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## Modernity's abject space: the rise and fall of Durban's Cato Manor

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**Abstract.** Recent work on the history of urbanization in South Africa suggests that the development of urban apartheid policy was influenced by the broader discourses of modernization and planning which guided the morphology of urban areas in the industrial West. Less attention, however, has been given to the ways in which these discourses of modernization served to define and control certain forms of subjectivity within the urban order. Accordingly, in this paper I examine the relationship between urban policy and public discourses about race and space in the city of Durban in the 1940s. In the first part of the paper I argue that the development of urban apartheid was marked by a modernist impulse to define and control the subjects and spaces of the city. This control was fostered by new circuits of power designed to produce racialized working subjects and the orderly and efficient management of urban space. Despite these attempts, however, Indian and African residents created informal spaces on the outskirts of the city, spaces which posed a challenge to the political and economic hegemony of the white settler population. In the second part of the paper, I draw upon Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to argue that one such space—an area known as Cato Manor—became a repository of larger fears about the changing nature of identity and alterity within the city. These abject fears burst into public consciousness in 1949, after an Indian–African 'riot' in Cato Manor called into question the efficacy of the city's attempts to manage the social and spatial contours of urbanization. In response, the city set about enacting policies of formal residential segregation, policies which can be read as attempts to manage the troubling presence of racialized 'others' through spatial control.

In the wake of South Africa's second democratic elections, academics, researchers, and policymakers continue to contribute to the task of charting the contours of postapartheid society. At the same time, a number of scholars have been engaged in a critical reevaluation of the legacies of apartheid. This task is a crucial one for, as Aletta Norval (1995) has suggested, it is only by tracing out the particular strategies of apartheid discourse that the postapartheid order can move beyond the logics of racial and spatial difference that characterized the policies of the past. Such policies had a particularly salient impact upon the structuring of urban space in South Africa, and recent years have seen a number of studies examining the evolution and functioning of the 'apartheid city'.

One feature of this work has been a move away from the traditional view that the apartheid city is an exceptional case, a racist distortion of more 'normal' urban processes and policies evident elsewhere in the world (Parnell, 1997). Instead, it has been increasingly recognized that local interventions in the urban environment in South Africa should be seen as part and parcel of the more general phenomenon of 20th-century modernism (Parnell and Mabin, 1995; Thornton, 1996). One facet of this South African modernism was an increasing engagement with a discourse of urban planning, and its associated concerns with the orderly management and control of industrial growth and productivity. Thus, a number of studies have examined the emergence of apartheid urban policies in relation to the broader discourses of modernization and planning which guided the morphology of urban areas in the industrial West (Brooks and Harrison, 1998; Freund, 1997; Mabin, 1991; Maylam, 1996; Norval, 1996;

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Parnell and Mabin, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996). In the context of the rapid growth of South African cities in the middle decades of the 20th century, such discourses served as the backdrop for a host of juridical and administrative mechanisms designed to manage and control the spatial development of urban areas, to “transform the chaos of traditional urban patterns and the hidden-ness of urban life into open, orderly, regulated spaces” (J Robinson, 1997, page 375).

There is another aspect of South African modernism, however, which has received less attention, namely, the way in which these mechanisms of planning, order, and control served to delineate specific forms of subjectivity within the urban order, by defining and policing a set of constitutive exclusions as relations of alterity (Shields, 1991; Sibley, 1995). That is, while urban interventions in the early 20th century can be read as a form of administrative rationality, they also highlight the ways in which the spatial epistemology of modernism codified a particular definition of subjectivity as a relation of absolute difference, producing not just the spaces of the city, but a certain kind of identity-space as well (Kirby, 1996). In this way, policies to control the spaces of the South African city can also be viewed as attempts to spatialize identity, by drawing ever tighter the boundaries between self and other within an expanding industrial order.

In what follows, I want to elaborate on this modernity–spatiality–alterity nexus by examining the relationship between urban policy and public discourses about race and space in the city of Durban in the 1940s. In the first part of the paper, I argue that the development of urban apartheid had as its precondition a modernist impulse to define and control the subjects and spaces of the city. Drawing upon Michel Foucault’s notion of subjection, and Henri Lefebvre’s abstract space, I show how the development of industrial modernity in Durban was accompanied by new circuits of power designed to produce racialized working subjects, while at the same time fostering the orderly and efficient management of urban space. I read these practices as attempts to domesticate the disturbing ambiguity of modern industrial urbanization, to deal with what Zygmunt Bauman (1991) has referred to as “the scandal of ambivalence” at the heart of modernity.

Despite these attempts, however, the influx of Indian and African workers into Durban produced deep anxieties about the perceived breakdown of social order. As I detail below, this process was fueled by the rise of informal spaces on the outskirts of the city, where Indian and African residents could challenge the political and economic hegemony of the white settler population. Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection, I argue in the second part of the paper that one such space—an area known as Cato Manor—became a repository of larger fears about the changing nature of identity and alterity within the city, as the ambiguity of industrial modernity became embodied in racialized spaces and subjects. These abject fears burst into public consciousness in 1949, after an Indian–African ‘riot’ in Cato Manor called into question the efficacy of the city’s attempts to manage the social and spatial contours of urbanization. In response to this, the city set about enacting policies of formal residential segregation, policies which can be read as attempts to manage the troubling presence of racialized ‘others’ through spatial control.

For some readers, the story of Cato Manor will be a familiar one, and in constructing my account, I draw liberally on the work of South African historians, especially Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards. My intent in this paper is not to challenge these existing accounts, nor is it to offer new empirical material to supplement the historical record. Rather, I aim to draw out of this history an interpretation that places emphasis on the subjective dimensions of South African urban–industrial change. If, as many scholars contend, apartheid was conditioned by the epistemological categories

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of modernity, then revisiting South Africa's urban history might tell us something more generally about the complex interrelationships between spatiality and the constructions of identity/difference through which the formation of racialized subjectivities takes place. By placing my emphasis on the mutual constitution of abstract space and its necessary abject outside, I want to highlight the ways in which the epistemology of modernity relied upon an unacknowledged 'racial unconscious', which both structured the ways in which difference was conceived and guided the organization and management of urban space.

### **Spatial control and the web of subjection**

Maylam (1990, page 63) has suggested that "if one is seeking to discover the origins of urban apartheid practice, Durban probably provides the likeliest source". These origins can be traced to the colonial period in the colony of Natal, and to the racial structuring of space which defined the colonial order. In the early decades of the 20th century, the urbanization process in the colony of Natal was guided by a strict division between white spaces and 'native' spaces. Cities were deemed to be the preserve of white 'civilisation', and, although African laborers were necessary in urban areas, they were viewed as temporary visitors whose true homes were a patchwork of rural 'reserves' where so-called 'native law' still held sway. The prevailing view was described in 1904 by Durban Magistrate James Stuart:

"[Africans] should, for many years to come, be regarded as mere visitors to the town ... and though they give us labour, they ... have no right to share in the same privileges that regular citizens do ... . It seems to me it will always be a fair argument to say Natives may not do acts which tend to admit them, directly or indirectly, to the society of the more civilised race, simply because they do not understand the privileges sought" (quoted in Swanson, 1976, page 168).

As the city grew, however, the need for Indian and African labor in the cities increased dramatically, disrupting the implied division between the permanent urban space of Europeans, and the rural 'homelands' of Africans.

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s witnessed rapid industrial expansion in Durban. Spurred by the development of transportation infrastructure and the modernization of the harbor facilities, much of the land to the south and east of the city became dotted with industrial facilities (Freund, 1997). At the same time, urban administration throughout South Africa became increasingly concerned with the efficient planning and orderly management of urban affairs. The first planning ordinance in Natal was passed in 1934, and administrators in Durban set about fostering the development of a 'modern' city, organized around the social and economic contours of Fordist industrialization. As Bill Freund (1997, page 16) suggests, "such a city needed to be designed on the latest models as a Garden City that would appeal to the white middle class with high levels of maintenance in low-density white suburbia and carefully zoned industry and commerce". Armed with this new vision, the city embarked upon a series of large-scale public works projects, and extended the municipal boundaries in order to secure new land for industrial development and expand the city's administrative jurisdiction over a much larger area (Freund, 1997; McCarthy, 1991; Scott, 1992).

If the city was relatively successful in intervening in the spatial development of the city, however, the rapidly changing social features of Durban proved somewhat more difficult to regulate. With the increasing economic growth of the city, Indian and African workers were recognized as a necessary and permanent presence in Durban, and this led to renewed efforts to control the racial and spatial boundaries of urban subjects. There were two general strategies used in this regard.

The first was an attempt to rid the city of all 'nonproductive' individuals through a range of local and national legislation generally referred to as 'influx control'. Under such laws, Africans were required to carry a pass at all times documenting that they were gainfully employed in the city, and thousands of Africans considered to be 'idle, dissolute, or disorderly' were expelled from the city (Maylam, 1994). In this way, the presence of Africans in the city was explicitly tied to their role as unskilled and semiskilled workers in an expanding Fordist order: those who refused or were unable to take on such a role could not legally remain in Durban.

Second, in addition to ridding the city of superfluous labor, increasing forms of control were brought to bear on those Africans whose labor was required in the city, in order to promote the proper habits of work and life. Such habits would not only benefit white industrial capital, but were the means through which the African could gain entrance into the modern civilized world. As the 1932 Report of the Native Economic Commission noted:

"It would be unwise to try to leave the Native in ... [the reserves] ... His mind must be freed from his animistic conceptions if he is to create worthy conditions for his descendants. He must learn to school his body to hard work, which is not only a condition of his advance in civilization, but of his final survival in a civilized environment" (quoted in Ashforth, 1990, page 85).

If the African was now to be a permanent resident within the city, then it was imperative to ensure that he became the proper, working subject, to "school his body to hard work" through new forms of disciplinary control. Such control corresponds to what Foucault (1979, page 26) calls 'subjection':

"[The] political investment of the body is bound up ... with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection ... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body."

For Foucault, subjection comes about through a multidimensional "political technology of the body", which instills proper habits and thereby produces a "society of normalization" (Foucault, 1979, page 26; 1980, page 107). Techniques of subjection emerge as a series of disciplinary practices which work to produce "docile bodies" in such institutional sites as prisons, schools, monasteries, barracks, and factories.

In 1930s Durban, such techniques were emerging in concert with a shift in the ways in which power was exercised within the city, from what Foucault calls 'sovereign power' to a regime of 'disciplinary power'—from a coercive form of power to a productive 'microphysics of power', transferred through circuits of power/knowledge in multiple sites and through various strategies within the city (Foucault, 1980). Of these, three strategies in particular deserve mention.

First, there was an increasing *control of space*, through laws which required all African workers to live in municipal hostels or employee-sponsored barracks. As Foucault (1979, page 141) suggests, "discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space", and the distribution of workers within the hostels and barracks was clearly designed to discourage what was deemed to be improper or immoral behavior. Residents of these living areas were under constant surveillance, creating "an enclosed segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are in a fixed place, in which all events are recorded" (Foucault, 1979, page 141). Within such places, workers could be located and controlled: a "strict regimentation, ranging from virtual imprisonment to school-like discipline, considerably limited the free movement of African workers" (Maylam, 1982, page 11). Such disciplinary spaces were greatly

expanded in Durban during the 1930s, as new hostels were built to house a workforce now illegal in the 'white' suburbs of Durban.

Second, discipline was not only effected through the control of space, but also by an increasing *control of time*. As David Hemson (1996, page 147) explains, under the colonial order:

“the traditions of tribal life weighed heavily on the employment relationship: time was not yet subject to the rigid measuring of the clock ... The employment contract did not bear the awesome power later developed: the African work-force always had the ‘featherbedding’ of the land, and the habits of instant and automatic obedience had not yet been learned.”

Disciplinary power, however, constituted “a new technique for taking charge of the time of individual existences; for regulating the relations of time, bodies and forces ... and for turning to ever-increased profit or use the movement of passing time” (Foucault, 1979, page 157). Thus, the ‘habits of obedience’ were instilled through what Foucault calls the “coding of activity”, such as, for example, the ubiquitous curfew legislation, which dictated the times and spaces that workers were allowed to occupy. In 1942, the African Mine Workers’ Union described the impacts of such prohibitions:

“workers living in a compound under the control of the employer for whom they work are not free. Their time and activities are strictly regulated to conform to a routine and organization determined by the employer and based on considerations of economy and efficiency. The worker who lives in a compound is a machine” (quoted in Crush, 1994, page 303).

This worker–body–machine, economic and efficient, was to be the new engine of Durban’s industrial growth.

However, such efficiency was threatened by illicit activities, such as drinking and sex, and thus, thirdly, disciplinary power worked in Durban through the *control of activities*, in particular leisure activities. White Durbanites continually expressed concerns about the ‘animal instincts’ and ‘excess energy’ of the native, and it was deemed imperative that such energies be channeled into productive activities (Maylam, 1982). In 1930 Durban created the post of Native Welfare Officer, who was charged with providing recreational activities for Africans in Durban. Such activities revolved around the Bantu Social Center, which sponsored a literary and cultural club, and hosted ballroom dances and music recitals (Edwards, 1989). In 1931, the Native Welfare Officer called for the provision of sports for Africans, arguing that:

“[through sports,] the native community of Durban could be moulded into a law abiding and contented section of the community of the Borough ... [and] there would be a direct result from an economic point of view. Energy offered outlet in this physical manner, in addition to creating a happy mental outlook, would assuredly be of value to an employer of labour, in that contented gangs of workmen would in return render more efficient service” (quoted in Maylam, 1982, page 12).

Such proposals drew upon a growing cadre of administrators, authorities, and planners—‘experts’ who knew how to provide the proper health, sanitation, housing, and recreation conditions in order to channel the energies of the native subject ‘efficiently’, thus initiating a new regime of discipline: “in becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge ... a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits” (Foucault, 1979, page 155).

### **The production of abstract space**

Taken together, the processes and events I have been describing marked a shift, in the first four decades of the 20th century, from what might be described as a colonial order to a modern industrial order, focused around the rational planning and efficient

regulation of the city. A panoply of new legislation, intervention, and construction was designed to turn Durban into a center of economic growth and suburban domesticity. To do so meant in particular to target and transform the chaotic 'premodern' subjects and spaces of the city. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of modernity is precisely this concerted attempt to eliminate chaos and contingency, to develop "the capacity for doing and redoing, making things change, coercing things into becoming different from what they are or to leave the stage" (Bauman, 1995, page 140).

In the process, the space of the city was transformed into what Lefebvre calls abstract space, a space defined by the calculus of capitalism and the state. Such a space is produced through a 'violence of abstraction', which seeks to "impose an artificially and artfully designed, homogeneous, uniform space upon the chaos of nature and historical contingencies" (Bauman, 1995, page 129). This uniformity is produced through the application of plans and the operation of property and capital markets, which reduce social and spatial complexity to the logic of profit and the rationality of social and spatial engineering. Thus, abstract space is intimately bound up with a certain disciplinary microphysics, which circulates through "technology, applied sciences, and knowledge bound to power" (Lefebvre, 1991, page 50).

These complex processes had a contradictory impact upon the way that racial alterity was viewed in Durban. On the one hand, Indians and Africans were recognized as having a permanent position within urban modernity, a position defined in terms of their capacity to serve as abstract labor. No longer seen in terms of a simple master—servant relationship, which governed the colonial order of alterity, workers were given the autonomy to become independent wage earners, contributing to the betterment of the economy and city. At the same time, Africans and Indians were seen as capable of social upliftment by mirroring the moral and familial mores of European society, and many liberal reformers were prepared to accept 'the other' as a partner in a collective effort to manage the flux of urban and industrial change for the benefit of all.

Such notions, however, came up against important limits. For, if Indian and African residents in Durban were allowed to enter into capitalist modernity, they were not allowed to do so on their own terms, but on those set by the employment relationship. The Fordist order was first and foremost a white, patriarchal order, and political and economic institutions were developed to maintain the dominance of the European settler population. It was as laboring *subjects*, rather than as *citizens*, that the 'other' was tolerable in Durban. Thus, racial fears and conceptions were not eroded, but merely transferred to the context of the worker, reinscribed in stereotypes about bodies and temperaments. 'Race' became a collection of attributes, some useful, some problematic, as suggested by a 1957 report on the Durban labor market:

"There is no doubt that the Indian's nimbleness of mind and finger are a great asset to industry ... [especially] when an appreciation of the process, multiple attention and quick thinking are essential ... . Yet, when this is offset by his lack of physical strength and stamina, then the scope for Indian employment narrows down in the face of competition from the Native who is robust and possesses a highly developed sense of rhythm which can be of considerable value when harnessed to mechanized production lines ... the Native in Durban is generally of a more amenable disposition and works well on routines. But it requires rhythm to bring out the best in him" (quoted in Freund and Morrell, 1993, page 3).

In a sense, 'race' became refigured as different kinds of body-machine, not unlike the many other kinds of useful machines being fabricated and applied to the benefit of industrial Durban.

### The autonomous space of Cato Manor and the rise of 'New Africa'

Despite the web of regulations, and the disciplinary apparatus developed in the city, "in the 1920s Durban was still a place where there were open spaces to be occupied and opportunities to be exploited" (Maylam, 1994, page 266). Such spaces were located on the outskirts of the city, and throughout the decade, increasing numbers began to settle on available land beyond the boundaries of the Borough, comprising what became known as the 'black belt' surrounding the city. The best known of these areas was Cato Manor, an area of some 4500 ha of undulating land located only 7 km west of the city center. The land was originally granted to Durban Mayor George Cato in 1845, and in the ensuing decades portions were sold to white landowners who farmed the area. In the early decades of the century, the land was progressively sold to Indians who had completed their five-year period of indenture. Most built simple houses of wood and iron, and became market gardeners, growing fruits and vegetables on small family plots (Scott, 1992). Communal ties were strong, and community initiatives led to the building of schools, mosques, temples, and other civic amenities (Maharaj, 1994).

The market gardeners were soon joined by Africans seeking to evade the harsh forms of control and discipline that characterized the spaces of domicile in hostels and private barracks. Small clusters of shacks began cropping up along the Umkumbaan river, and by 1932, the first aerial photographs of the area showed some 300 to 400 shacks (P Robinson, 1997). Beginning in the 1930s, industrial expansion, combined with deteriorating conditions in the rural reserves, brought thousands of African migrants into Durban, and many settled in Cato Manor as tenants on Indian-owned property. During the 1940s, Indian market gardeners realized that 'rack-renting' was more lucrative than farming, and plots of land were quickly subdivided for shacks. In 1939 there were an estimated 500 shacks in Cato Manor; by 1943 there were some 1500, housing 17 000 people; and by 1948 at least 3000 shacks had been erected, housing an estimated 29 000 residents (Maharaj, 1996; Maylam, 1982).

For the African residents of Cato Manor, the shacklands became a space within which it was possible to develop autonomous forms of cultural and economic agency, and "the inhabitants of Cato Manor created for themselves new economic, social and political spaces" within which they were able to resist to a lesser or greater extent the state's attempts at social and spatial control (Maylam, 1996, page 19). The shacklands quickly became famous for the range of cultural activities available there, and during weekends the population doubled as revelers came from all over the city to sample Cato Manor's food, music, and drink (Edwards, 1989). As one former resident recalled: "All influx control busters were to be found there [in Cato Manor] and the place was full of life. Like Sophiatown, ... [Cato Manor] was the cradle of music from marabi, mbaqanga to African jazz. It was also the home of every home-brewed alcoholic concoction, hidden underground from police who raided every weekend. Fashion was to be found there as well, Stetson hats, two-tone shoes, you name it" (*Natal Witness* 1993).

This culture was beginning to take shape as a political consciousness as well. As Edwards has shown, the spaces of resistance carved out in Cato Manor became spaces of agency, embodied in the notion of a 'New Africa'. The area became for many a specifically African space, known as Mkumbane, in which a form of identity and dignity could be fostered (Edwards, 1989). Union leader A W B Champion described Cato Manor as "the place in Durban where families breathe the air of freedom" (quoted in Maylam, 1996, page 19).

An important dimension of this agency was the economic autonomy that became possible in the area. Although many shack-dwellers took up formal employment in Durban, even more opportunities were available in the informal sector of Cato

Manor itself. The African residents of the area created a dense network of legal and illegal economic activity, ranging from petty trade and providing small-scale services such as building, painting, and mechanical repair, to selling forged passes, dealing *dagga* (marijuana), and operating the ubiquitous underground drinking establishment, or 'shebeen'. For many, these opportunities promoted a sense of agency and forged an opposition to the inequities of the economic order. Cato Manor also became the center of a powerful cooperative movement in Durban. Groups of residents set up buying clubs, and cooperative banks were formed to give small capital loans. The movement vowed to keep money in New Africa by drawing upon local goods and services wherever possible, and non-African businesses became the target of boycotts. Local capital was called 'fertilizer', and was used to foster an African entrepreneurial class, which would hire African employees for the benefit of the African community. As Edwards has described it:

"within the shantytowns, the sense of unity and community spirit was based upon the circulation of money, commodities and services in a way which bound the shack-dwellers together ... The co-operatives maintained that it was only through workers and their families being economically united and living a new type of life that political power could be gained" (1989, pages 84–86).

The political power of the cooperatives served as a challenge to the ways in which the discourses of European modernity structured the subjects and spaces of the city. As 'New Africans', the shack-dwellers of Cato Manor rejected their role as body-worker-machine, and instead developed a sense of subjectivity and agency. As one cooperative leader put it:

"As an oppressed group there is a tendency ... to place too much accent on politics ... There are other powerful forces at work besides the vote, one of them being economic power. The man who wields a financial whip is often the master, the ruler, the law. We therefore congratulate the growth of the Co-operative Movement in Durban" (quoted in Edwards, 1989, page 93).

In this way, the autonomous spaces of Cato Manor signaled a resistance to the structuring 'law' of abstract space, and its elevation of the white subject as master of the urban scene.

### **The space of abjection**

The city of Durban initially took a *laissez faire* approach to spaces like Cato Manor for, like the reserves, they provided for the housing and reproduction needs of the urban workforce without necessitating financial expenditure from either the city or its taxpaying citizens. By the 1930s, however, fears were expressed about a 'black belt' around Durban, "hemming it in on nearly every side" (quoted in Maylam, 1983, page 413). For city administrators and elites, the expanding activities and growing political consciousness within Cato Manor were most unwelcome, and throughout the 1940s, public officials and newspaper editorials began to express increasing concern about what was referred to as 'Darkest Durban'.

These concerns generally reflected two perceived problems in Cato Manor. The first was that, because of its rapid and haphazard growth, Cato Manor was a chaotic space, out of control, beyond the rational ordering of the city. In 1928, for example, the Joint Council for Europeans and Natives in Durban stated that "one of the worst features of the [peri-urban] district is its lack of any organic character. It has no centre, no community buildings or activity. Building are pell mell, not according to any plan" (quoted in Torr, 1987, page 35). As Edwards (1989, page 82) notes, such 'chaos' was in fact a conscious form of resistance, a means of producing and defining a social space outside of the abstract space of planning.



“[Cato Manor had become] a densely populated ever-growing collection of shack clusters, with a vast array of footpaths and roads interlinking the various settlements. For those not resident in a particular area, the settlements were virtually impenetrable. Consciously desiring to create a degree of confusion for ‘outsiders’, many painted randomly selected numbers on their doors, thus obliterating the effects of municipal shack surveys.”

In this way, the social space of Cato Manor was made baffling; it was a space that could not be made legible by the traditional tools of state power—survey, census, cadastral map (Scott, 1998). This inability to locate and fix the residents of Cato Manor led the Department of Native Affairs in 1948 to complain that the area resembled a “recently disturbed anthill” (quoted in Edwards, 1989, page 75).

If the social spaces of Durban's ‘black belt’ were not legible, then it was of course impossible to determine the social conditions and types of activities taking place there, and this led to numerous fears and complaints about the unsanitary conditions and immoral activities present in Cato Manor. Local residents in adjacent suburbs, in particular, began to protest the illegal drinking, illicit sexual activity, and vice that were presumed to run rampant in the shack settlements. In 1936, the Local Administration and Health Board in Westville, located adjacent to Cato Manor, told the Durban City Council, “there is a very bad and growing black belt in Cato Manor ... Natives of vile character are putting up shanties and between making beer and creating disturbances are causing my Board to receive complaints from residents” (quoted in Maylam, 1983, page 414).

Most commonly, the informal settlement of Cato Manor was viewed in terms of filth and disease. The area lacked sewer and water provision and as the population increased conditions in the area deteriorated. Outbreaks of typhoid and other diseases were not uncommon. In 1943, for example, a report for the city indicated that conditions were appalling:

“without exception these so called dwellings fail to comply with even most elementary hygienic and structural requirements, with no consideration of sewerage services or disposal of rubbish. Although an odd water standpipe was noted here and there these are certainly not nearly adequate even for the shacks adjacent thereto, so that in the main the picture confronting us was dismal in the extreme” (quoted in Maylam, 1983, page 415).

Although conditions within Cato Manor were far from ideal, such concerns reflect what Maynard Swanson (1977) has described in a different context as a ‘sanitation syndrome’ in which the imagery of infectious disease becomes a powerful social metaphor for rapid urban change. In a similar manner, I think portrayals of Cato Manor's shacklands emphasizing disease and decay registered a broader sociocultural reaction against this chaotic and anomalous space, rather than an actual accounting of the conditions there. In this way, the specification of pestilence and disease in Cato Manor became an important means to demarcate the boundaries of modern industrial society, by identifying the shack settlements as spaces of defilement occupied by ‘others’ (Sibley, 1995).

I do not think we should view these expressions as unique to South Africa, but instead as a more general symptom of modernity, as a necessary supplement to subjection and the production of abstract space. And I want to suggest further that this supplemental operation can be understood as a process of *abjection*, a term used by Kristeva (1982) to describe that which must be expunged or repressed by the corporeal subject in order to maintain an identity and a place within the social and symbolic order. By specifying and rejecting the unclean, the improper, the impure, the proper boundaries of the subject can be managed and regulated (Douglas, 1966; Grosz, 1990).

Seen in terms of the *social* body, the abject functions as a spatial boundary, by rendering 'outside' those social activities deemed to be a threat to the social and moral symbolic order (Cresswell, 1997; Lozanovska, 1994; Sibley, 1995; Wilton, 1998). In the context of mid-20th-century Durban, the space of Cato Manor become a repository for these abject elements of the social body—chaos, crime, disorder, infection—thus symbolically purifying the abstract and ordered spaces of white industrial Durban.

In general, as constitutive of subjectivity, the abject functions as an *unacknowledged* demarcation of difference: rather than an intentional political act, the abject "is excluded from consciousness in what is ultimately a less-than-perfect manner" (Wilton, 1998, page 178). This description aptly describes the way in which Cato Manor was viewed in Durban throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Although the 'black belt' was occasionally mentioned by Durban officials and discussed in newspaper articles, for most residents these spaces served as a kind of social and racial unconscious, laying outside the boundaries of the city, and outside of the borders of subjectivity. Cato Manor was in this sense an unacknowledged 'constitutive outside' against which the governmentalized spaces of the Fordist industrial and suburban order could be defined.

Durban officials contributed to this by displaying a general unwillingness to address the perceived problems of Cato Manor. Although the settlements of Cato Manor were technically illegal under a host of health, property, and influx control legislation, little effort was made to force the residents of 'New Africa' to move. In fact, the area embodied a stark contradiction: industrial development in Durban depended upon the very racialized bodies that were deemed to be a threat. In 1948 the city convened the Broome Commission to examine the needs and grievances of Durban's African community. Among the Commission's findings were that "the demands of industry ... fluctuate; all the Native labourers cannot be employed all the time. But the requirements of industry demand that there shall be readily available a reservoir of labor that can be drawn upon to meet seasonal demands" (quoted in Hemson, 1978, page 107). Allowing this pool of reserve labor to remain 'beyond the boundary' in Cato Manor eliminated the necessity of providing state-sponsored housing, and also allowed the city's industrial concerns to respond during times of increased demand. Such sentiments reflect a continuing view that the African subject could be a partner in the industrial development and modernization of the city, a view that would be radically altered in early 1949.

### **The 'Durban riots': reinscribing the boundaries of subjectivity**

As I have suggested, the abject is not an outcome of intentional exclusions, but rather serves as an unconscious sociocultural boundary which, in distinguishing the subject from what is impure, improper, or disorderly, helps to 'knit' or 'interpellate' a stable subject position. I want to argue, however, that at certain moments, a rift occurs within the social and symbolic order, destabilizing the existing boundaries of subjectivity and space. It is in such moments of shock or 'waking' (Benjamin, 1983–84), that we are confronted with the inherent ambiguity of identity, and the unsettling precariousness of the psychic and social boundaries of subjectivity (Grosz, 1990; Robinson, 2000).

In Durban, such a moment occurred on 13 January 1949, when the tensions of race, class, and oppression in Cato Manor exploded in what became known as the 'Durban Riots'. It began when a 14-year-old African youth was assaulted by an Indian shop owner in downtown Durban. The event was witnessed by a crowd of Africans, who became angered and began attacking Indians in the area, who responded in turn with reprisals against Africans. By late that evening order had been restored, but during the night, Africans "added up the wrongs, real and imaginary" attributed to Indians, and began to plot revenge (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, page 4). Throughout the

next day, Indian people and property were attacked by groups of Africans. By the end of the day, hundreds of Indian homes and businesses had been looted and burned, and 142 people lay dead (1 European, 50 Indians, 87 Africans, and 4 unknown), with more than 1000 injured (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949).

The riots had the effect of radically transforming the social and psychological landscape of space and race within Durban. For the Indians in Cato Manor the riots were devastating. Most of the Indian shops and businesses, and a good number of homes, had been destroyed, and all residents had been evacuated (Ladlau, 1975). Few chose to return, instead taking up new residence in available spaces throughout the city. Some Indian landlords returned periodically to collect their rents, but many sold or relet their plots to African shack lords, most of whom took advantage of the situation by expanding the number of shacks per plot and increasing rents (Ladlau, 1975; P Robinson, 1997). For their part, Africans were emboldened by their 'victory'. Residents considered that they had 'won the battle for Cato Manor' and set about consolidating the area as a space "liberated from all forms of unwanted authority" (Edwards, 1989, page 74). The Indian exodus, combined with more dense rack-renting, greatly expanded the number of shacks in Cato Manor, and by 1950, there were an estimated 6000, housing a population of between 45 000 and 50 000 people (Ladlau, 1975).

But it was the consciousness of white Durban that was most profoundly impacted by the riots. The abject space of Cato Manor could no longer contain the savage impulses which threatened to invade civilization and disintegrate the symbolic order. Instead, this unconscious abject had burst into the open, highlighting the city's failure properly to manage and control the contours of social and spatial development. In the years following the riots Durban was marked by an obsession with bringing Cato Manor into the open, with making visible the abject elements of the city's 'other' spaces. Newspaper articles criticized local authorities for turning a blind eye toward the shacklands, and residents were warned to take notice of the imminent danger that they still posed. Written accounts referred to Cato Manor as an "uncontrolled, disease-ridden shanty town" and an "incredible cesspool of filth and crime" (*Daily News* 1951; 1956). In 1952 researchers from the University of Natal conducted an extensive survey of the area. In their report, the authors pointed to the "vermin, flies, cockroaches and other pests [that] flourish in the uncovered food, overflowing pits, neglected refuse dumped a few yards from the shacks and general filth. Unsavory odours cling to shacks and often to whole areas" (Natal Regional Survey, 1952, page 372).

Worse, the spaces of Cato Manor were beginning to encroach upon nearby white neighborhoods. A 1958 newspaper article described how the area was "littered with rubbish and waste of every description, and the surrounding bush was used as a public convenience", warning that it was "not far from the European boundary at Bellaire" (*Daily News* 1958). Such descriptions highlight the spatial nature of abjection—it was not merely the existence of society's abject (waste, bodily fluids) that proved troubling, but that the bestial conditions of 'the bush' threatened to invade the domesticated spaces of white suburbanization. What made this breakdown of boundaries a very real threat was that the chaotic spaces of Cato Manor lay outside of the planning and control of the city. The Natal University researchers noted that "shacks are grouped in huddled clusters, often clinging precariously to the steep sides of hills in crazy and chaotic patterns" (Natal Regional Survey, 1952, page 370). A Commission of Inquiry convened after the riots agreed:

"In these human rabbit-warrens something like 23,000 Natives live under the most sordid conditions. The shack areas are difficult of access; roads are non-existent, bad or indifferent, and there is no lighting. Consequently it is difficult, if not impossible, properly to police these areas" (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, page 20).

I want to suggest that such concerns can be read as emblematic of a more general expression of anxiety. The abject spaces of Cato Manor were more than simply the locus of illicit activities and pathogens: they represented an inability properly to manage the spatial relations of alterity within the city, a symptom of the more general and ever-present threat to the stability of the modern subject. As Kristeva explains, “we may call it a border: abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (1982, page 9). For Kristeva the danger is nothing less than the breakdown of human civilization itself, for the abject exists as a reminder of our inherent, animal nature. “The abject”, writes Kristeva, “confronts us ... with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the *animal*” (1982, page 12, emphasis in the original). It was precisely as such an ‘animal territory’ that the ‘engulfing black tide’ within Cato Manor was conceptualized in Durban, and it is in this guise that the abject spaces of the shacklands posed a threat to the modern urban order.

This threat, of course, was specifically *racial*, and in the aftermath of the riots, race became reinscribed onto the spaces of the shacklands, and onto the bodies of its residents. Indeed, we might go so far as to suggest that within European modernity the abject itself embodies a kind of racial unconscious, through which the (white) subject, properly interpellated by civilization and ‘culture’ can be differentiated from its barbaric, premodern ‘nature’ (Anderson, 2000). As Norma Claire Moruzzi suggests, “in order to attain language and culture, the (human, national) self must differentiate from the (animal, foreign) body. Instead of politics and civilization, however, the abject would drag us back into chaos and bestiality” (1993, page 145).

After the riots in Durban, the politics and civilization of the (European) national self were redefined in sharp opposition to the racialized ‘chaos and bestiality’ of Durban’s dark spaces. Newspaper headlines told how “thousands of natives, chanting their battlecry, ran amok in an orgy of killing and sacking” and the Commission of Inquiry into the riots recounted how “the mobs of Natives swelled into ‘impis’ [Zulu battalions] chanting the Zulu war-cry and indulged in bestial orgies ... . By indulging in barbarous chants and deeds the Natives worked themselves into a frenzy” (*Natal Mercury* 1949; Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, pages 4, 5). Although some commentators blamed the city for the poverty and squalid conditions of Cato Manor, most placed the emphasis on the African people themselves. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry, in particular, explained that the African subject is inherently uncivilized, a premodern alien in the modern urban order: “The Zulu is by tradition a warrior. The veneer of civilization which has come to him during his urban existence is but a thin covering” (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, page 13). For this reason, the Native cannot be trusted to comply with the law. The Report argued that “certain racial characteristics ... combined with the stage of development to which the Native has attained, induce him to certain habits of mind ... it is apparent that urban Natives in the mass are increasingly given to lawlessness and are ready to take the law into their own hands” (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, page 12).

Although not explicit, there is I think another issue behind such concerns about ‘lawlessness’ for, to recall the view of the Cato Manor cooperatives, ‘the man who wields a financial whip is often the master, the ruler, the law’. That is, the redefinition of Africans as primitive and barbaric was also meant to counter the increasing political and economic agency of spaces like Cato Manor, agency which posed a threat to the stability of the racial boundaries of industrial Durban. Indeed, the Commission of Inquiry placed part of the blame for the riots on the increasing political activity of Africans in Durban. The report singled out for particular scorn those:

“Native intellectuals, entirely sequestered from the thoughts and aspirations of their people, quite incapable of independent thought, who merely repeat the precepts of their mentors. From all sides it is dunned into the heads of the Natives that they have grievances. It would be surprising if they did not become restive” (Van Den Heever Commission, 1949, page 21).

By rejecting the subject positions ascribed to them by the modern discourses of order and control, the political leaders of Cato Manor were in a certain sense indeed ‘taking the law into their own hands’.

In this way, the eruption of violence in Cato Manor served to dislocate an economic and symbolic order which had relied upon its unacknowledged repression, and in so doing the riots became a vehicle for the reinscription of racial alterity within the city. Subjection had failed: to recall Foucault’s formulation, African bodies had not been ‘manipulated by authority’, but were instead still ‘imbued with animal spirits’. At the same time, the riots signaled the city’s ultimate failure properly to manage and control the boundaries through which subjects and spaces could be defined and identified in an expanding industrial economy. This fear of disintegrating boundaries is in fact fundamental to the experience of abjection: “abjection is the state in which one’s foothold in the world of self and other disintegrates ... blurring borders of oneself, pushing toward psychosis where the all-too-real undermines the division between self and other and the capacity to differentiate” (McAfee, 1993, page 120).

In Durban this confrontation with the abject lent purchase to arguments that the city needed new ‘capacities to differentiate’ both the spaces of the city and the racialized subjects who were now permanent residents in Durban. More and more, these arguments focused on the need for residential segregation, which would at once make visible and legible the unruly spaces of ‘Darkest Durban’ and contain the contaminating trace of racial difference. In 1951 the Durban City Council appointed a Technical Subcommittee on Race Zoning to plan for the implementation of Group Areas in the city. The city embarked upon a new program of spatial ordering, constructing rationally planned and neatly laid out ‘townships’ at the periphery of the city, where they could be policed and controlled. Over the next decade, thousands of shacks were demolished, and by 1966 the shacklands of Cato Manor had been eliminated. Some 40 000 Indians and 120 000 Africans had been forced from their homes, and relocated to the controlled, racially sanitized township spaces of KwaMashu, Umlazi, and Chatsworth. The effects on Cato Manor were described in a Durban newspaper in 1988: “Once home to a vibrant, cosmopolitan community ... Cato Manor is today virtually a ghost town” (quoted in Maharaj, 1994, page 19).

### **Conclusion: the racial unconscious of modernity**

The power of abstract space, for Lefebvre, is the power to dictate, to control, to dominate alternative ways of living and being: “the dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there” (Lefebvre, 1991, page 49). This aptly describes the abstract and violent spatial dispossession suffered by those inhabiting the ‘peripheral spaces’ of Cato Manor in Durban. On the one hand, we can read this spatial process as an unobvious attempt to regain control of the city, to clamp down on a rising political opposition, and to secure the hegemony of the white population. I want to suggest, however, that it also signaled the final, and ultimately doomed, attempt to manage the subjects and spaces of an emerging industrial order.

Within the flux of modernization in Durban, the bodies of Indian and African subjects became a permanent feature of the urban order, and with increasing economic

and political organization, began to embody the troubling ambiguity of identity. The psychic compensation for this unsettling ambiguity was the projection of the primal, improper, and impure elements of the social order onto abject bodies and spaces which could be defined racially as the absolute alterior. Hovering just outside of the boundaries of the city, this abject posed a seldom acknowledged threat to the subjects and spaces of European Durban. As Kristeva (1982, page 69) puts it:

“the danger of filth represents for the subject the risk to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed, to the extent that it is a device of discriminations, of differences ... [It is] a threat issued from the prohibitions that found the inner and outer borders in which and through which the speaking subject is constituted.”

With the Durban Riots, this risk of social breakdown became a reality, forcing the city to reexamine the ways in which racial alterity was being defined and controlled. Eventually, townships were planned as new abstract spaces, within which the trace of racial difference could be isolated and kept at bay by increased powers of surveillance and subjection.

In this way, the successive development of the policies of formal apartheid can be viewed as part of a more general attempt to reestablish the disintegrating ‘inner and outer borders’ of industrial modernity, to shore up the leaky margins of space and subjectivity with new forms of ‘discrimination and difference’. This metaphysics, and its racial unconscious, is one of the most enduring historical legacies not only of apartheid, but of modernity more generally. It is a legacy that must still be acknowledged and worked through in a variety of contexts if we wish to bring about a form of democracy that would foster and respect difference, and open the way for new forms of social space.

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