storm water drainage and pavements.[74] The Natal Indian Association and the Merebank Indian Ratepayers Association (MIRA, later MRA) protested against the housing scheme as a form of covert segregation, and mass protests were held under the Durban Expropriation Joint Council of Action, delaying the Central Housing Board's approval.[75] The MRA waged a campaign for about a decade. When they lost the battle in the courts, they were forced to fold up. The Council used Section 11 of

[71] Scott 1994: 221
[72] Memoir of Balbhadur Juggernath of Merebank, Pp. 16 and 33. D. Scott, 'Communal Space Construction', 221
[73] The 1940s held possibilities and compromises in the sphere of welfare, in the development of a dual-track welfare system which provided full-spectrum, contributory social services on one track, and non-contributory, means-tested, basic universal old-age and disability coverage on the other (Seekings 2005). The government subsidized social service organizations engaged in child, family, elderly, or disabled care, or mental health, rehabilitation of offenders and prevention of substance abuse (Lund 2008: 8-9). Social assistance for whites was mainstreamed to all citizens by the 1960s, with racial differentiation in grant levels and administrative procedures (Lund 2008: 9). Welfare and social work would subsequently have to work through a broader unequal landscape of subsidies built into racial infrastructure itself. The generation raised in this unequal landscape would seek expertise to call it into question in a later phase.
[74] Scott 1994: 261
[75] Scott 1994: 264-5; G Chetty, Interviewed by Chari, Jun 25 2005. All names except those of public figures who are easily identifiable, or those who are no longer alive, have been changed.

the Housing Act of 1920 as a legislative means to expropriate 656 acres from whites and 629 acres from Indians, purportedly for productive purposes.[76] Community activists reorganized as a coordinating committee, concerned that the Council was expropriating homes to provide space for industry. Indeed, the shack settlement called 'Wireless' became the site for the Frame Group, and then for Beacon Sweets.[77] The more dramatic contrast between industry and residence was built at the end of this period, in 1953, when 285 acres in Wentworth became the site of the Stanvac Oil Refinery, today's Engen Refinery. Engen's own representation of this space is of a wild, sparsely peopled landscape festered with snakes, caught by a Mexican snakecatcher before the construction of the refinery.

In 1944, areas declared slum zones to be removed included Cato Manor, the north bank of the Umgeni River, Karim Lane in South Coast Junction, and Happy Valley between Wentworth and the Bluff. Brij Maharaj and Dianne Scott have impressed upon us that the bulk of South Durban's 40,000 forced removals were effected in the 1930s and 1940s, for industrial or infrastructural spatial uses, authorized by provincial and local legislation before apartheid's Group Areas Act of 1950.[78] The racial zoning of the Barnes Report of 1944 prefigured the national career of the Group Areas Act after the 1950s. *The Durban Housing Survey* of 1952 recommends racial consolidation through residential space adequate for expansion and with good access to the right kind of work, separated by the use of physical barriers like rivers, ridges, hills, or if needed, open 'buffer zones', though these might become areas of racial contact rather than separation.[79] Durban's undulating hills, rivers and steep ridges would prove ideal physical barriers for racial zoning.

In recalling forced removals, people pause while remembering multi-racial shack settlements with a specific kind of nostalgia. Kumaran Josephs recalls stories of his great grandmother's mixed-race household in early Merebank, before it was ethnically cleansed. She had come as a 'passenger' from the Madras Presidency and ran "a herbal clinic for childbirth and infertility."

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[76] Scott 1994: 263
[77] G Chetty, Interviewed by Chari, Jun 25 2005.
[78] Scott 1994: 118; B Maharaj
[79] University of Natal, *Durban Housing Survey* 1952

Despite being "a traditional Tamil', she remarried a Welshman called Powers, converted to Methodism, and ran preschools across Merebank while presiding over a large, interracial extended in a big house on Mere Street near the canal. Joseph explains the vibrant political culture he grew up in during the 1970s as built on long-term residential stability and an interracial past.[80]

Dorothy James does not like being interviewed about her daughters who joined the armed struggle, but she does recall fondly her early years in Happy Valley, a cosmopolitan shack settlement in Wentworth with all sorts of people, including a Xhosa-speaking *tokolosh* (a diminutive trickster with exaggerated sex organs, foiled by placing bricks under one's bed). Her husband adds, "there were Pondos, Xhosas, a lot of Indian families, and of course Coloured families. There was no violence, and children grew up to know one another and respect one another." He contrasted this with the violence of everyday life once they had to move to the Assegai section of Wentworth, and the very different lessons that taught his daughters about the necessity to fight a violent system.[81]

People remember details about pre-township residence and the process of removals in different ways, linked to their histories of dispossession, the nature of the housing stock they received, and the timing in which townships are formed. Many in Merebank recall moving into better housing, and of trying with various degrees of success to climb the class ladder. Coloured Wentworth was only created in the subsequent period, when people were thrown out of tenancies across the city in the forced removals of the 1960s and 1970s. Wentworth's first residents took over former military housing peopled by white-working class beneficiaries of subsidized work and housing, and they recall a geography in which industrial use values were already dominant.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the emergence of black politics, galvanized by the mineworkers' strike of 1946.[82] Young militants challenged the old guard of the African National Congress, and the Communist Party of South Africa began to see nationalist organizations like the ANC as allies in struggle. However, participants of the bus boycotts of the 1940s pointed to more prosaic burdens like heightened transportation costs. New legislation following the

[80] Kumaran Joseph, interviewed by Chari, Jul 23 2004.
[81] Dorothy and Earl James, interviewed by Chari, Sept 13 2004.
[82] T Lodge 1983

Nationalist Party electoral victory in 1948 had made everyday black presence in the putatively white city more risky. The Group Areas Act of 1950 drew on the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, to link planning and segregation more closely, while the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 sought to stabilize a section of the African working class in the city, but most who did not meet strict criteria faced expulsion.[83] The imposition of the pass system on women was the main complaint behind the ANC-led Defiance Campaign of 1950-52. The rising tide of black collective action fueled fears of *swart gevaar* or 'black peril'.

The late Billy Nair was a young boy in Durban in the 1940s, working from an early age while studying at night. He was drawn into the nascent labour movement of 1940s Durban, and subsequently into the Congress movement, the South African Communist Party (SACP) underground and Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC and SACP. During his early work as a labour organizer for the Dairy Workers Union across the city, and for the South African Congress of Trade Unions, he recalls widespread and uncounted rural and urban activism, before the repressions of the early 1960s. He also recalls black frustration with respect to state support for Afrikaner working-class migrants coming to Durban from the *platteland* (rural interior), pushing for stronger labour market segmentation and housing segregation. If municipal government was leading the regulation of work, welfare, housing and infrastructure within a racially segregated city, black residents were beginning to formulate critical consciousness to fight back.[84]

1953-1972 – Apartheid and the urbanization of capital

The period from the early 1950s to the early 1970s is the high tide of spatial engineering of the impossible dream of 'separate development.' Underwritten by strong growth, manufacturing and finance capital found profitable outlets in the mass provision of black housing, and in other construction opportunities in building the apartheid city. Regional planning became a key part in the state's development and security strategy during the political clampdown in the 1960s.

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[83] P Maylam 'The Rise and Decline of Urban Apartheid in South Africa' in African Affairs, 89, 354, 1990, 57-84: 69

[84] Billy Nair, interviewed by Chari Aug 28 and Sept 4 2008.

The rise of metropolitan planning in this period paralleled a process of state centralization in the conditions of black housing and living, as well as in industrial policy.[85] Metropolitan planning would become more tightly connected to urban accumulation and circulation in relation to elites who expected First World standards of living, while the reproduction of the black majority would become a matter of the central government.

Apartheid's mass black housing provision was underwritten by strong economic growth in the 1950s and early 1960s, and political repression of radical black nationalist organizations. As the apartheid economy, with its grossly uneven investments in the built environment, shifted into political and economic crisis, African housing construction in 'White South Africa' was cut in 1967, and the state shifted its energies to the frontiers and to making the Bantustans self-governing. Regional planning became a handmaiden of apartheid, with 'regions' firmly defined in ethno-racial terms.[86] The continuing flow of black migrants to cities, despite rural 'betterment planning', meant that, as the Tomlinson Commission of 1956 argued, economic development in the reserves was politically necessary. Verwoerdian apartheid hinged its utopian spatial policy on both Group Areas and Bantustan development.

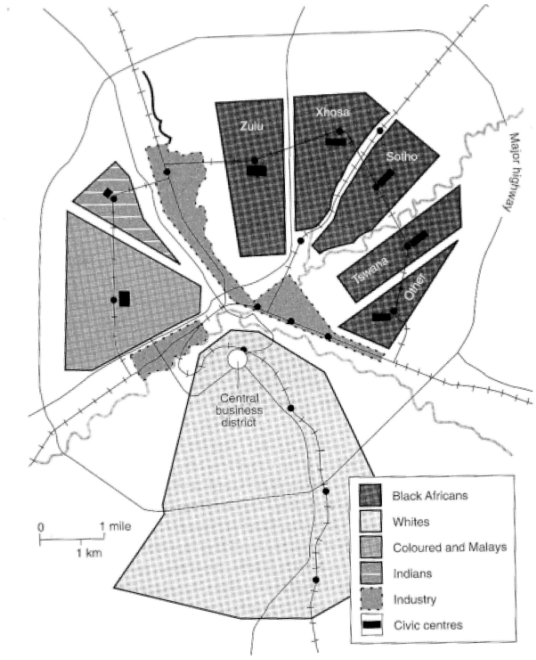
Apartheid's coercive urban segregation system required the forced removal of masses of people into racially designated Group Areas. More than half of the city of Durban was forcibly evicted and moved through application of the Group Areas Act.[87] Durban Council established a Technical Sub-Committee in 1950 to oversee the displacement, from the west of the old Borough Durban, of over 70,000 Indians, 8,500 Coloureds, 40,000 Africans, and less than 12,000 whites, the last figure reduced to 3,100 after white public outcry.[88] Durban's Technical Sub-Committee was widely recognized for its enthusiasm in implementing compulsory segregation and in developing national Group Areas legislation.[89]

More curious was the way in which the Technical Sub-Committee interpreted the ethno-racial ideal type of the apartheid city (Plate 2). One of the

[85] Smit 1989: 153
[86] Smit 1989: 116
[87] Smit 1989: 103
[88] J Kuper, H Watts and R Davies, *Durban: A Study in Racial Ecology*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1958: 192
[89] Kuper Watts and Davies 1958: 34

main assumptions of the committee was that inter-racial contact in residential areas breeds conflict. The recent African-Indian riots of 1949 were often used as evidence of the obviousness of this point. The committee recommended using Durban's physical geography to divide race groups, rather than allowing open fields to be reclaimed as parks and other areas of contact. However, industrial and commercial areas were not to be thought of through these assumptions, as these were 'common' areas. The crucial distinction for the committee was that in industrial areas, people meet on unequal and impersonal terms, as white employers and non-white artisans or labourers, in contrast to the relations of intimacy and equality that residential contact implied.

PLATE 2: The apartheid city ideal type

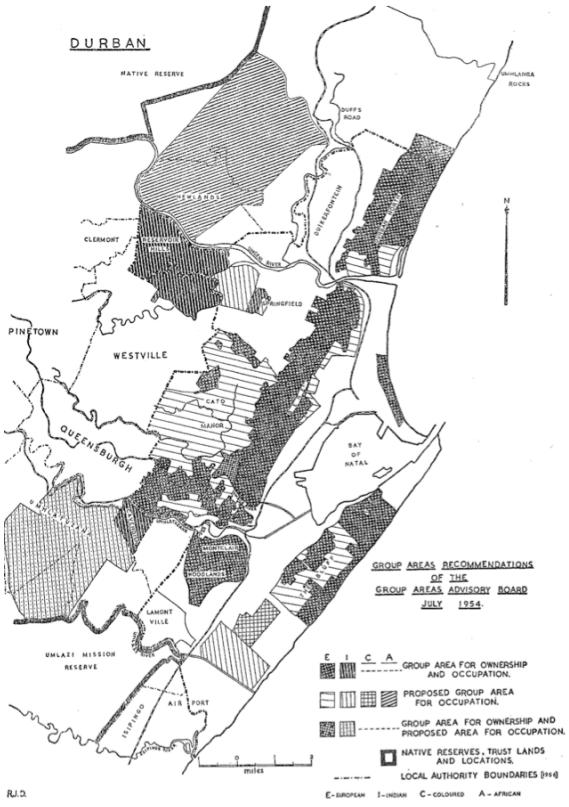


Source: Todes, Harrison and Watson 2008: 28

During the hearings of the Group Areas Board, a variety of civic groups presented their opposition to the removals. Systematically, Indian protests went unheard, while 'European' protests worked into an adjustment of the abstract plan of the city. In particular, lower and middle-class residents of white areas in the 'Added Areas', in areas like Malvern and Woodlands, resented the idea of having to move and for Indians to move into 'white homes'. The Technical Sub-

Committee recognized their attachment to their homes so as to continue to preserve the idea of a united 'European' presence, even when it contradicted the biopolitical imperatives of the plan.

PLATE 3: The Technical Sub-Committee's Final Recommendations on Group Areas, 1954



Source: Kuper, Watts and Davies 1958: 205

The transformation of the city, since the 1940s, proved immensely profitable. The construction industry grew in leaps and bounds in the decades between 1943 and 1952, from R70 million to R450 million, an indicator that forced segregation could be part of a capitalist restructuring of space.[90] Finance capital came to take a stronger role in the transformation of the urban built environment after the 1950s. A key moment in this process was the shifting of capital from mining into other spheres of manufacturing, spearheaded by the Anglo-American Group's initiative in forming the National Finance Corporation in 1949, and in forming a merchant bank in 1955. The increased availability of finance capital allowed for urban redevelopment without state assistance, in the

[90] Smit 1989: 114

building upwards of the central business districts of Johannesburg and Durban, and in building freeways and white suburbs.

By the end of this period, Durban had invested in expertise to fuel and finance segregationist development, with figures like Town Clerk E.B. Scott, and City Treasurer Ossie Gorven helping professionalize public service.[91] Gorven brought into being Durban's Capital Fund, built on property investment, which kept Durban debt-free and reliant on only moderate rate increases since the late 1970s. Bill Freund notes that the Capital Fund "turned Durban into a kind of engine of development potentiality", as it did not accompany consistent economic development, and was premised on the political exclusion of the working-class majority.[92]

Subalterns who demonstrated ingenuity remain largely forgotten. For instance, the peasant-worker family of J.J. Govender, had moved from gardening near Sea Cow Lake in the early 1940s, to the area that became Mobeni, where they continued farming on leased land. For Governder's family, periodic expropriations were becoming a fact of life. He helped his father transport vegetables to the Warwick Avenue Market in the heart of Durban, today on the verge of expropriation. Their seemingly stable livelihood was abruptly transformed in 1948, when the City Council bought their land for industry, and told them to move elsewhere. Govender's father moved to Merebank and continued farming on leased land along with "one-two labourers, Indian ladies." Eventually, they owned an acre near the end of the South Coast Road, where the Umlaas Canal turns to enter the ocean. He recalls an arduous routine beginning with work at 2:30 am each morning, loading vegetables for the market by 6 am, and finishing with night school after a day's farm work. This difficult routine was shattered when the City Council expropriated the land once more, in 1960, "to build houses and build factories, and to build freeways."[93]

Govender emphasizes improvements of the land undertaken by marginal farmers like him, often in the face of willful negligence of the city's planners. Apart from expropriations, the key events of his life were two major floods, in 1958 and 1987, for which he blames the poor planning of the Umlaas Canal as it

[91] Freund 2004: 15
[92] Freund (2004: 16)
[93] J.J. Govender, interviewed by Chari Sept 10 2005.

bends before what would become the site of the Mondi Paper Mill. At this point, he explained to me, high tides would force down the barrier next to his former plot. It was after the second flood that Govender was evicted once more, when he was told that the land was no longer safe to farm, as toxic waste had been brought downstream by the flood and had now contaminated the soil. Once more, prior acts of poor planning in constructing the canal and in disposing of toxic wastes forced him to move in order to remake his livelihood. Govender was forced into unrewarded improvisation, tinkering, and innovation, which he can still describe in great detail. His anguish as he faces expropriation today from the land on which he has farmed for the past 20 years, since 1988, on lease from the Airports Company of South Africa, has to do with the lack of recognition for the improvements that people like him have undertaken. His practical knowledge and labour could never attain the status of expertise in the management of land and labour.

Few residents of Wentworth today have familial memories of land ownership, let alone records of land deeds lost their lands before the 1913 cutoff date for restitution claims. Most were tenants for as far as they could remember. The *Durban Housing Survey* paints an acute housing shortage faced by Coloureds in the 1950s, about 80% as tenants, predominantly in Indian-owned dwellings.[94] While, as I suggested in the last section, both Indians and Coloureds often construct pre-township residence as a kind of Halcyon Days of relative racial indeterminacy, Coloured Wentworth become another kind of vibrant place of transgression, but with new forms of negative value, a piling of stigma linked to broader structures of race, employment, and welfare.[95]

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[94] *Durban Housing Survey* 1952: 232-233

[95] For most men in Wentworth construction, and semi-skilled industrial artisanal labour became the defining aspiration. Coloured men had inherited the dominant labour regime of migrant industrial artisanship from the draconian 'Coloured Labour Preference Policy' instituted by the National Party in the Western Cape in 1955, which severely curtailed the movements of Africans to help define Coloured racial identity as well as identification with a Coloured 'nation' located in the Cape. There were competing views from the Department of Labour, which insisted that Africans would accept lower standards of living, and hence lower wages, and that Coloureds were '"work-shy" and unsuitable for certain jobs' (Ian Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa,* Longman, New York, 1987: 147). As a compromise, by 1973, Africans gained exemptions in heavy manual labour, shift work, cold-storage work, and as night watchmen, a compromise that deepened the stigma around Coloured men as dishonest, unreliable, often absent and unsuited to heavy manual labour (Goldin 148). The incursion of African labour into unskilled work would lead Erica Theron of the Theron Commission of 1976 to conclude that "the employment prospects for at least the bottom 30%, in terms of education and social status, are very unfavourable. There will be no permanent or continuous employment prospects for this group" (in Goldin 149). Between this hapless bottom 30% and the jealously guarded world of skilled labour, semi-

People came to Wentworth's former military housing as they themselves experienced their classification as 'Coloured' becoming harder to avoid. Wentworth Coloureds could not portray forced removals as does Kumaran, in the previous section, in referring to Merebank as a place in which 'Indian community' was left intact after being cleansed of non-Indians. Instead, Coloureds are stereotyped as consummate drifters, as *ilawu*, Xhosa for the inauthentic.[96] While both landlords and tenants in older settlements might have often been in similar states of income poverty, they had differently recognized claims on land and place. The *Durban Housing Survey* also sees tenants as rootless: "People living in rented houses…can hardly be regarded as having their roots in the property of which they are tenants, often on a somewhat precarious basis". Colouredness, inauthenticity, and a history of tenancy would haunt the occupants of Wentworth.[97]

People like Alfred Henry moved to Wentworth to former World War II barracks for subalterns of the Royal Navy. Henry moved from Dundee, in the interior of Natal, to work at Lever Brothers in the printing works in 1949, at the age of 18. He lived with his young wife Greta in various parts of town, and as tenants for Indian landlords in Overport, Brickfield and Springfield. When they were renting in Sydenham, they were told that there was a new township called Wentworth where they would receive a house. Alfred's brother had already bought a place in Merewent. They moved to the little area called SANF, for the South African Naval Force, in Austerville in 1959. Greta speaks of the neighbourhood with fondness:

> This area was all white people, you know, ex-soldiers. They hadn't moved out, but they had to get out because this was now going to be a Coloured community…We moved here with our children and we lived really nice

skilled artisanal labour would become the prized occupation for Coloured men, as they would in Wentworth. This would only deepen when the shortage of skilled labour in the 1960s led manufacturing capital to push for the transformation of the colour bar by admitting black labour in larger numbers into 'semi-skilled' categories as long as white workers benefited more through wages and promotions (Crankshaw 1997: 49). Alongside the racialization of labour, social assistance had, by the 1960s, been generalized to all citizens, but that the welfare department worked through and with a racial structure of subsidies built around the white working class. The Nationalist Party protected white families' access to preferential subsidies to housing rentals, loans for civil servants, school subsidies, job reservations, as well as preferential treatment of non-state organisations like the Dutch Reformed Church (Lund 2008: 9). Indians, and to a lesser extend Coloureds had private welfare organisations picking up some of the slack, but there was virtually no such private welfare possible for African children and families (Lund 2008: 9).

[96] Thanks to Lungisile Ntsebeza for this point, personal communication 2008.

[97] *Durban Housing Survey* 1952: 422.

> here. The house was small, we had one bedroom and a kitchen and a long dining room, but our neighbours were very nice. Fortunately the wash house was just across. We had black men who stoked the fire. It was very very nice…We could walk with our children. We used to take walks with our prams and we used to go down to the oil refinery. It was like a ship with the lights, and it was very nice for the children; it amused them.[98]

There is something like a colonial gentility in this narrative of nice prams and black workers in a neighbhourhood near an oil refinery. Greta Henry would become one of the first group of women in prayer groups involved in the major charismatic revival that swept Wentworth in the 1970s, forcing the priests of all mainline churches into transforming their church practices. This very 'nice' place would also acquire another set of attributes, and a set of dystopian narratives that would be repeated for the next few decades. Hence, Henry James contrasted the shacks of Happy Valley, which he had remembered specifically as mixed and non-violent, with moving to Wentworth:

> Wentworth was a violent… it was a ghetto. There were people from all parts of the province dumped here. Whether you were Christian, whether you were Moslem, whether you were Heathen, you were just all dumped together. There was no really truly family-community spirit. It was cultivated, through hardship, and determination to survive. It was mainly knives and sticks and stones, but it was tough. This was a transit camp for immigrants coming through from England, just after the war: hence the military hospital. Then they refurbished the area for Group Areas. This [Assegai] was the office quarters: whites, I'm talking about.[99]

These terms – 'dumped' in a 'ghetto' – would be key to the making of a particular kind of Wentworth blues in the decades to come. James also claims that his pocket was of white officers quarters; that is, a cut above the rest of the ghetto. The little neighbourhood of Assegai would produce members of the 'responsible poor' – social workers and development intermediaries who could claim to act on behalf of the rest of their fallen neighbours. As he put it, violence would prove instructive for his children, as four of his daughters would go into various kinds

[98] Interview with Greta Henry (date)
[99] Interview with Henry James

of community or care work: one would become a nurse, another a prominent community worker, and two others as social workers who would join the MK sabotage unit headed by Robert McBride:

> That was where the positive side was. The children saw that, being social workers, that poverty and being deprived and being confined: *that* was the cause of the violence. This is what urged them on, in the democratic movement, in the amalgamation of the ANC, 'cause of having the same goals.[100]

The route of these young women through activism at school to social work in the community, and to a spectacular sabotage MK cell, is one type of trajectory through the turbulent 1970s and 1980s. A slightly older group of friends from Merebank demonstrates the range of forms of activist politics emerging in the 1970s. Kumaran was among the first batch at Merebank High School, where he and others started a student organization that would become a breeding ground for student indiscipline for the next two decades. The basement of a Baptist Church in Merebank became the site a youth counterculture very much of '1968'. This group of friends smoked, listened to music, and discussed religion and politics. They got in touch with the militant Black Consciousness activists around Steve Biko while he was resident at the Alan Taylor Residence for black medical students of the University of Natal, adjoining the Wentworth refinery. The lives of these friends are a window into youth lived space becoming a crucible of resistance in the 1970s.

I met this group of old friends together over dinner in Johannesburg in 2006, as they told me their varied routes from high school politics through Black Conscious and New Left countercultures. One went into exile and rose in the ranks of the ANC into a leading position in the Macroeconomic Research Group – the group of development economists who planned for a redistributive democratic future – and on to a high level government position; another became community activist and banned trade unionist until he and his feminist partner moved to Johannesburg to continue working on labour union and feminist training across the continent; a third became a background figure in the underground in the late 1980s in the rural north of Durban, and is not

[100] Interview with Henry James

remembered as a struggle 'stalwart'; and a fourth couple made an arduous journey on foot to Botswana where they spent decades in exile without renouncing Black Consciousness or joining the ANC. Their trajectories show how political choices multiplied as activist careers focused on differently conceptions and arenas of politics in the 1970s and after.

By the early 1970s, economic and political crisis in the apartheid space economy coincided with the onset of global political economic turbulence, and also with a highpoint in black worker militancy in Durban in 1972. The abstraction of the reproduction of black labour to the central government mean that planners either they followed metropolitan planning to work at the municipal level, or they worked for the central or regional government to formulate Apartheid Guide Plans. The subsequent period, from the early 1970s to the unbanning of the ANC, was marked by state deregulation of land and labour markets, and retreat from expenditure in black reproduction.

This was, in effect, a renovation of economic liberalism in response to crisis over apartheid's built environment. Debates about liberalism at the time were polyvalent. Some argued that capitalism would erode apartheid's perverse form of planning, others criticized 'white liberal' refusal to see black nationalism as a critique of both capitalism and apartheid. Rather than turn to the thicket of debate, my suggestion is that activist practices were shifting in important ways. A new generation of youth emerging through the Black Consciousness Movement, trade unions, churches and community groups argued about capital, racism, authority, and practical challenges of organizing in the apartheid city.

Apartheid's urban crisis set the conditions for the emergence of a civic biopolitics, of activists picking up the biopolitical expertise that was once used to build racial segregation through the long shadow of an imperial past. From the Black Consciousness Movement's community activism in the 1970s, to the work of organizations documenting forced removals of black populations in the application of Apartheid's Group Areas Act, to the widespread housing struggles that would gather under the banner of the UDF in the 1980s, state failures in the realm of social reproduction were generative of widespread organized conflict. Expertise once put to use in building segregation had, by the 1970s become part of an ideological struggle peopled with planners, lawyers, sociologists, social

workers, health professionals, civic activists, photographers and others fighting to de-racialize Durban.

Pravin Gordhan, now South Africa's Finance Minister, grew up in central Durban and first became politically active through the Student Representative Council at the segregated Indian university at Salisbury Island. He tapped into the revival of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1971, as well as older civic organizations in Merebank, Asherville and Reservoir Hills, and met the released 'first batch' of political prisoners released from Robben Island, including current President Jacob Zuma. When he left university at the end of 1973 for full time organizing with the NIC, he describes a range of locally-specific forms of activism, with a strong youth presence, across Durban's black townships.[101] He also suggests that this was not directed by an underground, jailed or exiled movement leadership:

> We didn't need the Party. A lot of these things, by the way…If you have any impression that people from outside organized all these things: no! You have a multiplicity of currents. I don't think its possible for anybody to capture all those currents. We were Marxists before we were formally Marxists.[102]

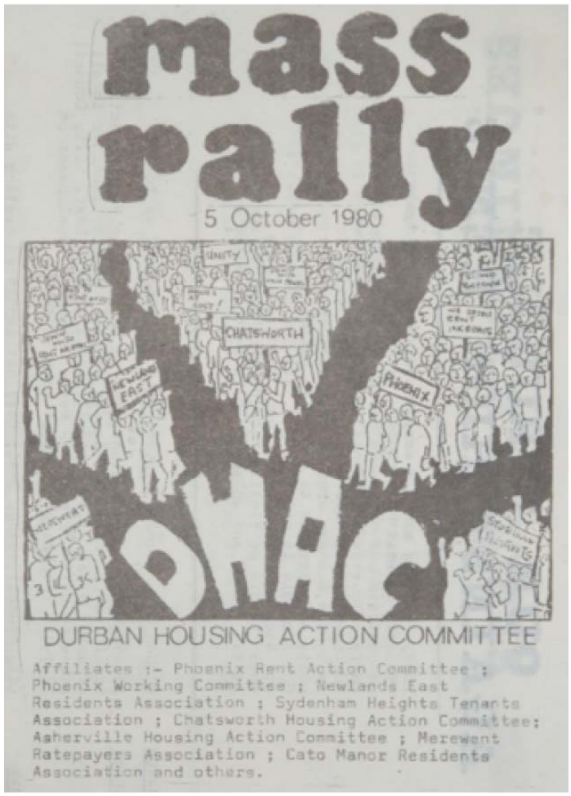
A pivotal was the flood of the Umgeni River in 1976, and the devastation of the shack settlement of Tin Town. The 'Tin Town Floods' of 1976 brought a great deal of community activism to connect with the suffering of shack-dwellers. Gordhan describes 'giving expression' to this outburst of activism through the NIC by providing a combination of mass mobilization, political education, and activist training to people from across the city. In 1978, the NIC activists around Gordhan conducted a transport study in the Indian township of Chatsworth, to find out whether they could establish an activist constituency there. In 1978-9, they launched the 'anti-autonomy campaign' in the Indian township of Phoenix, which the Municipality wanted to cut-off from Durban as an allegedly self-sustaining town. Slowly, lawyers, planners, social workers and other middle-

[101] P Gordhan, interviewed by Chari Jul 16, 2008.
[102] P Gordhan interview

class professional allies came to be part of the networks that connected civic groups, and also provided a cover for underground activities.[103]

Initially working through Indian areas, the NIC brought groups from Indian and Coloured areas together to form the Durban Housing Campaign (DHAC), represented graphically on Plate 4, and they subsequently to connect with African activists in the Joint Rent Action Campaign (JORAC) emerging from Lamontville and other areas. There is much to be said about the differentiated local political histories that these alliances sought to bring together as a non-racial front. What is important, as I have suggested, is that they drew on planners, geographers, social workers, doctors and public health experts, and by the late 1980s articulated a Campaign for a Democratic Durban. Their goal, in other words, was a different kind of city.

PLATE 4: Durban Housing Action Campaign Flyer, 1980



Source: Hassim Seedat Personal Archive, DHAC Files

The 1970s marks the emergence of a new kind of progressivism in planning, through urban reform understood through quite different political

[103] P. Gordhan

lenses. On the one hand, the state engaged in selective 'upgrading' of black townships in the 1980s. On the other hand, 'liberal' scholars defended shack dwellings as functional forms of informal housing, drawing on John Turner's ideas about poor peoples' innovations in housing themselves. To radical critics, this did not question the broader dynamics of social inequality through which informality persists. Many of these critics built alliances with the many layers of the urban revolt of the 1980s, with its overt focus on housing and on the apartheid state's attempt to provide limited political representation for Indians and Coloureds through the Tricameral Parliament, in exchange for continued African exclusion. Mobilization against the Tricameral elections became an important rallying point, bringing together civic organizations with ongoing and linked struggles over housing, welfare, and transport. The urban revolts pushed the state's mid-1980s shift from urban exclusion to a positive urbanization policy. Satellite towns would become a spatial means for legitimating the built environment accumulated from early apartheid, and for meeting some of the militant demands for investment in black housing proximal to urban services.[104]

By the mid 1980s, many South African cities, including Durban, began thinking beyond the confines of land-use, to 'strategic planning'. A few black planners would enter the profession in this period, and some of them would try to transform the links between planning and apartheid. Capital began to take a stronger interests in spatial planning in Durban, led by the Tongaat-Huwlett Group. The militancy of the late 1970s and early 1980s urban protests would shift as the possibility of negotiated settlement appeared in the late 1980s, earlier to some than others, bringing questions of sovereignty and capital accumulation to center stage.

CONCLUSION: BIOPOLITICAL STRUGGLE AND EVASIVE COMMONS

Twentieth century spatial planning in South Africa has been both Promethean and constantly undermined by its own contradictions, as well as by many fronts of opposition. Professional planning, as various critics began to argue by the 1980s, had been quite strongly complicit with apartheid, while progressive planning organizations linked to the civic struggles in the 1980s offered

[104] Smit 1989: 256

alternative ways of using this expertise to support black communities and to possibly offer resources for social and spatial justice.

I have suggested that over the century, the remains of Victorian expertise with respect to vitality has been used to build racial infrastructure and to call it into question. Scholars who presume a generalized logic to biopower – of proliferating 'states of exception', for instance, – miss the historical and methodological novelty in thinking as Foucault does, and as do certain historians. As a specific class project of expertise, intervention and subjectivity with respect to vital processes, biopolitical government has required financial, institutional and disciplinary commitment, rare ingredients in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Biopolitical tools have been harnessed to the great state racisms of the 20th century, as Foucault presciently argues, but there is no intrinsic political valence to biopolitics.

Certain tools of biopolitical government were particularly important in building segregated cities in the putatively 'white man's country' of South Africa, particularly after the influx of 'poor whites' through a combination of war, depression and agrarian crisis. Under racial-colonial conditions, biopolitical tools were used to exclude black populations from the white city, but this exclusion was in perpetual contradiction with the ongoing need for labour, and the inability to completely exclude the many ways in which people inhabit and use the city. As many have argued, Durban has long sought to present migrants, shack-dwellers, street traders and other informals as incidental rather than central to the life of the city.[105]

Apartheid's utopian project of forced segregation concentrated capitalist crisis in cities. By the 1970s, the governmental tools used to shape productive and segregated geographies were reined back through a revival of economic liberalism. However, urban crisis also provoked intense questioning from subalterns about the urban fabric itself. What I have suggested is that under conditions of repression, and with the leadership of the Leninist liberation movement organizations exiled, jailed and banned, there was a tremendous flowering of activism, beginning in the early 1970s. The local forms varied

[105] Richard Pithouse's ongoing work on shack-dwellers in Durban is crucial here, as is Caroline Skinner's work on Warwich Junction. See R Dobson and C Skinner with J Nicholson *Working in Warwick*, School of Development Studies, UKZN, Durban, 2009.

considerably, as they do in Wentworth and Merebank in ways I have not been able to demonstrate here. However, activists who sought to stitch these protests into a broader internal movement saw their transformative potential.

The Black Conscious Movement and Soweto Uprising of the 1970s are two key events that remind us of the incredible, fomenting critical sensibilities during the repressive 1960s. The history of the ANC and SACP underground is now coming into view as a wider phenomenon that has been recorded by movement histories.[106] When the township and worker revolts broke out into the open in the 1980s, they were an expression of more than a decade of careful strategizing about points of legal, open conflict over racial infrastructure. Experts like social workers, doctors and other health workers, urban planners, geographers, and other social scientists were drawn into harnessing their knowledge calling for an actual commons.

There is much yet to be said about the way in which this powerful biopolitical revolution was contained in the period of negotiated settlement with the apartheid regime, and also about the way in which biopolitical struggles re-emerge in new guise after the struggle for democratic sovereignty is apparently won. The reemergence of struggles over the means of life in contemporary South Africa are part of the long and contradictory history in which the commons have often been a goal, if not a reality.

[106] R Suttner *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, Jacana, Auckland Park, 2008.