

A Political Ecology of Water Struggles in Durban, South Africa

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For Thulani and Fiona

Abstract

This thesis looks at the relationship between water and social power. It attempts to answer two questions: who controls the distribution of water in the South African city of Durban? And how might this distribution be transformed in positive democratic ways? In attempting to answer these questions, the thesis provides insights into post-apartheid South African society and the possibilities for democratic social change. The framework of analysis builds upon work conducted in urban political ecology. In particular, I argue that urban environments, indeed all environments, should be understood as created ecosystems. Recognising this, I suggest that Durban's waterscape should be seen as produced through capitalist social relations. The waterscape thereby becomes a particular accumulation strategy through which profits may be generated. For Durban's communities, one of the most direct effects of this capitalist accumulation strategy is that access to water is dependent upon the exchange of money. Whilst this situation has been ameliorated somewhat through the development of a free basic water policy, the policy itself has necessitated a much tighter regulation of domestic supplies and, in effect, a more severe commodification of each household's water supply. In turn, this has resulted in water infrastructure acquiring power over the lives of most residents. This, I argue, is a result of the social relations that come to be invested within that infrastructure. The possibilities for change that are suggested lie within the struggle for a feminist standpoint and the connection of these situated knowledges of the waterscape with a broader historical and geographical understanding of the terrain of civil society. From such an understanding of civil society, a dialectical critique of hegemony is opened up. Overall, the thesis moves from an analysis of the power relations comprising the waterscape to the development of a critique from which, it is hoped, possibilities for political change might emerge.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“Questions of socio-environmental production become hereby fundamentally political questions. Political ecology attempts to tease out who gains from and who pays for, who benefits from and who suffers (and in what ways) from particular processes of metabolic circulatory change...The political program, then, of political ecology is to enhance the democratic content of socio-environmental construction by means of identifying the strategies through which a more equitable distribution of social power and a more inclusive mode of producing natures (of producing metabolic circulatory processes) can be achieved.”

(Swyngedouw, forthcoming)

“Do we know how to make the revolution? No, we do not; and only a charlatan would claim that we do”

(Holloway 2005: 41)

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis looks at the myriad ways in which water and power are interwoven in everyday life. In the course of the work, I seek to discover who controls the production and distribution of clean drinking water in the post-apartheid South African city of Durban¹ and how the currently unequal distribution of water might be transformed in positive, democratic ways. Through doing so, I argue we gain vital insights about important contemporary social processes and the delicate possibilities for revolutionary social change. Water serves as both a perspicacious lens and as a life-giving subject of analysis.

¹ Durban should now be considered a part of eThekweni Municipality. I use these names interchangeably throughout the thesis.



Figure 1: Durban's Location in South Africa

Source: Urban Strategy Department
eThekweni Municipality

Locating *who* controls the distribution of water in Durban is somewhat more difficult than it might, on the surface, seem. In a curious inversion, access to water in Durban does not really appear to be controlled by people, but rather by ‘things’. Money, water meters, flow limiters and ‘the state’; all of these seem to shape a resident’s capacity to access water, far more than any person or group of people. It is my singular hope in this thesis to show this inverted reality for what it is, and to show how access to water is instead shaped by social – or, perhaps more accurately, socio-natural – relationships. Thus, as the thesis progresses, I seek consistently to undermine the apparent dominance of non-human ‘things’ in the waterscape and search for a progressive politics that might seek to assert a more democratic and humanistic distribution of water within the city.

In searching for this progressive politics, I begin a journey through what might be termed Durban’s waterscape. Whilst the waterscape might be understood as a networked entity – the system of pipes, purification works and dams that link the city’s people – I intend it to mean something broader. As with the ‘things’ referred to previously, the waterscape is better understood as a complex of relationships, processes and struggles. It should be understood as something dynamic and changing – in a material way, as the network expands to outlying settlements; and in a political way, as the balance of power shifts from one group of people to another.

When looking at Durban’s waterscape, a few key features quickly emerge. First, there are vast inequalities between the abilities of different people to access clean drinking water: rich people are more likely to be able to access sufficient volumes of water than poor people. Secondly, as mentioned previously, ‘things’ as opposed to people appear to regulate access to water. Perhaps nowhere else in the world is the waterscape so

dominated by humanly-produced technologies, designed to regulate, restrict and limit people's ability to access water as it is in South Africa (ironically, this is related to the next point). Thirdly, as with so much in post-apartheid South Africa, this ability to access water is being radically reconfigured. A free basic water policy has been developed, to both international acclaim and some less vocal disdain. Pioneered by Durban Metro Water Services², this permits each household to access two hundred litres of free water per day. Ironically, the free basic water policy seems to have opened the waterscape up to a new wave of technologies for the regulating of supplies. Fourthly (and perhaps inevitably given the preceding points), the waterscape is fraught with tensions. Sporadic protests are the most overt manifestation of these tensions, as is the spate of disconnections and restrictions of domestic supplies that the municipality has embarked upon in the last decade.

The framework I use for trying to make sense of these observations might best be described as a historical geographical materialist framework (Harvey 1985). I choose my terms carefully here, in order to stress that if my approach is marxist³, it is because it follows the historical materialist *method* of Marx (see Lukács 1971, Thompson 1978). At its most basic level, such an approach requires looking at historical and geographical variations in the ability of people to produce the means of their own subsistence and reproduction. In general, in contemporary Durban, this means finding access to money – usually through paid work or the informal economy – in order to be able to pay for basic resources such as water and food. Before long, such an analysis requires that we confront the capitalist system of accumulation upon which the distribution of water in Durban, the

² As with eThekweni Municipality, this was the previous name for eThekweni Water Services.

³ My use of 'marxism' as opposed to a canonical 'Marxism' is also intended to imply the methodological influence of Marx.

waterscape, and indeed the majority of Durban's residents are dependent. Therefore, in the course of the thesis, I seek to explore the many ways in which water and the contemporary South African system of accumulation are interwoven and interdependent. This requires a continual journey to and from the distant realms of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the taps that deliver water to Durban households.

As if to illustrate an embryonic version of such a framework, early in the novel *Germinal*, the hero Etienne Lantier is seen to question a miner about the identity of the owners of the belching, ugly mines to which entire communities are sacrificing their young and old. As he replied, the ageing miner's "voice had taken on a kind of religious awe; it was as if he had spoken of some untouchable tabernacle which concealed the crouching greedy god to whom they all offered up their flesh, but whom they had never seen". A historical geographical materialist analysis is one that insists on us locating this untouchable tabernacle and revealing the crouching greedy god for what or whom it is.

Conversely, in doing so, a historical geographical materialist analysis reveals the power of everyday people to influence and shape the waterscape in different ways (here we might be seen to listen for the underground sounds of the miner's pickaxes which, in the close of *Germinal*, subversively sound the dawn of a new, better future). To echo Karl Marx (and David Harvey), my aim is to look at the ability of people to make their own histories and geographies, albeit not under the historical or geographical conditions of their own making (Marx 1977, Harvey 1985). Locating these everyday resistances is another key theme of the thesis. Following writers such as Scott (1990) and Holloway (2002b), I wish to explore what might be termed the hidden transcripts of power or the hidden worlds of insubordination within Durban's waterscape. There can be few

activities that are more everyday than accessing water. And yet too frequently our analyses of water politics remain focussed solely on either Zola's hidden tabernacle or the high politics of statesmen and women, rather than the lives of township residents, local councillors, "struggle plumbers", husbands, wives and children (see Loftus and McDonald 2001 for such a problematic analysis). Throughout this thesis, I hope to take the reader on something of a journey through three distinctive areas of Durban – KwaMashu, Inanda and Mzinyathi – in order to give a sense of the power of residents in each of these areas to be able to shape the politics of water in both the city and nationally. Without glorifying or romanticising these resistances, I hope to show how any progressive politics is likely to emerge from these seemingly humble roots. To use Lefebvre's words: "Man must be everyday or he must not be at all" (Lefebvre 1991a: xi).

One of the key obstacles confronted when exploring the world of the everyday – as Lefebvre recognised as far back as 1948 (Lefebvre 1991a) – is the fact that this is not always a world that can be taken at face value. One of the overarching features of Durban's waterscape is the fact that things such as water meters and flow limiters appear to exert more control over people than people do over those things. The power and violence of this inversion of people and things can be seen on a daily basis within Durban, as residents submit to having their supply of water restricted or their lives to be adjusted to the rhythms of an electronic (water) flow-limiter, thereby risking thirst, disease and malnutrition. Part of the reason for this apparent submissiveness is, of course, because of the dominance of another thing – money – within the waterscape. And the ability to assert this dominance comes in the form of yet another thing – 'the state'. The problem to be confronted in making sense of this might be expressed in terms of a

questioning of the relationship between form and process. The form in which the waterscape presents itself is thereby called into question, in an attempt to try and discover more about the processes, relations and struggles that have given rise to that form. Whereas an empiricist analysis would have little problem dealing in those forms, I argue these can only be understood as part of a broader set of relations which they internalise (see Ollman 1976, Harvey 1973). In positing relations, processes and struggles as the target of analysis (as opposed to discrete objects or events), my approach might be understood to be dialectical. Harvey summarises such a dialectical approach neatly:

“A dialectical approach says that (a) processes are more fundamental than things, (b) processes are always mediated through the things they produce, sustain and dissolve, and (c) the permanences produced (including ways of thought, institutions, power structures, and networks of social relations as well as material objects) frequently function as the solid and immovable bases of daily material existence” (Harvey 1996: 418)

Another important way in which theorists have expressed the appearance of social relations as things and the investment of those things with social powers is through an understanding of ‘the fetishism of commodities’ (Marx 1976). As one might in a fetishistic religion, Marx argues that, in capitalist society, we invest metaphysical powers into something that we have produced (Korsch quoted in Geras 1973). Several writers have pointed to the similarity (and apparent differences) in Marx’s discussion of fetishism and his previous discussion of alienation (Lefebvre 1991a, Geras 1973). Alienation refers to the alien power which products acquire in the production process, as well as the devastating social effects of a capitalist mode of production. In Ollman’s terms, it “is the intellectual construct in which Marx displays the devastating effect of

capitalist production on human beings, on their physical and mental states and on the social processes of which they are a part” (1976: 131). Lukács appeared to bring the two concepts together in his discussion of reification (1971). As the thesis progresses, I put these concepts to work, in order to better make sense of the way in which the alienated waterscape is transformed, reified and fetishised through the capitalist system of accumulation.

Through rooting these processes in a historical materialist framework, I argue that we are led to situate them in the actual activities that people perform. In the case of water, this requires looking at the sharply gendered division of labour. In Durban, women are largely responsible for water issues, be this through collecting water, registering the water bill in their own name, paying this bill and so on. At this stage, the possibility opens up that men and women’s knowledges of the waterscape – if seen as structured by their activities and position with regard to relations of production and exchange – might be quite different. Through exploring situated knowledges (Haraway 1991), I argue we might begin to see cracks in the process of reification and fracture-lines in the reified consciousness produced through capitalist alienation (Jameson 2004). New possibilities might begin to emerge for radically different understandings of the waterscape. Here, I begin to question what a specifically *feminist* historical materialism (Hartsock 1983a, 1983b) of Durban’s waterscape might look like. Beyond this, I consider the possibilities for political mobilisation that might emerge from *within* the waterscape.

Many of these questions have been overlooked or neglected in the course of debates within political ecology. In many ways this thesis does not fit neatly into a canon that can be termed “political ecology” (Blaikie 1985, Blaikie and Brookfield 1987, Peet

and Watts 1996, Bryant and Bailey 1997, Robbins 2004). However, it does fit more closely with the concerns of an emerging debate over urban political ecology, in which various theorists have adopted an explicitly dialectical approach in theorising human-environment relations (see Swyngedouw 1997, Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw, forthcoming). Very quickly when analysing something such as water, the impossibility of discretely dividing social and natural processes becomes clear. As Raymond Williams (1980) has famously noted the ideology of separate realms of 'nature' and 'culture' emerged with the Industrial Revolution and the vast expansion of capitalist relations. From recognising the inseparability of society and nature, there are numerous ways into beginning to theorise how they are interrelated (Huntington 1915, Schmidt 1971, Sauer 1996, Whatmore 1999). In this thesis, I have found Smith's work on the production of nature (1984) to be one of the most fruitful inroads. For Smith, building on a historical materialist framework, labour is seen to mediate the 'metabolic' relation between nature and society. The argument is relatively simple: by doing things, or by making sure we are able to survive, we transform natural things and in the process they transform us (Marx and Engels 1970). By making a table, we not only transform the wood we are working, we also transform our own lives by ensuring we have something to work from, to entertain around, or to rest our books on. By flipping a hamburger in a McDonald's burger bar, we not only ensure the sustenance of others through the cooking of food, we ensure that profit rates are maintained for some distant shareholder. We play a part in a commodity chain running from the farm to the burger bar (and on to the stock exchange).

Smith makes an important distinction between the production of nature in a non-capitalist society and the production of nature when capitalism operates on a global scale.

In the latter, he argues that the distinction between first and second nature is transformed such that both should be understood as produced. The former, however, should be understood as produced through human labour, the second as produced through human relations. 'Second nature' thereby becomes increasingly associated with the exchange abstraction. This provides helpful insights into beginning to theorise the transformation of water in Durban. Increasingly, water is being understood through the exchange abstraction and, increasingly, it is being produced by capitalist social relations. Thus, Smith's work provides something of a bridge between the previous discussion of form and process and a dialectical understanding of produced nature in capitalist society.

In summary, then, this thesis develops a historical geographical materialist analysis of the power relations shaping everyday access to water. It looks at how access is structured by socio-natural relations mediated through the work people carry out in producing and distributing water. Whilst looking at such relations, it confronts the problematic way in which socio-natural relations and processes often appear as things or surface forms. Towards the end of the thesis, the critique is transformed into an exploration of the potentials for democratic social change. Throughout, the thesis is situated and put to work within a broader debate about the provision of water in post-apartheid South Africa. In the next section, I look more closely at these debates. Then, I turn to a review of the methodology used in the course of the research, justifying this and looking at some of the necessary modifications to the approach adopted. Finally, I conclude this introduction by looking at the overall structure of the thesis.

2. WATER DEBATES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prior to the ending of apartheid, the distribution of water in South Africa was, predictably, more unequal than it is at present. Because of their ‘illegality’, informal settlements were unlikely to be serviced with clean drinking water and township residents, although having access to water, tended to be serviced by a decaying and unreliable service. In an effort to assuage new sources of opposition, municipalities often charged residents a minimal amount for these poor services: although supplies were often metered, charging tended to be based less on the volume consumed and more frequently on a monthly charge for all services.

With the ending of apartheid, lively and important debates emerged concerning the most progressive way of extending services to informal settlements and the most effective way of calculating a tariff system that might be both environmentally and socially just (Bond 2002). Several of these ideas materialised in the document around which the African National Congress (ANC) contested the 1994 elections – the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). In this document, the party committed itself to achieving short, medium and long term targets for the provision of water to all. The RDP also makes explicit reference to a system of ‘lifeline provision’ in which residents would be guaranteed a basic volume of water per day (ANC 1993, Bond 2002).

With the ANC by far the dominant party after the 1994 elections, a large expansion of water service provision therefore commenced. New combinations of public and private sector partnerships were used in many rural areas and in several

municipalities (see Bakker and Hemson 2000, McDonald and Pape 2002). The system of lifeline provision soon became a major topic of debate, with the government appearing increasingly evasive about whether or not a commitment to ‘lifeline provision’ implied a genuine commitment to guaranteeing residents a basic amount of *free* water. In the meantime, the government moved towards a tariff mechanism through which full-cost pricing might be achieved. Unsurprisingly, for many millions of residents, this meant that water became increasingly unaffordable in sufficient volumes to maintain a healthy life (McDonald and Pape 2002). As payment arrears amassed, the number of water disconnections increased substantially in the late 1990s and, for many living in townships, the situation with regard to water access seemed qualitatively worse than under apartheid. New technologies were introduced in various parts of the country to ensure that all running costs for water services were met; prepayment cards being one of the more noticeable examples. With these, residents are only able to access as much water as they have paid for on their card. Rather like ‘pay-as-you-go’ mobile phone technology, water is expressed as a digitalised amount on a plastic card. All these developments seemed counter to both the spirit and letter of the RDP, the new South African constitution, which enshrines the right to water for all (RSA 1996), and the 1998 National Water Act, which should enshrine this right still further (DWAF 1998).

As these paradoxes mounted, tensions began to increase. The main union for municipal workers – the South African Municipal Worker’s Union (SAMWU) – began a campaign in alliance with several progressive Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and academics for the lifeline supply of water to be guaranteed to all residents for free. Sporadic wildcat protests began to occur in many settlements around the country; in

Durban one such protest resulted in the shooting of a disconnection bailiff. Many more residents were hurt as police targeted protests with tear gas and rubber bullets. New grassroots organisations began to form in order to oppose privatisation of water and electricity (the Anti Privatisation Forum), and to insist on the right to services for all (the Concerned Citizens Forum). In the meantime, the government pursued water privatisation further with concession contracts announced in Nelspruit, Fort Beaufort, Queenstown and the Dolphin Coast: most of the country's major cities pursued some form of commercialisation of branches of what remained a publicly-owned and operated service (McDonald and Ruiters 2004). By February 2000, a massive cholera outbreak in rural KwaZulu Natal appeared to suggest that full-cost pricing was having a much more serious human effect than many politicians had realised. Later, the Minister for Water Affairs and Forestry was to admit that this cholera outbreak was related to aggressive cost-recovery measures. Then, in a surprise move, in the run-up to the local government elections of 2000, Thabo Mbeki announced the government's intention to ensure that a free basic minimum volume of water was guaranteed to all residents. The responsibility for such guarantees would be in the hands of local municipalities. As the Minister for Water Affairs and Forestry followed up Mbeki's surprise announcement with an official statement, the municipality cited as an example to others was Durban (Kasrils 2000a).

3. WATER PROVISION IN DURBAN

For many, there would have been little surprise that Durban was seen as the example to be followed by others. Durban Metro Water Services (DMWS), or eThekwin

Water Services (eTWS) as it has since been renamed, has been praised many times for its dynamic and innovative approach to water provision; the head of eThekweni Water Services, Neil Macleod, received a National Geographic award in 2002 for his pioneering work in reducing water wastage across the city – much has since been made of this “international acclaim”. In the early 1990s, with the legal status of informal settlements still largely in question, DMWS had experimented with low-cost solutions to providing water in Cato Manor, a shack settlement close to the centre of the city, established by residents fleeing the violence in the rural and peri-urban fringes of the city. After having introduced standpipes to the area, the municipality then began to experiment with a “groundtank system” in order to deliver a basic amount of water to individual households on a daily basis. It was possible to supply this water through low-cost piping and thereby develop a rudimentary water network in the informal settlement. This system is described in more depth in Chapter 4, but it is important to realise at this stage that Durban was proactive in responding in innovative ways to some of the challenges that post-apartheid water provisioning would entail. It faced potential condemnation in bringing water to what was still considered to be an illegal settlement (Interview Magubane: 9th September 2002).

Since the development of the groundtank system, the municipality has pioneered a semi-pressure system introducing a third tier of service between the most basic level and a full-pressure system. Through a combination of services, the municipality now boasts to have connected an impressive 100,000 new households to the network over the last ten years (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). With the outward expansion of the municipal boundary, eThekweni Water Services has since assumed responsibility for the

provision of water to greater numbers of people. In doing so, once again, it has responded innovatively and flexibly, expanding the groundtank system and developing higher quality ventilated improved diversionary pit latrines for those not connected to the sewerage network. In some of its more recent ventures, eThekweni Water Services has entered into various public private partnerships. One of these – in combination with “civil society” – is analysed in Chapter 6. Another consists of a large wastewater recycling plant constructed by the multinational water company Vivendi for the bulk-water needs of a large paper mill, Mondi, in the South Durban basin.

eThekweni Water Services has also been praised by the central government for being one of the most effective municipal water providers at ensuring full-cost recovery. This has been achieved, many argue because of efficiency gains from replacing an ageing network and because of the firm approach to non-payment of bills (Interview: Bailey 5th September 2003; Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). By 2000, Durban was said to be 98% efficient at achieving full-cost recovery (DWAF 2001). In ensuring such costs were recovered, the municipality has employed a private security firm to accompany bailiffs who disconnect, on average, 800 households per day for non-payment of bills. According to both the executive director of eThekweni Water Services and the director of research and development the average disconnection⁴ rate at the time of research was 4000 households per week (Interview Bailey: 5th September 2002; Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). If one assumes an average household size of four across the municipality (and in reality poor households tend to be considerably larger), this amounts to a possible 16,000 people being affected by disconnections on a weekly basis. Currently, the

⁴ With the policy at the time being to “restrict” and not “disconnect” supplies, it must be assumed that by 2002-2003 they meant 4000 households were having their supplies restricted.

municipality claims to be restricting supplies rather than physically disconnecting households, although in many cases, the reality was either physical disconnection or the outcome of restriction was qualitatively the same, with the supply being reduced to zero.

The process of restricting household supplies has now become a major area for the investment of time, energy and resources. At present, two methods for restricting supplies predominate: the first involves a rudimentary “orifice” valve which reduces a full pressure supply to a trickle; the second involves an electronic flow limiter that shuts off supplies after a set volume of water has been delivered. Both are highly problematic and neither is yet reliable. Other ways in which supplies might be considered to have been limited are through the groundtank system, which only allows 200 litres of water to be accessed per day; the semi-pressure system, which reduces pressure and thereby the volume that can be accessed; and through the favouring of standpipes in certain areas, which reduces the volume that can be accessed to the volume that can be carried.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that eThekweni Water Services’ apparent progressiveness in pioneering new technologies for providing water to poor residents of the city is continually seen to come into conflict with its struggle to achieve full-cost recovery and its hard-line approach to non-payment. Deep tensions lie within water provision in the city, as the municipal provider’s apparent paternalism is seen to conflict with its aggressive commercialism, reflected in the restriction and disconnection of household’s supplies.

One of the key problems constraining eTWS’s current efforts to achieve full-cost recovery and exacerbating many of the present tensions is the municipality’s relationship with its bulk-water provider, Umgeni Water. Throughout most of the previous century,

the city's own engineers had developed an impressive bulk-water infrastructure on the Umlaas, Umbilo and Umgeni Rivers. There appeared to be little need for any further tier in the chain of provision to the city, as both local expertise and funds were quite sufficient. However, by the late 1960s, the central government appeared to be constraining the municipality's ability to continue developing this infrastructure. Instead, the national administration undertook its own water supply augmentation works and began to sell water from these to the city. These developments were in anticipation of the formation of the Umgeni Water Board, a body that would have overarching responsibility for the sale of water to both Durban and Pietermaritzburg municipalities. The principal justification for such a water board was that a third party was required in order to mediate between competing users of water abstracted from the Umgeni River. With Durban municipality being responsible for 85% of the water abstracted, this rationalisation seemed to make little sense. Instead, as many of the city's engineers were to realise, the formation of the Umgeni Water Board provided a veneer of legitimacy to the government's apartheid vision of separate Bantustans for the country's African population. Up until the early 1980s, Durban municipality had been the primary provider of water to the KwaZulu Bantustan, having developed a water network to supply the surrounding townships. This appeared to undermine KwaZulu's status as a viable sovereign state: a third party was thereby required to sell water from South Africa to KwaZulu (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003).

Umgeni Water's⁵ ambiguous status has been a source of major tensions for the municipality. Bulk-water tariffs to the city have risen rapidly since its formation, with

⁵ With the gradual commercialisation of the Umgeni Water Board and the establishment of several different branches of the same entity (as discussed in Chapter 3) it has tended to be referred to as the abbreviated Umgeni Water.

several increases of over 10% per year in the first years of this millennium. Many of Umgeni Water's price increases can be seen to result from bad commercial decisions on its part. With the passing of the 1998 Water Act, water boards were given far greater freedom to engage in commercial ventures: Umgeni Water rose to such challenges enthusiastically. What becomes important in this thesis is to recognise Umgeni Water's important role as a mediator between the local supply of water and the broader system of accumulation operating in South Africa. With Umgeni Water having floated several large bonds on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, it has become increasingly important for this semi-commercial entity to ensure continual returns are made for investors. Here, then, we begin to see the journey from the local waters in Durban to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and beyond to some of the other African cities in which Umgeni Water has been bidding for potentially lucrative concession contracts (Umgeni Water's role is explored in much more detail in Chapter 3). As stated earlier, all these tensions must be situated within the local areas in which they manifest themselves. Thus, a crucial part of the methodology employed throughout the thesis is to try and uncover the processes linking this broader system of accumulation with the tensions that manifest themselves in the different areas of the city.

In summary, water policy in Durban can be seen to be produced through the intersection of local and global political economic processes. Currently, it is both fraught with tensions and in a period of flux, producing both positive and negative outcomes. I explored these processes and some of the latent tensions through a focus on three key areas of the municipality. It is to the selection of these, and the overall methodology employed, that I turn in the next section.

4. CHOICE OF FIELD SITES AND METHODOLOGY⁶

Crucial to a methodology that aims to explore the everyday constitution of the waterscape and the hidden resistances within it, is the selection of sites in which to explore such processes. My decision to carry out research in Durban had largely been driven by the characteristic features of provision in the city noted above – in particular the municipality’s paradoxically progressive and aggressive attitude to water users in the city and the politics beginning to develop around such tensions. Following the decision to carry out work in Durban, three different field study areas were chosen within the city in which to conduct community workshops, focus group interviews and household interviews. The choice of three sites was based on the assumption that different experiences would be encountered in an informal settlement, a township and a rural area. All three types of settlement might be expected to have different experiences of water provision, different political histories and a radically different contemporary politics around such issues. The first site chosen was Inanda (see Figure 2 for Inanda’s position in eThekweni Municipality and Figure 3 for a view of one area of the settlement) a large informal settlement about 30 km from the centre of Durban. Inanda is an important location because of the recent experimentation by the municipality with different forms of trisector partnership – involving the private sector, the local municipality and various groups from “civil society”. Having established fruitful research contacts within Inanda,

⁶ I have chosen not to situate myself as a researcher in the course of discussing this methodology. This is not because I consider my positionality to be unimportant but rather because I consider it to be of too great importance to be dealt with in either a brief or extended biographical passage. Throughout the course of the thesis, the strong reflexivity (Harding 1993) I would advocate should be clear.

it then made sense to build upon these and carry out research in a neighbouring township and a neighbouring rural community. Thus, research was also conducted in KwaMashu township – Section C of the township being chosen because of its central location and the initial willingness of the local ward committee to assist with the research – and Mzinyathi, a poorly demarcated, rural area lying just beyond Inanda in the Qadi former Tribal Area. A brief description of each of these areas will help to better contextualise the research.

KwaMashu C is a section of a formal township constructed in the early 1960s as Africans were forcefully evicted from Cato Manor and re-housed on the periphery of the expanding city. Almost adjacent to KwaMashu, moving out from the centre of the city, lies Inanda, a largely informal settlement comprising 33 different communities, each with its own quite distinctive character. For this research, interviews and workshops were conducted in three of these communities: Bhambayi, Amatikwe and Amaoti. Over 100,000 people now live within Inanda, an area remarkable for both its haunting beauty and deep poverty. Sandwiching Inanda from the opposite direction is the Qadi former Tribal Area, of which Mzinyathi is a part.

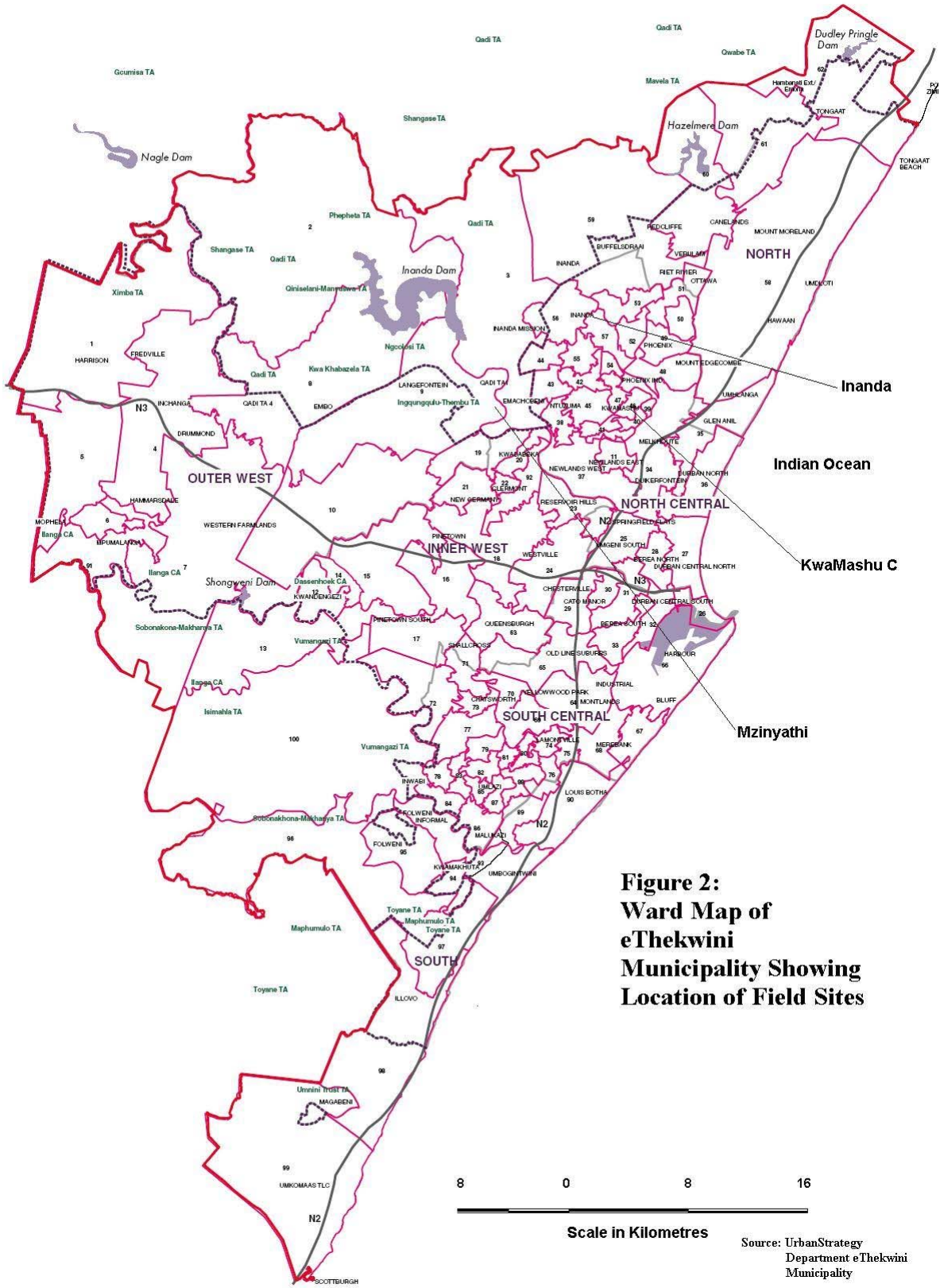




Figure 3: A View of Inanda



Figure 4: Community Workshop in KwaMashu C, 12th March, 2003

Considering the proximity of these places, it is perhaps surprising how much they differ. Visually, the three are entirely different. The uniformity of KwaMashu marks it out as one of apartheid's planned "labour containers", with houses coming in one of two forms – a whole house or a half house. This contrasts so noticeably with the chaotic layout and cramped shacks of Inanda. Whilst apartheid's planners designed KwaMashu's formal layout as little more than a storage centre for labour power, Inanda's growth was more organic, lying as it did outside of both "white South Africa" and the KwaZulu Bantustan. Unusually, much of the area consisted of African freehold land until the fall of apartheid in 1994: the source of income for many of these landowners came from the "farming" of dense fields of shacks. Mzinyathi, in contrast, lies on the edge of the deep blue waters of the Inanda dam. The surrounding escarpments cascade into this aquatic playground for the rich, whilst Mzinyathi's round houses mark it out as what the government now terms a former tribal area. The rural idyll is only shattered by the severe poverty of most who live there.

The three areas also differ culturally and politically. Historically, formal townships under apartheid had a much stronger support base for the civic movements that challenged apartheid (Seekings 2000). In contrast, rural areas, on the surface at least, appeared to be held under the sway of what were often corrupt traditional authorities. These helped to cultivate a conservative support base for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), led by Gatsha Buthelezi. Inanda occupied a more ambiguous position, lying as it does in a peri-urban area. Perhaps as a result, it saw some of the most violent turf wars between the United Democratic Front comrades with their revolutionary hopes and

aspirations, and the conservative and nationalist youth of the IFP (Hemson 1996). It is important not to exaggerate the contemporary differences. Mzinyathi, for example, now has an ANC councillor, and residents of the area talked of very similar strategies to those in KwaMashu in their struggle for water supplies (mass action as opposed to investing hope in traditional leaders). There is also a constant migration from townships to rural areas and back again which tends to fragment any clear distinction between a “rural resident” and a “township resident”.

One difference which remains crucial to this research, however, is the manner in which the geographical location of each of these areas has had an influence on the relative ability of households to access water. Since the construction of KwaMashu as a planned apartheid township, local households have been serviced with a backyard tap, toilet and shower. As a result, the township’s residents have always retained a link (with varying degrees of reliability) to the main water network. In Inanda, in contrast, households historically depended on the “goodwill” (or eye-for-a-profit) of their shack-farming landlords to provide a borehole source or shallow well. Whilst KwaMashu received a fairly reliable supply of clean drinking water, Inanda suffered frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases and occasional typhoid and cholera outbreaks, prompting the construction of Inanda Newtown by the Urban Foundation in the early 1980s⁷. Now, a mix of standpipes, illegal connections and eThekweni Water Services’ ‘pioneering’ intermediate technologies bring clean water to nearly all of Inanda’s residents. In further contrast, Mzinyathi is only just beginning to receive a clean supply of drinking water. For some of the residents who were displaced by the construction of the

⁷ Inanda Newtown is a ‘site-and-service’ township in which plots of land and standpipes were provided in a planned layout upon which residents were expected to proceed with the construction of their own formal houses.

Inanda dam, the irony is that their displacement was to ensure safe supplies of water to Durban. Such supplies only reached those on the dam's edge some fifteen years later.

For the research in the field sites, I relied on the assistance of a native isiZulu speaker, Thulani Ncwane, who acted as both translator and research assistant. As a resident of Inanda and a part-time student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, his local knowledge and his many local contacts were invaluable. Throughout, I also worked alongside my partner, Fiona Lumsden, who was conducting research as part of a project for the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu Natal. The pattern of research we followed in both Inanda and KwaMashu was to: meet with the councillor of the area; call a community meeting; and then follow this up with in-depth household interviews. In Mzinyathi, because of the dispersed nature of the community and the difficulty for individuals of travelling to a central location, we began individual household interviews immediately after having met with the local councillor.

Overall, we carried out interviews with all five of the ward councillors (see Appendix 1 for list of interviewees) responsible for the areas in which research was conducted. This was a crucial part of the process of gaining access to specific communities. With water issues being so highly politically contentious, a level of mistrust would have existed if councillors felt their authority being undermined through a lack of consultation over such sensitive issues. Thulani was crucial in this process, knowing all the councillors individually and knowing the complex (and often murky) political history of each area. The interviews would identify new developments taking place in the ward and would identify any particular problems concerning water delivery.

Invariably, however, councillors were reluctant to suggest that any problems existed and the interviews were consequently less informative than might have been hoped for.

The process for organising community meetings would begin in each area with Thulani contacting a member of the local civic association, ward committee or development forum. A date would be chosen and a community hall booked in the area. We would provide refreshments and, generally, the news spread quickly throughout that researchers were coming to hear more about the community's opinions on water provision. Almost without exception, residents were eager to attend, in order to express their views and discuss their problems with others.

Once the meeting had started, I would explain the nature of the research and my position as a DPhil student, before going on to describe how the meeting would run. Thulani would translate this and a register would be taken in which people recorded their names and addresses. The register provided the formality to the meeting that participants seemed to appreciate, although a secondary purpose was that it facilitated follow up interviews: we made this point clear before names or addresses were given. The meeting would then break into smaller groups in which participants would discuss a list of questions on a sheet. These centred around three issues:

- What is the current pattern of access in this area?
- How and why has access changed?
- How could it be transformed in the future?

After each set of questions, one speaker from each group would summarise responses and we would pose further questions in order to probe specific issues. After the final set of group discussions, the meeting would generally take on its own dynamic as participants began to explore their own ways of dealing with the problems they were encountering. Finally, we would summarise the entire meeting, establish whether it would still be acceptable to carry out follow-up interviews and offer to meet again in order to summarise findings from the other areas of the municipality. Agreeing to share information from other areas was seen as a key part of the community meetings as it allowed residents to contextualise the shifts that were taking place locally and contributed to the building of stronger connections with others across the municipality. Throughout, I would take notes of the meeting.

Whilst our original plan had been to follow up the community meetings by carrying out household interviews with those who had attended, the selection of interviewees was instead frequently structured around particular areas that had been highlighted as exhibiting particular tensions in the larger meetings. If, for example, a semi-pressure tank water system had been introduced to one area of a community, interviews would be conducted at those households most recently connected to the network, whether they were present at the meeting or not. If a spate of water disconnections had been taking place in one particular area of a community, interviews would be carried out with those affected. The community meeting would still provide a vital platform for the follow-up interviews, although the link between them was not the direct one originally anticipated.

The interviews themselves were generally unstructured but would focus around the same themes as the meetings and the specific issues that had been highlighted. Generally, Thulani would translate, unless the interviewee spoke in English of his or her own accord. More often than not, this was the case in KwaMashu, whereas in Mzinyathi all interviews were conducted in isiZulu. After early experiments tape recording the interviews, I found it to be less obtrusive to take detailed notes instead of recording.

By employing such a methodology, I would argue that the research was driven as much by the concerns, perceptions, struggles and understandings of the participants as it was by us. The community meetings allowed for maximum participation of those attending, and provided a crucial way into formulating questions for the household interviews. Questions were open-ended enough to allow groups to develop their own ideas and develop quite different responses. Such a flexible approach could have run into problems. Individuals' specific understandings of the issues at stake could take an unjustifiably prominent position in the research (for example "Why is my bill so high?", "I've had a leak for the last six months" and so on). This could have taken meetings well away from the objectives we wanted to achieve. Such a method could also allow more vocal participants to lead the meeting in one particular direction to the detriment of quieter participants. The most important means of countering this was to ensure the meetings provided a space in which all felt able to express their views and concerns. On top of this, regular meetings with bureaucrats in the municipality helped to situate and contextualise specific issues. Finally, through using the community meetings as a route into household interviews it was possible to probe in much more detail specific issues and, through this, gain a much better understanding of individual problems. Although the

heart of the research is structured around the qualitative data generated from interviews, it is complemented with data (including a detailed billing record for all residents of KwaMashu C) and more formal, structured responses provided by the municipality.

It should be noted that some problems were encountered early on when attempting to organise two of the community meetings. In the Amatikwe area of Inanda, on the two occasions a meeting was called, a hall was booked but no participants attended. This was exceptional and seemed largely to do with the local activists we had initially contacted being out of touch or out of favour with the rest of the community (even though the activists were themselves depressed and despondent at the gradual demobilisation of grassroots structures). As a result, we started household interviews without having had this preliminary community meeting. This seemed relatively unproblematic, although it required more household interviews to be conducted than in other areas.

In KwaMashu, there seemed a danger early on that the meeting might be seized upon by one individual who had ambitions to become a local councillor. It became clear that participation would need to be broadened quickly in order to ensure everyone had a chance to express their own opinions. As mentioned previously, we soon realised that it was absolutely vital to try and ensure a space in which all felt happy to express their views. Maintaining this - and ensuring the least vocal felt happy speaking out - was a constant challenge. Finally, as discussed earlier, a community meeting was not held in Mzinyathi because of the difficulties local residents would have had in travelling to a central location.

Alongside the primary research in these three field sites, interviews were conducted with representatives from the municipal water services provider, the municipality and the bulk-water provider. These were vital in learning more about the strategies being adopted by each of these entities around the political ecology of water and also to better contextualise the research being carried out in the field sites. The list of interviewees is included in the appendix. Secondary sources were continually consulted to further contextualise this. Thus, sources on the history of Durban's municipal engineering projects were consulted in the University of KwaZulu Natal, Killie Campbell Archives; City Engineer's reports and Mayor's Minutes for the municipality were consulted in the University of KwaZulu Natal Library; further reports written by City Engineers were consulted in the Don Africana Library; and the Umgeni Water Library and Archive was used for Annual Reports and Accounts for this entity. Much of this research helped in contextualising the unfolding political ecology of water struggles both historically and geographically.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The overall structure of the thesis is to move from an analysis of the power relations running through Durban's waterscape to an analysis of the potentials for the transformation of these relations. Chapter 5 thereby acts as something of a crucial pivot, as the alienation discussed in previous chapters is at last seen to be punctured by the struggle for a feminist standpoint and – in the subsequent chapter – through a dialectical transformation of civil society.

In initially looking at the dominant power relations within the waterscape, the thesis begins by confronting what appears to be one of the key agents controlling the distribution of water in the city – the state. Most political ecological analyses have to consider the role of the state and this entity is usually seen as either an agent for progressive change or a cause of many of the most serious problems in Third World political ecology (Bryant and Bailey 1997). In Chapter 2, however, I argue that the state can serve as something of a distraction from broader political ecological struggles. In actual fact, the state might more accurately be viewed as the fetishised form of these struggles. This is not to deny the existence of either a state system or a particularly powerful idea of the state (Miliband 1969, Abrams 1987), but it is to argue that our political ecological struggles might be more productively focussed on those relations between people and groups of people that are obscured by an ideology of ‘the state’ as agent. In seeking to discover who controls access to water in Durban, we must first undermine the mirage that control is exerted by a mystical entity called the state.

In the following Chapter, I take this argument a stage further by focussing more explicitly on the relations that can be considered to be reified in the state. This takes me into a discussion of the important political ecological struggles between eThekweni Water Services and its bulk-water provider, Umgeni Water. With the latter exerting increasing pressure on the municipality to increase revenues, I argue that the waterscape is better understood as a particular accumulation strategy, shaped by Umgeni Water’s needs to ensure profitable returns to its investors. Many of the tensions and much of the restless change encountered in the waterscape can be seen to result from Umgeni Water’s need to continually engage in capital accumulation and the crises that result from this.

In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to a closer examination of some of the effects of the waterscape becoming this accumulation strategy. Here, I look at how the previous discussion implies the production of an alienated waterscape in which the majority are divorced from direct access to clean drinking water unless able to pay money for this (leaving aside for now, the basic (and commodified) free water allowance). The effect is for socio-natural relations to become increasingly mediated through a capitalist system of accumulation. Deep tensions begin to emerge between the qualitative valuation of water for its life-enhancing properties – its use-value – and its quantitative valuation in the accumulation process – its exchange value. As discussed previously, one of the many cruel outcomes of the production of an alienated waterscape is the inversion of people and things. In this chapter, I confront this inversion directly. In doing so, I attempt to put to work the ideas of Lukács (1971), Marcuse (1964), Schmidt (1971) and Smith (1984) exploring the many tensions between them and what they might reveal about the contemporary political ecology of water in Durban. Bringing these ideas together, I conclude this chapter by arguing that water is being produced through social relations that impute human characteristics and social power into both water itself and the infrastructure through which it is distributed.

Whilst the tendency of Chapter 4 is to suggest a somewhat depressing reification of human consciousness, as access to life itself is reduced to a quantitative function, the following chapter argues that by exploring the situated knowledges of women, in both the interviews and community workshops conducted, the possibility for a non-reified consciousness and a radically different politics might be seen to emerge. As argued before, this chapter acts as something of a pivot; the argument moves on from a critique

of the power relations producing the alienated waterscape to a search for a radical politics that might emerge from the preceding critique. I begin the chapter by considering several different starting points for a feminist historical materialism of Durban's waterscape. Here, I look at the possibility that women's domestic work might be seen as beneficial to capitalism in certain key ways (Meillassoux 1981). Then I move on to look at women's struggles over reproductive issues in Durban and how these might be seen to transform both the politics of patriarchy within the city and challenge the development of capitalism and apartheid (Bozzoli 1995). Then, in turning to the interviews with women and the discussions that developed in community workshops, I argue that we begin to uncover radically different vantage points from which to view some of the preceding problems. The struggle for a feminist standpoint and the exploration of situated knowledges begins to open up radical alternatives to the alienated and alienating politics being produced through the capitalist production and exchange of water.

The following chapter attempts to connect these situated knowledges more effectively with the broader historical geography of civil society within South Africa. At first, civil society is viewed as an obstacle to a progressive politics and it is argued that a new hegemony is being established within the waterscape around the notion of the responsible, atomised, paying consumer of water. Later, however, I argue that within such a terrain lies the possibility of a trenchant critique. The new hegemony is shown to be as riven with contradictions as the waterscape itself: the rational consumer is continually juxtaposed with the rights of the citizen to free water. Thus, as civil society becomes a terrain through which this new hegemony might be consolidated, so it also becomes a terrain through which new contradictions might be prised open. Thus I attempt

to explore some of the dialecticism in Gramsci's understanding of civil society. The thesis concludes with an attempt to draw these ideas together and consider some of the lessons that might be gained for urban political ecology.

Chapter 2

THE STATE OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY

“More than ever before men now live in the shadow of the state”
(Miliband 1969: 3)

“There is one preliminary problem about the state which is very seldom considered, yet which requires attention if the discussion of its nature and role is to be properly focused. This is the fact that ‘the state’ is not a thing, that it does not, as such, exist”
(Miliband 1969: 46)

“The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is”
(Abrams 1988: 58)

A simple framework for studying political ecological change might begin by privileging three main units of analysis: the state; capital; and civil society (Bryant and Bailey 1997). Between these three units, we might begin to uncover some of the answers to the two questions posed in the introduction. The state might be seen to control the distribution of water in Durban, and strategic lobbying of the state, or democratic control over the state, might lead to the transformation of that distribution. Following a similar framework, studies of the political ecology of water often posit the state as a key entity for dictating broader change. This would seem to make intuitive sense. In the UK, for example, the state can largely be seen to be responsible for consolidating a highly fragmented water service in the mid-Twentieth Century. More recently, the decision to re-fragment and privatise this centralised service was again made by the national state. And currently, branches of the state are responsible for regulating these privatised entities

and arbitrating in recent decisions over whether such private companies should be permitted to be transformed into not-for-profit entities (Bakker 2003).

In South Africa, the state might be assumed to play an even more prominent role in the political ecology of the country, with the central state having cast a particularly dark shadow over the lives of the majority of people during the last century. Thus, under apartheid, the South African state had a remarkable influence on the segregated layout of the built environment, as well as the fixed infrastructure through which the apartheid city was serviced. At present, state institutions play a key role in deciding whether or not private sector firms should be permitted to compete alongside the public sector for contracts to supply water to municipalities (Bond 2002, McDonald and Ruiters 2004). According to the government, a state-supported programme has ensured that an impressive ten million citizens have received a connection to the water network in the ten post-apartheid years (DWAF 2004)⁸. Once again, the decision over how the new connection targets might be achieved – whether through private sector delivery or a large state-sponsored, public works programme – has been made by the state. Importantly for this thesis, the local administration in Durban (soon followed by the national state) has been responsible for the introduction of a free basic water policy. All this has been done in line with an impressive national constitution that claims a right to water for all. Everywhere one looks, political ecology would seem to interact with – and be shaped by – both the national and local states.

In this chapter, however, I want to question this assumption of the centrality of the state. I wish to show that it is not the privileged arena for political ecological change that

⁸ It is important to note that since receiving a connection many of these households, some claim the majority, have either been disconnected or their service has fallen into disrepair (Bond 2002, Hemson 2003b).

we often assume it to be: nor should it be the privileged unit of analysis within work in political ecology. Rather the social relations that give rise to the state form (be these relations between worker and capitalist or between consumer of water and shareholder) should be the focus of political ecological analysis. In making this case, I draw on two important theoretical bases. The first employs the ideas of state derivation theorists (Hirsch 1978, Holloway and Picciotto 1978, Clarke 1978). The second builds on ideas concerning the state as a structuration within political *practice* (Abrams 1988). The overall argument of the former is that the state can be ‘derived’ from key contradictions within the accumulation process, understood as an ongoing process of struggle. The state thereby becomes the fetishised form of social relations, obscuring more salient political economic relations of domination and resistance. The latter conception focuses less explicitly on political economy and more on ideology and practice, both understood through historical analysis. Drawing on Miliband’s (1969) distinction between the ‘state-system’ and the ‘state idea’, Abrams argues that “We are only making difficulties for ourselves in supposing that we have also to study the state – an entity, agent, function or relation over and above the state-system and the state-idea” (1987: 58). The point might seem to be merely a semantic one. However, when we turn our attention to the question of political praxis and where we might focus our struggles and resistances (as I do later in the chapter), it soon becomes clear that the debate is of crucial importance to the political ecology of Durban’s waterscape. Overall, my argument is not that the state is unimportant. Rather it is that the state should best be understood as the fetishised form of what are often more salient (albeit latent) struggles. It acquires power through political practice.

I begin the chapter by providing a broad overview of the political economy of the national state, before going on to look at the local state system in Durban. In providing these overviews, I try to focus particular attention on the broader power relations that have continually reshaped both the state system and the state idea. Such an overview is important less for its direct relevance to the thesis and more in providing the context in which political ecological struggles have unfolded. In the case of the national state, this requires particular attention to be paid to the development of what Fine and Rustomjee (1996) refer to as a Minerals Energy Complex (MEC). If one is to understand the state as the fetishised form of broader political economic struggles, the MEC must surely be seen to be at the heart of deep power struggles within South African society. In the contemporary era, it is a terrain over which key contradictions and crises have emerged.

In the case of the local state, my focus is more on struggles over collective consumption (Cockburn 1977), and struggles over the structured coherence of the urban region (Harvey 1989). Throughout its relatively short history, the local state system in Durban has been responsible for the distribution of potable water throughout the city. In doing this, it has built up a fixed infrastructure that would seem to invest it with a great power over the ability of residents to live a healthy and fulfilling life. During the apartheid years, some of this control was wrested away from Durban by the central administration as part of its ambition to redefine the KwaZulu Bantustan as a viable region in its own right (with its own puppet control over fixed infrastructure). At the same time, the local administration in Durban was becoming a major target of attack from anti-apartheid activists, as the local state began to represent the Achilles Heel of apartheid power structures (Hart 2002). In more recent times, the local state has, again

become a target of attack from community groups struggling for access to basic resources (Desai 2002). These struggles are crucial in the reification of the local state.

Later in the chapter, I turn from the concrete to the abstract and review some of the theoretical arguments employed by Holloway and Picciotto (1978), Hirsch (1978), and Abrams (1988), in order to see how such ideas might lead to a radical rethink of some of our basic assumptions concerning the state. In the final section of the chapter, I argue for a rethink of the role of the state within work on political ecology. Rather than reifying the state further through an agent-centred approach to political ecology, I argue for a more relational understanding of political ecology, arguing that the state frequently serves as a mask for hiding these relations from our analyses.

1. THE NATIONAL STATE SYSTEM

1.1. The State as the Embodiment of a *Minerals Energy Complex*

In their pathbreaking analysis of South African political economy, Ben Fine and Zav Rustomjee are for the centrality of what they term the Minerals Energy Complex. This, they argue, has had a profound influence on economists' misinterpretation of the South African economy. Thus, in reviewing debates around state or export-led development, Fine and Rustomjee (1996) argue that the state has been profoundly oversimplified. In the South African case, this leads to an assumption that the post-apartheid state should merely follow one or another of several development paths open to it. Instead, they argue, the state cannot be fully understood without first making sense of

the system of accumulation. This is not to imply that the state is a functional tool to the system of accumulation but rather that it embodies key relationships present in the system of accumulation.

This Minerals Energy Complex is argued to have developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century and to have achieved an absolutely central position within South African society. Fine and Rustomjee's (1996) argument is not that the MEC operates as some shadowy elite controlling the South African state behind the scenes but rather that we cannot grasp the limited political choices being made by the state unless we understand some of the broader class and power relations within South African society. Such an argument has particular resonance, and some important differences, with the thesis developed later in this chapter.

Whilst noting the political and economic disjunctures within South African society highlighted by the 'fractionalists' in the above account (see Davies et al 1976), Fine and Rustomjee note that the period subsequent to 1948 was in fact marked by the apparent erosion of such divisions. They then go on to cite three overlapping phases in what they refer to as a process of change within the capitalist class:

"The first phase in the 1950s witnessed the state's successful encouragement of the development of large scale Afrikaner finance capital. The second phase (the 1960s) witnessed the interpenetration of large-scale Afrikaner finance capital into mining, with the active collaboration of both the state and mining capital itself....the third phase, which emerged in the 1970s, consolidated the collaboration between MEC [Minerals Energy Complex] capital and the state with extensive, if not comprehensive co-ordinated policies for the economy emerging for the first time in South Africa's history" (Fine and Rustomjee 1996: 13)

The coordinated policies of this third phase were largely directed internally at the further development of the Minerals Energy Complex through the promotion of mineral, heavy chemical and energy production. Much of the reason for turning to the MEC at the time was because of the pressures resulting from a global economic downturn in the 1970s and the international rise in oil and gas prices. In the meantime, the apartheid regime was beginning to come under massive pressure both internally and externally from a large, increasingly united anti-apartheid movement. Locked in vicious and costly proxy wars in Angola and Mozambique and beginning to feel the effects of the post-1973 global economic depression, the apartheid regime began to crumble.

1.2. The Ending of Apartheid and the Contemporary South African State System

Much has been written on the remarkable unbanning of the ANC in 1990, the dismantling of apartheid and the democratic elections of 1994 (Murray 1994, Habib and Padayachee 2000, Marais 2001). Large questions remain as to whether these events were the result of a large movement of people's power (coming together in a domestic and a global movement), the result of the action of a few remarkable individuals, the expression of an economic crisis within South Africa that appeared only possible to resolve through radical action, or another sign of a changed post-Cold War geopolitics. None of these factors can be discounted and each had a synergising effect on the others. The pressure of decades of township revolt, in conjunction with mounting global pressure, had undoubtedly taken its toll on both the South African economy and the state administration. Although around the world television crews focussed on the remarkable

figure of Nelson Mandela, within numerous South African townships and informal settlements many quiet heroes were negotiating their own communities' transitions after a remarkable grassroots mobilisation of many millions of activists.

For some, the period after 1994, although far more peaceful than most would have envisaged, has been a profound disappointment. The radical changes expected from an ANC government are not easily squared with the results. By 1997, the Keynesian inflected and apparently progressive Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the ANC appeared to have been abandoned in favour of GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), a more fiscally conservative, monetarist inspired programme that many have seen as a home-grown Structural Adjustment Programme (Hart 2002, Bond 2000b, Marais 2001). The results have been profoundly mixed.

Water delivery is a good example of this “yes, but...” progressiveness. Whilst ten million residents have received connections to the water network in the post-apartheid years, many of these connections fell instantly into disrepair (often for such simple reasons as a water pump lacking any fuel (Hemson 2003b)) and people returned to their original water sources. Whilst the constitution has enshrined citizens' rights to water and this has been reinforced by the passing of a Water Services Act, many residents have found themselves in open clashes with bailiffs who have been disconnecting them for non-payment of water bills. Whilst a free basic water policy has been introduced, for many, the most obvious consequence of this has been a restriction of their supplies to a minimum amount. Interpreting these paradoxes and the stifling of many of the inspiring possibilities is crucially important. Again, if we are to develop an adequate understanding of this situation, we seem to be confronted with the question of the state.

For Habib and Padayachee (2000), the problem lies in the restricted possibilities available to a post-apartheid government because of international financial constraints. Essentially, the world economy has disciplined the South African state into following a broadly neo-liberal policy route. In Peet's (2002) more recent work, this should be understood more in terms of the academic-institutional-complexes through which South African policy emerges. Rather than disciplining the South African government through material economic constraints the transition was discursively disciplined through the policy prescriptions and scenario strategies of the various International Financial Institutions. For Bond, the transition was largely hijacked, resulting in a negotiated transition geared to:

“fulfilling the desire by white business to *escape* economic decline born of a classic overaccumulation crisis. The deal represented, simply, this: black nationalists got the state, and white people and corporations got their capital out of the country”
(Bond 2004: 9)

For Hart (2002), the post-1994 period might be understood through Gramsci's writings on the reversal of a revolutionary moment. Marais would appear to agree, arguing that a Gramscian understanding of the continued need for a war of position might help to refocus our attention on new areas of contestation, after the apparent failure of a war of manoeuvre to bring about the revolutionary change anticipated. What these last two analyses help to draw our attention to is the need to broaden our understanding of politics beyond the sometimes narrow confines of the state. In Gramsci's view, the state should be understood as political society + *civil society* or “*hegemony*, protected by the armour of coercion” (1971: 263). Capture of a state apparatus by no means would seem

to guarantee that radical change will follow. Instead, we should also look – in a Gramscian sense – at the cultural sphere and civil society as an arena in which struggles for hegemony are conducted. I turn to such an analysis in the penultimate chapter of this thesis.

1.3. Post-Apartheid Political Economy

Although developing a much more econocentric argument, the overall effect of Fine and Rustomjee's analysis of the political economy of South Africa is actually somewhat similar to that of Hart's work and Marais'. For, in shifting attention away from the state as an assumed *independent* agent of change, the analysis urges us to look elsewhere, at broader social relations. Whilst not arguing we should overlook the state, they argue we need to refocus attention on the relations which comprise it. This requires a much clearer understanding of the class, economic and social structures of contemporary South Africa. Much of the overestimation of the capability of an ANC government to effect change came from an underestimation of the centrality of the Minerals Energy Complex. This error, Fine and Rustomjee argue, stems from the lack of good economic understandings of South Africa⁹. Whilst the relative weight of policy prescriptions is not the prime focus of this thesis, the emerging crisis within the South African economy has, I argue, shaped (and fetishised) the state over the last two decades. The struggles resulting from the dominance of this MEC have profoundly shaped post-apartheid

⁹ In a review article, Fine (2002) argues this is a result of the development of sophisticated sociological analyses of South Africa at the expense of sound economic analyses. (In a somewhat different vein, see Natrass 1991)

society, and, once again, provide much of the context in which political ecological struggles have unfolded.

For Fine and Rustomjee, economic analyses of South Africa have consistently been driven down a blind alley by overestimating the size of the manufacturing sector: standard economic prescriptions have been based on an assumption that the South African economy is remarkably similar to any other around the world. By disaggregating the manufacturing sector, the authors show how dependent manufacturing actually remains on core MEC functions. As a result, they argue that the MEC has a determining role within the economy. Many of the scenario strategies upon which post-apartheid policy has been based overlook this and policy advice has subsequently deeply flawed.

Through such work, we seem to be moving somewhat closer to an analysis that radically decentres the state and situates political change as political *economic* change. For political ecology the consequences are large. An entity some assume to be largely responsible for shaping an emerging political ecological landscape might actually be seen to be little more than a surface form representing broader social struggles. This is the argument developed by Clarke (1978, 1990), Holloway and Picciotto (1978) and Holloway (2002b) (although it is also, in its purest form, one from which Fine and Rustomjee distance themselves). This need not lead to a rejection of the analysis presented above. Instead, I think it requires that we focus our attention on the forces that have invested this apparent entity with the power it seems to have. In the present era, political ecological struggles might be seen to be at the forefront of reifying the state. In order to continue with this analysis, a review of some of the contributions of these theories of the state is necessary.

First, however, I will present a brief review of some of the writings on the local state in Durban. This, after all, appears to be the state entity most directly responsible for what happens in Durban's waterscape. Here, rather than laying importance on the political economy of the Minerals Energy Complex, my focus is more on the development of the structured coherence of an urban region through the development of fixed infrastructure and how this has led to local-national tensions and also made the local state system the target of struggles over collective consumption.

2. THE LOCAL STATE SYSTEM

As several writers have noted, the task of studying the local state system in South Africa is made harder because of a historic paucity of research on such an entity within the country (Maharaj 1996, McCarthy 1991). Whereas heated debates occurred in the 1970s over the links between apartheid, capitalism and the central state, almost without exception these neglected the role of the local state. The reasons for this dearth of research, McCarthy argues, are the apparent high degree of centralisation of the apartheid state (leading to an assumption that all policy is driven from the centre) and the lack of empirical studies on the development of the local state and politics in South Africa. However, although it was clear that the centralisation of power in the apartheid era was profound, this did not entirely rule out a degree of autonomy for local elites. Indeed, as I discuss later, Maylam has noted in the case of Durban that the city administration was in fact a *pioneer* of some of the apartheid policies adopted centrally by the National Party through what became known as 'the Durban System' (see Swanson 1976). Maharaj

(1996) goes further in confirming this, whilst relating the local state to local social relations. He argues that under apartheid, Durban adopted an “interventionist position” in order: to boost accumulation; to provide greater labour control; and to forge alliances with the ‘white working class’ (1996).

Other writers have shown the role that local government structures played in the demise of apartheid – Gillian Hart going as far as describing how the “local state, in short, became the Achilles heel of apartheid in its reformist guise” (2002: 46). Thus, she cites the devolution of fiscal and administrative responsibility to newly created Black Local Authorities (BLAs) as a pivotal moment in fomenting dissent within townships. The structures for these local puppet administrations were drawn up under the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982. Later, the civic movement emerged largely in opposition to the imposition of the BLAs and helped to pave the way for a mass movement against apartheid through a strategy of “ungovernability”. After the democratic elections of 1994, the new government was faced with the task of how to establish *legitimate* tiers of government at the local level. In some ways, as I will argue in the penultimate chapter of this thesis, *grassroots* democracy was very much alive and well, but this acted as a source of possible dissent, posing a potential threat to some of the centralising tendencies of the ANC (see Marais 2001 for more on this). More formal, more easily governable structures were required.

Ostensibly, however, the greatest challenge for the post-apartheid government with regard to the local state system was to be able to create a tier of authority that might combine white, black, rich and poor areas. With the fragmentation of local government into city councils and adjacent Black Local Authorities under apartheid, revenue bases

were divided along the lines of race or class. Redistribution was essentially prevented by now defunct lines of demarcation. Cross-subsidisation within the water sector, for example, was prevented by the fact that the water system itself crossed the borders erected under apartheid.

In response to this, the Local Government Demarcation Act 27 of 1998 made way for the creation of wall-to-wall local government in South Africa. This meant the rationalisation of 843 municipalities into 284 (www.demarcation.org.za). The new municipalities now fall into three categories: Metropolitan municipal areas (Johannesburg, Pretoria (now called Tshwane), East Rand (now called Ekurhuleni), Durban (now called eThekweni), Port Elizabeth (now called Nelson Mandela), and Cape Town); District municipalities (10 of which were drawn up within the Province of KwaZulu Natal, for example); and local municipalities (50 of which exist within KwaZulu Natal). For the purpose of this thesis, my primary concern is with eThekweni metropolitan municipal area. When referring to the local state system, as a result, it tends to be the city level that I have in mind, although clearly the term also applies to other tiers within South Africa.

Debates over the function of this integrated municipal government system have since focussed on three dominant themes, initially raised in a 1998 White Paper on Local Government (DCD 1998): *participation*, *efficiency* and *partnerships* (Pieterse 2002). The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (DCD 2000) went on to provide a firmer legislative framework for integrated municipal government, although heated debates over the interpretation and understanding of the role of local government have continued. Pieterse

locates the participation strand of this policy in critical development perspectives and the efficiency strand in new public management perspectives (ibid: 6).

The maelstrom of competing interpretations of the role of local government, as well as the *apparently* vital position the local state retains in relation to the local processes of accumulation have generated deep paradoxes at the local level. Hart argues, that “the local state has become a key terrain on which the contradictory imperatives of the neoliberal post-apartheid order are being constituted and fought out in everyday practice within and across key institutional arenas” (2002: 45-6). These need to be considered within the context of the Durban itself.

2.1. The Local State in Durban

Durban developed as a city as part of the colony of Natal. Historically, its economic growth depended upon – and its middle class grew up around – mercantile interests (Freund 2002). Thus

“Durban's growth is entirely tied up to the emergence of gold mining and the rise of Johannesburg and the complex of surrounding towns on the Witwatersrand some six hundred kilometres deeper in the interior. Durban is the port for this inland urban complex with a partly artificially opened harbour and a road-rail-air network built up through the twentieth century efficiently and impressively”

(Freund 2004)

Early on, mercantile interests were almost synonymous with the local administration, with Moffett and Freund (2002) arguing that the political and the economic elite of the city have often been the same. Infrastructural developments – and here we might include

water services – were guided as much by the interests of this merchant elite as they were by the broader needs of the populace. Thus, Moffett and Freund cite Bjorvig's example of a Durban Mayor who ensured the sealing of the main road west from the city centre, thereby ensuring crucial transport improvements for the merchants of the city. At the time, the Mayor himself was an important local merchant. The James Commission of 1964 generated a major shake-up of the local power group – the intention being to investigate corruption in the local administration, but the resulting effect was a shift from a patronage to a bureaucratic style of local politics (Purcell quoted in Moffett and Freund 2002: 11).

According to Purcell, subsequent to this commission, in the late 1960s, a negative relationship between local economic elites and the local administration developed, with the local chamber of commerce seeking to restrict proposals it saw as harmful to its interests. Links between capital and the provincial administration were often stronger over this period than they were with the local (Moffett and Freund 2002: 11). In spite of this, the council continued to play an interventionist role in the local economy through the purchase, sale and leasing of land, seeing this as a key policy instrument in being able to attract employment to the area. Throughout much of the period from the 1960s to the present day, the city remained one of the most financially secure in the country, assisted by a highly professional team of urban managers. Again, this facilitated the city's interventionist role in encouraging inward investment. Thus, Freund goes on to cite low water rates as a further inducement for businesses to locate in Durban (2002: 4), a point that will be taken up later, as I analyse more recent conflicts over water tariffs. By the 1980s, a different relationship with business began to emerge, as public-private

partnerships became the norm and the local state began to actively invest money in schemes it saw as beneficial to the area, rather than merely providing a conducive environment for attracting industry. Moffett and Freund (2002) cite McCarthy who comments that Durban is remarkable in not having developed a distinct, locally-bound bourgeoisie (2002: 2), however this might be defined. As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of these public-private partnerships have been with large companies with a national base. The bulk water recycling plant at the Mondi¹⁰ paper mill in the South basin of the city is a prime example. Here, the city has entered into a partnership with a multinational water provider, partly in order to ensure that Mondi remains in the city with the inducement of cheap access to water. As Freund comments, there is a danger that “public-private partnerships can become a mask, if the state is weak, for simply subsidising the initiatives of powerful private interests”. He concludes by stating that

“The reproduction of existing patterns of accumulation – social and economic – and the fact that, so far it is big capital that is most able to take advantage of the limits globalisation is placing on the regulatory capacity of the state remain the dominant aspects of economic development in Durban.”

(Freund 2002: 35)

In many ways, the push for local economic development, so strongly developed in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, can be situated in the reproduction of these existing patterns of accumulation. Durban’s local administration has always intervened in the local economy to a greater or lesser extent, in order to try to ensure that industry locates and remains in the area. An infrastructure has thus developed to serve both

¹⁰ Mondi is an Anglo-American subsidiary.

industry and the containers of labour power that became known as townships. Thus, throughout its history, and with renewed importance in the contemporary era, a structured coherence (Harvey 1989) would seem to have developed around Durban, with it forming a distinct urban region. If McCarthy is correct in arguing that the city created its own distinct, locally-bounded bourgeoisie, this contributed to such overall coherence. On top of this, a water network has been built up from the Umgeni River, in order to serve almost three million people living within the newly demarcated metropolitan municipal area. As elsewhere in South Africa, the coherence of this urban region was both shaped by, and placed under stress by, the Group Areas Act. Thus, the local administration was primarily responsible for servicing its labour force (living predominantly in the surrounding townships) with collective commodities such as electricity and water. However, with the gradual movement of the national administration towards its paradoxical vision of separate states for Africans, the structured coherence appeared to come under real stress. Thus, a struggle for the coherence of the urban region ensued, being played out as a battle between local and national administrations. I cover this battle in more detail in the following chapter.

On the surface, this relationship between Durban and the national state has always been characterised by such tensions. Most noticeably, from 1978, the Progressive Federal Party, the liberal, parliamentary opponents of apartheid, constituted the dominant political voice in Durban. (In a strange twist however, the National Party gained power for the first time between 1989-94, a period in which, Freund argues, they were “as much or more committed to change and the establishment of a new order than the PFP, whatever the white voters might have imagined in bringing them to power” (2002: 25)).

The city was thereby able to gain a somewhat unjustified reputation of being a bastion of liberal opposition to apartheid. Countering this benign image, Maylam (1996) argues that throughout much of the century, the city had pioneered several of the cornerstones of apartheid. Privately, some of the public tensions with the national state were not as marked as they sometimes appeared. Interestingly, this becomes most clear once again in struggles over collective consumption.

In this regard, the most widely cited example of Durban's contribution to apartheid is 'the Durban system' (Swanson 1976, LaHausse 1996, Maylam 1996, Maharaj 1996). From 1908, the town council developed a system for regulating both independent production of beer and the African labour force in general. By ensuring that Africans were prevented from brewing their own beer and were only permitted to drink in municipal beerhalls, the fears of the white elite – that African drunkenness was a scourge on productivity and a destabilising influence on the divided social order – were partially assuaged. But what was so distinctive about municipal control of beer production was that it allowed for the creation of a fund covering the reproductive needs of a cheap labour force. Thus, revenue raised from beer sales could be channelled into hostels, barracks, the police, further beerhalls and breweries. By 1916, Durban had a self-supporting Native Revenue Account and this was almost entirely down to the development of the municipal beerhalls. In a self-righteous twist, the tight regulations on native beer consumption were able to appear altruistic on the surface. Cynically, the city had been able to manufacture a system that ensured the self-oppression of the black majority: the more people drank themselves into despair, the more they swelled the city's coffers for their continued oppression.

However, resistance, largely comprised of women, was soon to be focussed on collective consumption through targeting these municipal beerhalls. Thus, a 1929 uprising resulted in a mass boycott that helped to fracture this self-exploitation and put the municipal administration in the seemingly impossible position of having to condemn the local African population for *not* drinking alcohol. Certain echoes of the beerhall boycotts may be heard in the struggles over water currently being waged in Durban's townships and informal settlements. In particular, the local administration's interventionist role in collective consumption and in the reproduction of a labour force has become a target for the anger of residents. By looking at the local state system historically, we can see periodic resurgences of opposition to its role in collective consumption. In some ways, this is the point argued by Hart. Thus, if the local state became the Achilles Heel of the apartheid government, so it is becoming the key site of contradictions in the neo-liberal era. As responsibilities are devolved downwards for water provision and housing needs – without being accompanied by an increase in funding, so the anger of local residents finds a target in the local administration. As the local administration itself so frequently argues, this anger is perhaps not always justified. Whilst a national administration can boast of a free basic water policy across the country, it remains the responsibility of the local administration to ensure this is realised, whether it possesses funds to do this (or the ability to cross-subsidise) or not. This has given rise to the common expression that the local state has been given an 'unfunded mandate' by the national administration.

Through such struggles around collective consumption, the local state is increasingly seen to be the site from which political change might emanate. This

reputation is not always justified. As subsequent chapters will show, the political ecology of the waterscape is largely shaped by relations of domination and resistance that exist outside of the state. People's frustration at the intransigence of the local state, whilst sometimes justified, could also be seen to be related to the fact that power is actually being shaped elsewhere. Similarly, the frustration over the deferred revolution in South Africa might also result from the fact that the state is less an agent of change or a tool to be wielded, and more the reification or fetishisation of broader political ecological struggles. Such a possibility requires much deeper exploration. In the next section, I turn to some of the ideas developed around the state as the reification of political economic struggle.

3. REIFICATION AND THE STATE

3.1. State Derivation Debates

To reify means to “thingify”. In the context in which I intend it to be used in this chapter, it refers to the transformation of relations between people into a thing, and how this thing might then acquire a power over the lives of others. In the context of the political ecology of Durban's waterscape, as I argue in later chapters, the relationships between shareholders on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and consumers of water in Durban come to be embodied in both water and the infrastructure through which water is supplied. Both thereby come to acquire a power over the lives of the city's residents. By transforming the social relations that are expressed in these things, I argue that we begin to open up new possibilities for a more egalitarian distribution of water. In this chapter,

my argument is that relationships between people also come to be embodied in a thing that we understand as the state. Once again, the target of our political attacks should, perhaps, not be the state (nor, as I argue later should it be the water meters that distribute water). Instead, I argue, it should be the social relationships that produce this situation in which things acquire a life of their own

For some theorists, such an understanding offers important inroads into beginning to probe the underlying relations that comprise the fetishised form of the state (Holloway and Picciotto 1978, Hirsch 1978, Clarke 1978). One of the main targets, rightly or wrongly, in these discussions was the apparent “politicism” detected in previous state theories: Poulantzas’ understanding of the ‘relative separation’ of the political and the economic was thereby heavily criticised. Whereas Poulantzas was striving to bring nuance to mechanistic and deterministic understandings of the state, Holloway and Picciotto (1978) were to argue that instead of probing underlying social processes, such an analysis led to an overemphasis on the surface appearance of the state, thereby losing sight “of the nature of the surface as a mere form, the development of which can be understood only through an analysis of the class relations which it conceals” (Holloway and Picciotto 1978: 24). Poulantzas himself admits to a tendency to “bend the stick in the other direction” in order to bring a sense of the politics of the state back in (1978: 52) but then goes on to criticise the “economism” of work by the state derivationists. In the preceding outline of the South African state system, I hoped to balance an interest in the politics of the state with a greater concern for the broader balance of power. Overall, I hoped to begin to give some sense of the manner in which the South African state might become fetishised within struggles to alleviate a developing economic crisis within the

country. Through looking at the work of Hirsch (1978) and Holloway and Picciotto (1978), I would argue, this process can be better theorised.

Hirsch's work represents an attempt to "derive the way in which the state apparatus functions from the context of the reproduction and crisis of the capitalist system" (1978: 76). Towards the end of this chapter, I show how this is the case in the political ecology of water. The functions of the state can be derived from the reproduction of a *produced waterscape* – one in which the majority of the people are divorced from direct access to the means of their existence. As Hirsch's argument progresses, he argues that the state plays a crucial role in the process of primitive accumulation, before being 'pushed back' in the liberal phase of bourgeois society. More recently, as contradictions have begun to sharpen, largely through the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in developed economies, the state has resumed a central role and "ever more determining significance" (*ibid*: 82). The bourgeois state must, therefore "be understood in the determination of its concrete functions as a reaction to the fundamentally crisis-ridden course of the economic and social process of reproduction" (*ibid*: 97)¹¹.

Holloway and Picciotto, whilst agreeing in the main with Hirsch's summary of the fetishisation of the state form, add certain correctives. They argue that there is a tendency in Hirsch's piece to move from an analysis of the class struggle as being shaped by and focussed on the struggle to accumulate, to an analysis that *separates* the accumulation process and the state, seeing them as being mediated through class struggle. This, they argue, falls back into fetishising the political: the quotes from Hirsch should

¹¹ The dense wording is partly to do with the fact the piece has been published in translation.

give a sense of this. Instead, for them, the accumulation process should be seen as an ongoing process of struggle. Whilst under a capitalist system of production and exchange, there is a tendency to be distracted by the 'formal' politics of the state, it is vital that we retain a sense of the centrality of the struggle that is the accumulation process in the reproduction of everyday life. It is a key claim of this thesis that the struggle to ensure one's family has sufficient water is part of this accumulation process, for example.

In building upon Hirsch's earlier work, Holloway and Picciotto also place the potential fragility of capitalism at the heart of their analysis. Thus, as individual capitalists and specific fractions of capital lurch from one crisis to the next, they mobilise to force the fetishised state to intervene in order to overcome barriers to their own profitability (Clarke 1978). The crisis-prone tendencies of the accumulation process might be temporarily assuaged but a long-term fix has in no way been found. In fact, the fetishistic illusion that the state system is 'neutral' in such crises comes to be gradually undermined (Jessop 1982: 97).

3.2. Reification and Contemporary Political Economy

Here, once more, we are drawn to the manner in which the South African Minerals Energy Complex might be viewed as a process of unfolding struggle. A current battle ground has been the attempt within the Minerals Energy Complex to internationalise. This is reflected in the high net capital outflow from South Africa and the intense pressure for the removal of exchange controls in order to facilitate capital flight. Fine and Rustonjee show how this drive is largely at the expense of new

investment in domestic industries. The stalling of the RDP and the shift to an export-oriented GEAR might be understood as a battle on the part of key players within the MEC to circumvent the barriers to renewed capital accumulation. In the following chapter, I show how this has driven parastatals such as Umgeni Water to seek new areas for profitable investment overseas. Localised political ecological struggles thus take on an international dimension, as Umgeni Water's failed investments have pushed up water tariffs within Durban. The drive to meter and regulate domestic water supplies more closely is thereby shown to be largely dependent on a broader attempt for the core functions of the MEC to internationalise.

For Bond (2001), this strategy should be seen as related to Harvey's understanding of the spatial fix (Harvey 1982). The stagnant growth and falling profit rates of the 1980s are all a sign of a classic overaccumulation crisis. Further evidence he musters for this lies in the financial explosion of the late 1980s in which share values soared. Just as Harvey points to the efflorescence of fictitious capital in other areas as part of a response to the post-1973 global recession, Bond finds the same to have occurred in South Africa at a slightly later time. Fine and Rustomjee would seem to support such a proposition. Thus, the crisis of the 1980s, whilst situated within a context of increasing sanctions, disinvestment, and labour and social unrest (each one of which could have provided an adequate explanation for the crisis) was actually

“reinforced by the mode of operation of the economy, particularly of its previously developed financial system, this being geared more to speculation than to long-term provision of investment finance to industry”

(Fine and Rustomjee 1996: 13)

The reasons for this skewed economic trajectory, lie, they argue, with the “*shifting balance of economic and political interests that have acted upon and through the state*” (1996: 11 emphasis added).

This would seem to represent an understanding of the South African state that builds on slightly different principles from those assuming the state to be an autonomous entity. Thus, a crisis-prone system of accumulation (the MEC)¹² lies at the heart of the analysis, whilst the various economic and political forces of which this is composed are reified within the state. From time-to-time crises threaten the overall stability of the system, and at such moments, new struggles break out in which individual capitals, specific fractions of capital and capitalist interest groups mobilise to force the reified state to overcome or circumvent various barriers to their own profitability or that of capital in general (see Clarke 1978). South Africa would seem to be experiencing such a period of grumbling (if not cataclysmic) economic crisis. Evidence of capital trying to circumvent barriers to profitability is found in the sale of state-owned assets, the loosening of exchange controls, the facilitation of capital flight and the vigorous promotion of both ‘the African Renaissance’ and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). As will be seen in the next chapter, all these have a profound effect on the political ecology of water struggles in Durban.

The local state might also be understood to be reified through similar processes. Thus, struggles within the city over the local system of accumulation might have been seen to have shaped the state. In more recent years, the struggle by local industrialists to force water tariffs down – threatening to relocate elsewhere if the city did not respond has

¹² Crisis prone for the reasons outlined previously: the stunting effect it has on diversification into manufacturing, its tendency to invest in capital intensive branches of industry at the expense of employing workers and its tendency to engage in speculative financial transactions (and now capital flight).

helped to reify the local state still further. In the 1980s, the state form might be seen to be partially derived from the struggle between local and national elites over the structured coherence of the urban region and the ability of the local state system to distribute water to its local labour force.

3.3. The Local State: Structuration within Political Practice

However, in the case of the local state, I think it becomes equally clear how important political *practice* is in reifying the state. For Abrams' (1988) it is largely this political practice that reifies the state. Thus, he argues:

“The state comes into being as a structuration within political practice; it starts its life as an implicit construct; it is then reified as the *res publica*, the public reification, no less – and acquires an overt symbolic identity progressively divorced from practice as an illusory account of practice. The ideological function is extended to a point where conservatives and radicals alike believe that their practice is not directed at each other but at the state; the world of illusion prevails”
(Abrams 1988: 58)

Abrams does not deny the very real function the state system performs in legislating or in implementing specific policies. However, he questions the autonomous power we often see within ‘the state’, stressing its social production rather than assuming its presence. The political implications of this are profound.

For obvious reasons, over most of the previous century, the apartheid state and its racist predecessor have been the target of attack for progressive movements. With tanks rolling into townships, peaceful crowds being tear-gassed by armed police working for the state system, and a vast security apparatus growing up around state institutions, the

state would clearly seem to be the dominant force to be reckoned with. However, with the apparent disappointments of the post-apartheid years, it would also seem to become clear that certain key relations of domination remain unchanged in spite of an ostensibly popular party being in power. What we really need to discuss, debate and transform is the very real relations of power that lie within the state system and not the fetishistic illusion that the state itself is this agent of change. Abrams touches on this apparent power and its illusory form as he comments against the idea that,

“if we think away the state we think away domination...But it does begin to seem possible that the real relations of domination within the state system and between it and other interests and institutions and groups might be seen more clearly were it not for the apparent problem of the state”

(Abrams 1988: 88)

Corrigan also notes this in a footnoted comment to Abrams in which he writes that the state is both “illusory” and “not illusory”. It is illusory in the sense that its claim to be what it appears is invalid, and yet it is not illusory in that we experience very real relations of power. As with the phenomenon of fetishism, the inverted world in which we live, in which ‘things’ seem to control people rather than vice-versa, is both real and yet a perverted reality. The problem is to isolate where power really lies and how this is established, without falling prey to the illusion that it emanates from some autonomous state. In a similar vein, Corrigan has written elsewhere that the key question for theorists interested in state formation “is not *who* rules but *how* rule is accomplished” (quoted in Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2004). For marxist theory, as Abrams shows, the problem for state theorists lies in a *theoretical* understanding that the state is not the agent of change it sometimes seems, allied with the *practical* need for a target for our political actions. Here

he pinpoints two of the questions for this thesis surrounding who controls the distribution of water in Durban (the state?) and how might this be transformed (through lobbying the state or not?).

In decentring the state, then, do we begin to undermine one of the most fruitful strategies for effecting political change? I think not. In fact, I would argue, by recognising that political economy is rooted in social relationships that exist in many places apart from the state, I think we open up more genuine possibilities. In Holloway's more recent writings, this takes him into a discussion of everyday resistances (2002b) and the connections we might be able to make with others outside of the high politics of the state. Thus: "The theoretical challenge is to be able to look at the person walking next to us in the street or sitting next to us in a bus and see the stifled volcano in them" (2002b: 157). The state, as so many of those interviewed in the course of this research will testify, cannot however be ignored. The challenge remains to find ways of confronting this power, whilst recognising that in part it is illusory. Thus, in a sensitive response to the criticism that he "wishes" away this form of power, Holloway returns to an earlier theme – the struggle within-and-against the state (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1980):

"The state (or any fetishised form) involves a particular way of organising social relations, of subordinating relations between people to relations between things – a way that impedes the recognition and assumption of social human subjectivity. It would be lovely to turn our backs completely on the state and money, but generally we cannot do that...Most of us have to engage with the state and other capitalist forms in some way; but the question is, how we do it? We recognise their specifically capitalist character; we criticise their form. We struggle in-and-against-and-beyond those forms; we try to see our own struggle as asymmetrical to the forms of capitalism; we try to establish other forms of organisation, forms that subordinate relations between things to relations between people"

(Holloway 2005: 40)

Here we see the reification of the state to be an open-ended process, a struggle without closure, but one that produces a powerful and destructive mystical entity through the subordination of relations between people.

From the renewed focus on everyday struggles to the struggle in-and-against-and-beyond the state – all these themes have enormous relevance to a radicalised political ecology. However, it is insufficient to simply take such ideas on board without questioning how political ecology can also transform this framework, as well as being transformed as a field of study itself. In the last section of the chapter, I suggest possible ways in which a retheorisation of the role of the state in political ecology could lead to a revivifying of work on the reification of the state.

4. THE STATE OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY

As noted earlier, several political ecological analyses have focussed attention on the state as an agent in the politicised environment (see Bryant and Bailey 1997 for a summary). This is not the approach I adopt here. Instead, I try to consider the ways in which the insights developed throughout the chapter might be transformed within political ecology. First, I consider the argument that the state is the reification of broader struggles. Secondly, I focus on how political practice deepens the mystification of social relations. Finally, I argue that political ecological struggles might also have the effect of disrobing the reified state.

Hirsch's (1978) work provides a useful starting point for rethinking 'the state of political ecology'. In adopting an explicitly historical materialist position, he looks at historical shifts in the processes comprising the changing state form. In a similar way, I would argue, that this form can also be derived from the manner in which *nature* is produced within such a system, and from how this has changed historically. An understanding of the production of nature (Smith 1984) is absolutely fundamental to the ideas advanced within this thesis. Thus, as the thesis develops, I argue that in the contemporary era Durban's waterscape is produced through both concrete human labour and more importantly through (and by) capitalist social relations. Such produced nature requires the separation of the majority of people from direct access to the means of their existence. In the case of water, this requires a vast infrastructure designed to ensure that people's access to potable water is restricted. Water meters, flow restrictors, flow limiters and pressure control devices have all been developed to ensure that destitute families do not access more water than they are able to pay for. In a crude but nonetheless genuine contrast, at the other end of the water supply chain, investors are able to make profits through investing their capital in bonds floated by Umgeni Water, Durban's bulk-supplier. It is clearly not too much of a stretch of the imagination to see the ability of speculators to profit from investments in water to be linked to the necessity of ensuring that most families in Durban are unable to access water through any means apart from through monetary exchange.

Such a system requires several guarantees. First, it requires the separation of the mass of the population from their means of existence. Later, I argue this might be understood to be part of a process of ongoing primitive accumulation. In Hirsch's

framework, the state's role in primitive accumulation was restricted to a historical phase; it was not seen as ongoing. Recent debates within political ecology (Harvey 2003) and elsewhere would suggest that this is not the case. Instead, states and sub-state organisations have legitimated the commodification of water, body-parts, seeds and vast areas of land in order to sustain levels of profitability. Thus, the form of the state might be seen to be related to the ongoing struggle over accumulation by dispossession.

Secondly, the system outlined requires monetary transactions to be guaranteed.

Pashukanis (1978[1923]) was one of the first to argue that the state form could be derived from its function as a legal-political entity necessary to provide the juridical rules binding together commodity exchange (see Pashukanis (1978) and for critical comments see Poulantzas 1978: 50, Jessop 1982: 85). Thus, whilst neither an agent, nor a specific locus of power, the contemporary state form might be seen to be the condensation of specific socio-natural relations under capitalism.

In the post-apartheid years, this role has changed somewhat. The state form can still be derived from this legal-political function. However, the ANC regime has introduced a free basic water policy. Through this, local and national state institutions have become key sites through which the contradiction between use value and exchange value has come to the fore. Rather than dissolving tensions, the free basic water policy has exacerbated tensions. Deeper cracks have begun to appear in the idea of the state, as state institutions have implemented policies that side with elite interests within the waterscape. The "triumph of concealment" that Abrams' detected in the state is being dragged into public through political ecological struggle around the use-value/exchange-value contradiction.

Thus if the contemporary state embodies key social relations associated with the production of nature in capitalist society, in recent times the state form has become shot through with deeper contradictions. As a rural water services market has opened up, and as entities such as Durban's bulk-water supplier, Umgeni Water, has sought to internationalise, so the fetishisation of broader political ecological struggles in the form of the state has become greater. This has profound effects at several levels. At an international level, the ANC regime has sought to dismantle barriers to financial flows across the continent through the NEPAD agreement. Potentially, for organisations like Umgeni Water, this could open up the possibility for it to play a fundamental role in shaping political ecological relations on a continent-wide basis. At the local level, it has opened local access to water to still more profound contradictions. These have manifested themselves in sporadic uprisings over access to water, housing and electricity. Here, we return to the important ways in which the state is reified through political *practice*.

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to argue that such political ecological struggles are the key founts of radical discontent in post-apartheid South Africa. As labour movements appear to have entered a period of relative quiescence, new radical social movements have emerged around questions of land redistribution and access to key municipal services such as water. When Hart (2002) argues that the local state is a key site of contradictions in the post-apartheid, neo-liberal order, it is largely because it has become a target of attack over political ecological issues. In the foremost account of community struggles in post-apartheid South Africa, Desai (2002) cites access to housing and water as being central to the sporadic uprisings within the country's townships and informal communities. Bond (2002), Ruiters (2001), McDonald and Pape (2002) have all

shown how crucial this battleground is for the welfare of the majority. As such struggles become focussed on the local state, they have paradoxical effects. On the one hand, they reify the state further. Abrams' comment that radicals and conservatives alike see the state as the target of their attack, rather than one another, is telling in this regard. On the other hand, such struggles may also begin to have the converse effect as they emasculate the local state through showing its inability to resolve the contradictions being experienced in people's daily lives. I explore this in more depth through a discussion of a specific struggle in Amaoti in Chapter 6. Here, the state is disrobed as it becomes increasingly clear that it cannot effect the change expected of it.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I hope to have confronted one of the first obstacles to an understanding of the political ecology of water struggles in Durban – the role of the state. Although we might assume that the state is a fundamental agent in shaping Durban's waterscape, I hope to have begun to show that it is not what it seems on the surface. Rather like Dorothy's surprise at finding the Wizard of Oz to be little more than a human operating a vast machine (and her disappointment to find that only she has the power to return herself to Kansas), we begin to uncover the humans that lie behind the mask. In the case of South Africa, I suggested ways in which the state might be understood to be the fetishised form of broader political economic struggles. This required a review of some of the powerful forces in the shaping of the South African state system and how that state system then acquires the appearance of being autonomous. Following Fine and

Rustomjee (1996), I sought to show the specificities of the South African system of accumulation and the important political economic contradictions that have emerged in the late-apartheid and post-apartheid years. In particular, I suggested that what might be understood as a crisis of overaccumulation has exerted considerable pressure on the reified state to open up new territorial strategies for the productive investment of capital across the continent, and the concomitant prising open of new areas for profitable investment within South Africa. These processes are explored in much more depth in the following chapter. Here, I situate such political economic contradictions in the investment decisions of Umgeni Water and look at how various policies such as the commercialisation of water boards and the New Partnership for African Development might be understood to be the fetishisation of deeper struggles.

In looking at the local state, I sought to explore the way in which our political practice helps to invest the state with a greater power than before, whilst also serving to further obscure the true operation of power. Because we perceive the state to be an agent of change, we focus our political practice on it as an agent. Thus, I sought to show how the struggles over housing and water in South Africa might have the effect of making the local state appear both a more powerful entity and more autonomous than if our struggles were instead directed at the relations which shape the social totality.

Bringing these ideas together, in the final section of the chapter, I suggested ways in which political ecological contradictions and struggles have reified the state. The main body of this thesis is now directed at a much more thorough exploration of the social relations and struggles that I suggest to be more salient. Thus, in the next chapter, I seek to show in more detail the economic conditions leading to Umgeni Water's investment

decisions and the strategies through which this entity has struggled to ensure profitable returns, often at the expense of a local population in Durban. Here power relations and the waterscape itself are seen to be constituted and reproduced through the processes of capital accumulation within Durban's waterscape. Later, I show how this also implies the production of an alienated waterscape, before going on to look at more fruitful vantage points from which we might struggle to grasp the relationships generating such an inversion of reality. I return to the political struggles for basic needs in the penultimate chapter. Here, I develop a Gramscian reading of civil society, showing how our understanding of political struggle might be broadened to a cultural terrain in which hegemony is both consolidated and contested. If the state is indeed a mask, we must seek to discover where else in the waterscape power lies and how best to contest this power.

Chapter 3

CAPITAL ACCUMULATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF DURBAN'S WATERSCAPE

“People, Planet, Profit”

- Umgeni Water's “Triple Bottom Line”
(Umgeni Water 2002)

If, in the previous chapter, I attempted to show that the South African state is not always the omnipotent agent it is assumed to be in shaping the waterscape, my aim was to begin to shift the analysis to the social forces that do play a role in producing Durban's waterscape. Durban's waterscape is not created and controlled by a simple set of tiers of state as we might at first have assumed. Instead it is increasingly produced by and interwoven with contemporary South African capitalism. Thus, in this chapter, I argue that the flow of potable water in Durban embodies many of the tensions and contradictions typical of a crisis-prone accumulation process. Developing Swyngedouw's (2004) claim that we are currently witnessing a process of the transformation of local waters into global money, I show the muddled fashion in which this is currently taking place in Durban. My primary focus is on Umgeni Water, the bulk-supplier of water to the city.

As a state-owned entity with an aggressive commercial subsidiary, Umgeni Water has found it difficult to survive in the competitive world of water provision. Because of this, it has sought to prise open new markets within South Africa and further North in the

African continent. The entity's most secure revenues, however, are to be found in Durban. Here, it has imposed large increases (frequently well above the rate of inflation) upon the bulk-water tariffs charged to the city. In response, as was shown in the introduction, the city has clamped down on the non-payment of bills by local residents through imposing a policy of disconnecting or restricting residents' supplies. I frame these symptoms within David Harvey's writings on the spatio-temporal dynamics of capital accumulation (1982), work on the production of nature (Smith 1984), and more recent writings on urban political ecology (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). More specifically, in this chapter, I focus on spatial and temporal fixes to Umgeni Water's financial woes and its apparent turn to the colonisation of new resources formerly assumed to lie within a (highly racially-inscribed) communal sphere. This latter transformation may be understood as a process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003). All these strategies have been turned to in an increasingly hasty fashion, as the bulk-water supplier seems to lurch from one problem to the next. Locally, they have been met by resistance within the municipal administration and at the community level. This resistance will be explored in more depth in later chapters.

1. DURBAN'S BULK-WATER ARRANGEMENTS

As shown in the introductory chapter, Durban's water supply infrastructure was originally developed through large municipal projects in the early to mid-twentieth century. From 1984, however, as I will show in this chapter, under pressure from the central government, the city was required to sell its bulk-water infrastructure to a water

board. Originally termed the Umgeni Water Board, this is now frequently abridged to Umgeni Water. Later in the chapter, I will go into some of the early debates around the establishment of this entity. It is important to note that, from the start, the relationship between municipality and bulk-supplier has been tense. Durban makes up approximately 85% of the entity's bulk-water custom. The municipality, in short, has provided its reason for existence. Partly because of the monopolistic privileges this relationship allows for, the bulk-water tariff to the city has increased steadily since 1984, with several large increases between the late 1990s and 2002.

Full of ambiguities, Umgeni Water is now a state-owned entity with an aggressive commercial subsidiary. It is a curious, part-privatised, public service provider and (perhaps more bizarrely) a not-for-profit entity whose "bottom line" in 2001 was "People, Planet, Profit". Perhaps because of this confused identity, the organisation has been quite successful at raising finance on private markets, whilst being singularly unsuccessful at finding profitable outlets for investing this capital. Capital was raised through the floating of bonds on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange with the expectation of a rise in the demand for bulk-water supplies to Durban. Such a rise in demand would have required large capital outlays on fixed infrastructure. In the mid-1990s, as it became increasingly urgent for Umgeni Water to find investments for the capital it had been able to raise, it sought to exploit new opportunities within the water sector. One such opportunity lay in expanding commercial operations into other parts of the African continent. Another potential outlet for investment lay in what it hoped would be a lucrative, emerging market in the South African rural water sector. Finally, as these new investments failed to secure the profits hoped for, Umgeni Water turned, in the late 1990s, to the service from which

it was best able to guarantee returns: it imposed massive tariff increases on the two municipalities it serves with bulk-water – Umsunduzi (formerly Pietermaritzburg) and eThekweni. Paradoxically, as Umgeni Water became awash with surplus capital, it was forced to impose large scale tariff increases in order to ensure this capital fulfilled a profitable function.

To begin to understand Umgeni Water’s actions requires an understanding of the entity’s role in relation to the accumulation process in South Africa. This forms the historical geographical materialist framework to my understanding of the processes of capital accumulation in Durban’s waterscape. In the following section, therefore, I attempt to clarify some of the key theoretical foundations for this chapter.

2. THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

One of the many original conceptual moves within *Capital* - and one central to making sense of Umgeni Water’s panic-stricken actions in the early 1990s - lies in Marx’s understanding of capital as value *in motion*. There appears to be no underlying motivation behind the accumulation process, except the need to keep capital circulating and profits amassing through constant reinvestment. Emphasising this ceaseless augmentation of capital, Marx contrasts the miser with “the more acute capitalist” who constantly throws money back into circulation (1976: 254-5). This need to keep capital in circulation is helpful in beginning to interpret some of the restless dynamism in capitalist society – and the contradictions encountered as fixed capital infrastructure is required to facilitate such a free flow. In several rich theoretical studies, David Harvey has

emphasised the important implications this has for the space economy of capitalism (1982, 2003). Thus, the regular bouts of creative destruction so typical of the cityscape in advanced capitalism (see Merrifield 2002), and the ceaseless restructuring of scale economies (Smith 1984, Swyngedouw 1997) are both consequences of this need for capital to be in continual motion and the contradictory requirement that buildings and infrastructure remain rooted in space. Through his integration of financial considerations and an analysis of 'fictitious capital' formation, Harvey is thereby able to show the manner in which the physically-rooted city is able to become an 'active moment' in the process of capital accumulation.

Developing this historical geographical materialism Neil Smith shows in his pioneering work on the production of nature (1984) how the dynamics of the accumulation process are also embodied within (and productive of) our socio-natural environment (see also Harvey 1996). By going back to historical materialist basics, Smith relates the labour process to a metabolic fusion of the socio-natural. He is thereby able to theorise the production of scale and uneven development from this socio-natural base. As Swyngedouw (forthcoming) has gone on to show, it becomes useful to conceptualise urban political ecology in terms of such metabolic processes or circulatory mechanisms. In Chapter 4, I go on to show how the production of nature in capitalist society (and the production of Durban's waterscape in contemporary capitalist society) entails the production of an alienated nature.

In this chapter, however, I restrict my analysis to the financial fortunes of Durban's bulk-water supplier showing how these are inextricably interwoven with the shape and form of the city's waterscape. Just as the city, for Harvey, becomes more

active in a capitalist system of accumulation than Castells' passive containers for the reproduction of labour power (Merrifield 2002), so I wish to emphasise water's more recent emergence as an 'active moment' in the accumulation of capital. Here, my argument follows that of Swyngedouw (1999, 2004) in several important ways.

Thus, through a focus on Umgeni Water, I argue that we begin to see the crystallisation of moments in the accumulation process. As noted earlier, the bulk-supplier has been seeking several routes out of its recent economic difficulties. Eager to find new investments for money borrowed in the early 1990s, Umgeni Water has expanded into new territories and channelled funds into new infrastructural projects. These strategies, I shall argue, should be situated within a broader understanding of the spatio-temporal dynamics of capital accumulation. Following Harvey (1982), such strategies might be understood as spatio-temporal fixes.

In developing his argument, Harvey traces Marx's understanding of what he terms the 'first-cut' theory of crisis. He defines this as 'first-cut' because of Marx's failure to integrate all the insights developed over the first two volumes of *Capital*. It is the task of integrating these insights that Harvey sets himself. Thus, he extends *Capital* in new and fruitful directions by arguing that overaccumulated capital can be switched to a secondary circuit and crises thereby temporarily alleviated (but not resolved). Thus, new profitable investments can be sought over a longer time period (a temporal fix) or by exporting overaccumulated capital to new investments in a different region (a spatial fix) or through a combination of the two (a spatio-temporal fix). If situated within a broader understanding of a crisis of overaccumulation within South Africa (or globally), Umgeni Water's actions may be seen as typical spatio-temporal fixes to this crisis.

Alongside such spatio-temporal fixes, Umgeni Water has embarked upon an expansion into rural water markets and struggled to raise bulk-water tariffs to the two main municipalities it serves. These latter two strategies, whilst being viewed as simultaneous with the spatio-temporal ‘fixes’, might also be seen as part of a process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003). Accumulation by dispossession is understood as a broadening of Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation. Whereas this is classically understood as involving the enclosure of common lands and the transformation of such land into profitable investments by an emerging bourgeoisie, recent theorists have argued that such an understanding should not be isolated to an historical past (De Angelis 2002, Perelman 2000, Bonefeld 2002). Instead, enclosures – and the struggles against them – should be seen as continuous, encompassing the privatisation of resources formerly considered under common ownership, such as water.

Some subtle differences emerge within these recent writings around ongoing primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession. Whereas for Harvey (2003) such dispossession should be seen as intimately linked to the need for capital to seek out new areas for profitable investment, as part of a response to continuing problems of overaccumulation (here we see a form of ‘internalised’ spatio-temporal fix), others have emphasised the importance of the reproduction of social relations in such a process (De Angelis 2002). This builds on Marx’s understanding of capital as a social relation; the lifeblood of capitalism depending upon the reproduction of such social relations. Marx recognises this in Wakefield’s modern theory of colonisation and in the unfortunate tale of unhappy Mr. Peel:

“A Mr. Peel he complains, took with him from England to the Swan River of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. This Mr. Peel even had the foresight to bring besides, 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women and children. Once he arrived at his destination, ‘Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.’ Unhappy Mr Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English *relations of production*”

(Marx 1976: 932)

In this chapter, I wish to keep both understandings of accumulation by dispossession in view. On the one hand, the commercialisation of Durban’s bulk-water supplier has opened up new potentials for seeking profitable investments in the socio-natural environment. On the other hand, for many consuming beyond the city’s free water allowance or finding their supply more tightly regulated by meters and flow restrictors, this has involved a reinforcing of the existing relations of production. For De Angelis (2002), the importance of this lies in an understanding of the fact that the possibility for liberation is embodied within the dialectical negation of such a situation – a point that is fundamentally important for making sense of some of the immanent potentials that lie within Durban’s troubled waterscape.

3. CAPITAL ACCUMULATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF DURBAN’S WATERSCAPE

3.1. The Unique Positioning of Durban’s Bulk-water Supplier

“His voice had taken on a kind of religious awe; it was as if he had spoken of some untouchable tabernacle which concealed the crouching greedy god to whom they all offered up their flesh, but whom they had never seen.”

(Emile Zola- *Germinal*)

“Umgeni Water's operations are financed mainly through the sale of potable water and to a far lesser extent, tariffs charged for the treatment of wastewater. In addition, capital is raised through the issue of stock on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). These stocks are consolidated into two highly successful gilt megabonds trading as UG50 and UG55 on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.”

(Umgeni Water 2004)

Umgeni Water clearly occupies a vital and unique position in the supply-chain of water to Durban. Just as Swyngedouw (2004) makes reference to a process of local waters being transformed into global money, through processes of privatisation around the world, this is occurring in Durban as Umgeni Water (ostensibly a parastatal entity) strives to ensure returns for bondholders on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Through peering into the dealings of Umgeni Water, we are able to chart something of a journey from the trickling taps of township residents to untouchable tabernacles hiding the crouching, greedy gods of which Zola writes. Through trying to excavate some of the underlying processes comprising the waterscape, we are taken on a journey linking township and stock-exchange; a journey that re-emphasises the interweaving of socio-natures.

Umgeni Water has occupied this lynchpin position since January 1st 1984. From this time on, the city has been required to purchase its bulk-water supplies from a third party. Originally termed the Umgeni Water Board, this third party was superficially created to act as a mediator between different users of the water abstracted from the Umgeni River. With Durban using 85% of this water, the municipality built up an extensive supply infrastructure along the river. Before the water board could take control of bulk-water provision, the vast majority of this infrastructure needed to be purchased from the City Council (Lynski 1982). For decades, the municipality had been opposed to

the creation of a water board, arguing that it would give a third party unnecessary influence over the cost of water in Durban (Kinmont 1959, Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). A mixture of pride and pragmatics seemed to drive much of this opposition, although frequently it was couched in strict financial terms. Thus, early on, the City Engineer recognised that

“The present standing value of the assets of the Durban Water Undertaking on conservation and purification works must approximate £7,000,000; and it is difficult to visualise any Water Board which can be set up being able to purchase outright these assets. Further unless it does so, any new Board would be unable – for many years – to supply water to its consumers at a rate comparable with that which water is being retailed to the city today”

(Kinmont 1959: 15)

Only two years later, the City was increasingly concerned that it should be granted permission to construct *its own* “urgent” augmentation of the city’s bulk supplies. Thus, the same City Engineer was becoming far more strident in his criticism of the direction in which national government policy on water was moving:

“It has been apparent for some time that the government has no intention of allowing Durban to proceed with its own Water Scheme, and that it intends to implement its own proposals, whereby Durban will be supplied with water from the Umgeni River at the entire discretion of the Department of Water Affairs, and at prices which will be decided unilaterally by the responsible Minister”

(Kinmont 1961: 5)

Amidst the rising anger within the municipality, one of the recommendations of Kinmont’s report was therefore to “protest to the highest level”. However, in spite of the City’s protests, the Umgeni Water Board was formed on 14th June 1974. Originally only

serving the Pietermaritzburg and Midland areas, by 1984 it was supplying water to Durban City Council.

In retrospect, it seems quite clear that the reasons behind the creation of the water board went some way deeper than either the national government's insistence on a third party to mediate over river basin use or the municipality's pride. Since its formation Umgeni Water has served to exacerbate serious tensions in the provision of water throughout Durban, as well as ensuring that tariffs are up to 30% higher than they might be without it (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003)¹³. The underlying motive behind its formation is somewhat bizarre but worth relating. The story must be charted back to the national government's policy of creating separate Bantustans for Africans. These 'homelands' were intended by the apartheid government to serve as the logical fulfilment of its policy of "separate development" for those of different 'races'. Providing water posed its own problem in the assertion of the legitimacy of the Bantustans. In the case of Durban, it seemed that if KwaZulu was to acquire the status of an 'independent state' (which it never did) this would have have been undermined if it was to be supplied with water from what was only a municipality – even though the fixed infrastructure had neatly woven the Bantustan and the municipality together for much of the last century. Instead, a third party, with the authority to sell water to separate 'states', would need to be created (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). As Kinmont had recognised 25 years prior to the handover of Durban's bulk-water supply operations, the creation of the water board really *did* have little, if anything, to do with the efficient management of water supply in the region. The current head of eThekweni Water Services, Neil Macleod argues that the lack of control exercised by the National Party in Durban exacerbated

¹³ The figure comes from an oft-cited Halcrow report on bulk water provision to Durban

many of the tensions between the national and the local government. Although civic pride is often mixed with family pride in Macleod's case (it was his father who finally had to cede control of bulk supply operations), he argues that a secondary motive for the creation of the water board was a "way of stabbing the municipality in the back because it wasn't National Party controlled" (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003).

In the midst of these tensions and struggles for control over bulk supplies – and having a sense of the political importance of the decision to the national government – Durban fought hard for the highest price to be paid for the infrastructure it would eventually be forced to hand over. Thus, after having paid considerable amounts for the purchase of Pietermaritzburg's infrastructure, the water board reached an agreement in 1982 with Durban City Council, regarding the acquisition of the Nagle and Shongweni dams¹⁴. The amount paid was initially set at R203 million, later rising to R274 million (Umgeni Water Annual Report 1982). As a parastatal, much of this was financed through government debt. However, water boards were also granted greater flexibility than the government in raising capital from the private markets. This situation has been accentuated in the last decade as Umgeni Water has been able to raise money through the floating of its own bonds.

Whilst it is difficult to assess what a "market" price for these dams might have been, with their respective ages being 32 years and 55 years (the Shongweni dam became redundant soon after it was purchased), it can be assumed that the amount paid was absurdly high and well above what the infrastructure would have been worth. Macleod now states (with a wry chuckle) that the national government's original valuation – which

¹⁴ These two dams – constructed by the city in the 1920s and 1950s – comprised the main bulkwater infrastructure for the municipality until they were superseded by the Midmar dam (constructed by the central government's Department for Water Affairs in the 1960s).

although clearly not independent might be seen to partially reflect the value of the holdings – had been put at R14 million for the two dams (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). Durban, it seemed, had been able to salvage a little pride, even if, as Macleod notes in retrospect, “This drove an even greater wedge between the municipality and the central state” (*ibid.*).

Very rapidly, as Kinmont had predicted, the water board descended into serious debt. As had also been predicted, Umgeni Water was best able to recover this debt through the sale of water to the municipalities. Inevitably, Durban and Pietermaritzburg’s tariffs rose rapidly. Thus, the cost of bulk supplies rose from 8.9 cents/ kl at the time of the handover in 1982 to the historic levels shown in the table below:

Financial Year	R/kl	% Increase
96/97	1.178	
97/98	1.291	9.59%
98/99	1.418	9.84%
99/00	1.581	11.50%
00/01	1.787	13.03%
01/02	2.136	19.53%
02/03	2.286	7.02%
03/04	2.469	8.00%
04/05	2.607	5.60%

(Source: Umgeni Water 2005)

Although some of this increase can be accounted for by the increase in demand within Durban – necessitating investments in new infrastructure – and by inflation, much cannot, it seems, be adequately accounted for. As Macleod states:

“At Durban Heights and Wiggins [purification works owned and managed by Umgeni Water], 75% of water is purified in these two works, the cost of the purification comes to about 78c/kl. The extra 25% of Umgeni’s work pushes the cost of water up to R2.29 [the tariff in 2003 at the time of research] meaning that 25% of their business triples the costs of the operation. Something is going terribly wrong.”

(Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003)

Moreover, things had gone wrong from the moment Umgeni Water was formed. From the start, without large amounts of government funding, the entity would have to fight hard for survival. Within the last decade, this situation has worsened. In part, this is due to the fact that, post-apartheid, new freedoms have been granted to water boards in order to allow them to compete more freely (DWAF 1997: Chapter VI) in an increasingly crowded water services market within South Africa. The public service role has been downplayed as water boards are now increasingly expected to bid competitively for contracts and raise more money from private finance markets. In short, the water boards have been encouraged to commercialise. Thus, Umgeni has sought to respond in a far more entrepreneurial fashion to opportunities within the water sector. In its own (somewhat muddled) corporate jargon:

“More recently Umgeni Water has restructured itself to better position it to meet the challenges of becoming a globally-competitive business-based organisation that is responsible and adaptive to the requirements of a globalised economy and intense developmental need. Notable achievements have been the appointment of a new and dynamic executive management team, and the development of a strategic plan that charts the course for the company to achieve its vision of being the number one water utility in the developing world.”

(Umgeni Water 2004)

It is worth charting some of these new opportunities being sought by the “globally-competitive business-based organisation”.

3.2. Umgeni Water's Early Ventures into the Rural Water Services Market

“[The 1997 Water Services Act] has created new opportunities for water boards. Water boards can become more commercially focused with a view to increasing income whilst at the same time creating increased employment opportunities. The Government welcomes water boards taking up secondary activities on a commercial basis. Umgeni Water is clearly a leader in this.”

(Kasrils 2000)

Post-apartheid, the new South African government was faced with the enormous challenge of providing potable water to all of its citizens. Preoccupied with haste – and to some extent dominant global ideology (see Peet 2002) – it chose to subcontract much of the construction of new rural water projects. Under the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, private companies have been able to submit proposals for rural schemes and tender competitively for the construction of these (see Bakker and Hemson 2000, Hemson 2003b). The successful bidder then goes on to construct the scheme, before taking over its running for a set period. At the end of this, the water supply scheme is then handed back to the local Water Services Authority. In most cases, this authority is either the local or the district municipality. Somewhat depressingly, many of the projects have proven unsustainable and many communities have been left with defunct water infrastructure and an enforced return to alternative (and often dangerously polluted) water sources (Hemson 2003b). In other cases, charges to rural residents have been set at an incomprehensibly high level. With prepayment systems being favoured on many projects, large numbers of households have found themselves simply unable to afford to pay for the new water supplies (Hemson 2003b, Bond 2002, Thompson 2003). In the meantime,

the national government was able to boast the ten millionth new consumer to be receiving clean water (DWAF 2004). For much of the 1990s, the rural water sector became a sphere in which many new companies cut their teeth in trying to make money out of the rural poor (Bakker and Hemson 2000).

Umgeni Water, though not a private company, was one of those able to cash in on the small boom in government funds, which, at the time, was being soaked up by new entrepreneurs. Between 1996 and 2002, the organisation was able to claim R104 million from the government in order to implement rural projects in five district municipalities in KwaZulu Natal (Umgeni Water 2002: 15). By June 2002, it was supplying water to over 27,000 metered households in the province. This was after the “hand over” of a further 15,000 rural customers back to eThekweni municipality (*ibid.*).¹⁵

In 1997, Umgeni Water Services, a commercial subsidiary was established under the new freedoms opened up in the 1997 Water Services Act. Interestingly, the rural projects were *not* included under this subsidiary. Instead, these were considered to be part of Umgeni Water’s primary (and therefore non-commercial) activities. Thus, on the surface, any commercial activities undertaken by the organisation are supposed to be “ring-fenced” within this subsidiary. If the rural water projects had been considered commercial ventures, Durban’s bulk-water tariffs should not have financed them in any way. Because they were not considered commercial ventures, however, the debts amassed by Umgeni’s rural ventures could be balanced by an increase in tariffs to Durban. Had the projects produced a surplus, presumably this would have been absorbed,

¹⁵ Such a handover – to one single Water Services Authority – has been taking place nationally. Generally, the Water Services Authority will be a District or Metropolitan Municipality. In the case of Durban, eThekweni Municipality will now be the sole Water Services Provider operating at the municipal level, although it is still supplied with *bulk*-water by Umgeni Water.

not by a reduction in bulk-water tariffs to Durban, but by satisfying long-term debt repayments and returns to investors. It thereby becomes possible to shift risk to the public sector and ensure returns go to the private sector. This is largely because of the practical difficulties in dividing Umgeni Water into a for-profit subsidiary and its not-for-profit core.

This point is important, because, from the start, Umgeni Water's rural projects ran seriously over budget and were often deeply inefficient. Several of their projects were also criticised for being over-engineered with little chance of ever being able to recover the costs laid out in them. The enormously costly Vulindlela water project located outside Pietermaritzburg is a case in point (David Hemson: Personal Communication). For some in Umgeni Water, this project is a sign of the organisation's engineering prowess (Interview Lusignea: 11th December 2002); for others, it is a costly white elephant. In some ways, such criticism might be considered unfair – surely rural residents are entitled to the same level of service as urban dwellers? However, when one considers that an individual network connection can cost as much as R80,000 under Umgeni Water and as little as R5,000 under the highly praised eThekweni Water Services' rural water system (Interview Bailey: 5th September 2002), the apparent inefficiencies in such projects become all the more stark. As I discuss later in this chapter, the handover of these costly and inefficient projects to the local municipalities has generated yet another set of tensions.

Whilst responsibility for such rural schemes remained Umgeni Water's, further debts began to mount. Desperate to see such projects running more efficiently, the entity became eager to ensure that residents were billed for the true running costs of individual

schemes. Again, to a limited extent there was not necessarily anything particularly new in this. From the mid-1980s, as a water services provider in parts of KwaZulu, Umgeni Water had made steps to ensure that water would be provided for residents of informal settlements through a “kiosk system”¹⁶. Some have noted how this represented an early form of the privatisation of water resources for rural residents (Hill 1991). Later, however, in 2002, such attempts to ensure full cost-recovery began to reach new, far crueller heights. Thus, when Umgeni Water learnt of the vandalism of water meters in Ntembeni, a settlement in Inadi (on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg), managers within the organisation presumed certain households were trying to subvert the payment system. Whether anyone in the community was responsible for the destruction or not, the entire settlement had its water supply disconnected. With the community lacking a clean water supply for a month, the South African Human Rights Commission initiated court proceedings against Umgeni Water (Mkhulise 2002).

Such aggressive measures to ensure full cost-recovery are often seen as a clear manifestation of a strategy of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003, for other examples, see McDonald and Ruiters 2004). In the case of Ntembeni, it becomes clear that this has developed in a profoundly uneven way. Accumulation by dispossession seems less a clear strategy being pursued by capital and much more a survival strategy being turned to in haphazard ways. A simple functionalist explanation of this is clearly inadequate. Instead, with the state opening up new opportunities for water boards to be able to bid for rural water contracts, Umgeni Water was able to provide water services to rural communities previously lacking any clean drinking water. This is a clear step

¹⁶ Through such a system one householder was placed in charge of a locked standpipe. This “bailiff” would then unlock the tap for the sale of water to residents.

forward for such communities and it would seem to matter little if this water is provided by a local municipality, a private company or a commercialised water board as long as people do retain access. In failing to make a return on its investments, however, Umgeni Water then embarked on a more overt strategy of dispossession. More like a starving despot, we see the fragility in Umgeni Water's control over the accumulation process.

Thus, rather than a dramatic transfer of the means of existence in the manner in which The Highland Clearances of the 19th Century took place (Marx 1976: Chapter 27), instead we see an encroaching process, driven less by aggressive state-backed appropriation and more by the gradual integration of water into capitalist relations of production. Similarly, accumulation by dispossession can be contrasted with The Clearances in that people still depend on some form of access to water. However, the relationship has been transformed from one in which some form of community access was virtually guaranteed to one in which access is only possible through monetary exchange. Clearly, full cost recovery (and therefore accumulation) would not be possible if people had *no* access to water – there would be no buyers of water and therefore profits could not be realised through exchange. Instead, access to water becomes increasingly dependent on capitalist social relations. Thus, dispossession in this instance should be understood to be dependent on transforming a social relationship. In the example of The Highland Clearances, a transformation of both a physical and a social relationship to the land occurred. Similarly, in the case of Ntembeni, it becomes clear how a physical separation becomes one way of ensuring the transformation of social relations – although the economic sustainability, let alone political sustainability of such a strategy is very short term indeed. I develop this point in more detail in the following chapter.

As in the previous chapter, the state system would seem to play a paradoxical or ambiguous role in this process¹⁷, helping to prise open the rural water sector to capital (and thereby driving through the divorce of the majority from their means of existence), whilst also seeking to ensure that more and more citizens are connected to the water network. Likewise, the ANC has actively publicised its free basic water policy, and yet has refused to intervene through state institutions when organisations such as Umgeni Water disconnect residents for non-payment (see Kasrils in Bond 2002: 264). Ultimately, this shows a process of struggle involved in the accumulation process with temporary victories for both capital and the majority. Accumulation by dispossession should thereby be understood not in terms of well-worked out, smooth running laws, but rather as a process to be struggled over and contested – often through such everyday acts as the vandalising of a water meter.

In spite of Umgeni Water's haphazard turn to a strategy of dispossession in rural areas (or perhaps partly because of it), it soon began to look increasingly unlikely that the organisation would ever break even with its rural water projects. Accumulation was clearly failing, even if (or perhaps because) dispossession appeared to be alarmingly successful. The bulk-water side of operations was already heavily subsidising the losses being made over the rural projects. Summarising this cross-subsidisation, the 2002 annual report notes that:

“It is the costs relating to these rural water schemes that have resulted in the 19.5% tariff (reduced from 22.3% due to Umgeni Water cost-cutting and efficiency savings achievements) increase for the 2001/2002 year. Without the cost burden of these schemes, Umgeni Water would have been able to pass an increase of 8%”
(Umgeni Water 2002: 29)

¹⁷ To some extent, again, this might be contrasted with Marx's detailing of the various laws passed by the Crown against vagabondage (1976: Chapter 28).

Thus, it became increasingly urgent for Umgeni Water to offload these inefficient projects along with their debts. This generated a new round of tensions with eThekweni Municipality (*News 24* 11 June 2001). In a curious reversal of the position 20 years earlier, the municipality thus found itself fighting hard to ensure it did not have costly infrastructure (and its associated debts) foisted upon it (Interview Bailey: 14th February 2003). Much of this battle was reflected in future debates over what constituted a permissible tariff increase

3.3. The Outlines of a Problem

Perhaps the core problem in all this lies in Umgeni Water's skill at raising finance but its inability to find good profitable outlets in which to invest the money it is able to borrow. This, I would argue, is related to a broader (and paradoxical) problem of overaccumulation within the South African economy (Bond 2001) and more broadly within the global economy (Harvey 1982). Thus, in the early 1990s, Umgeni Water had raised about R2.5 billion in the bond market (the UG50 and UG 55 gilt megabonds referred to previously). Some of this could be justified for investment in bulk-water infrastructural improvements; however, with demand levelling out in Durban, it became increasingly urgent for Umgeni Water to find profitable outlets for the money borrowed. At first, the rural projects seemed to provide just such fertile terrain. With the board of Umgeni Water increasingly comprised of staunch ANC loyalists¹⁸, it was possible that there was an assumption amongst the board that the national government would be quite

¹⁸ To take one well known example, the chair of the board, Omar Latiff, is the former ANC mayor of Pietermaritzburg.

supportive in providing subsidies to such new projects. Certainly, in this period of the 1990s, the relationship between the board of Umgeni Water and the national government was a highly cooperative one. Rumours abound that the award of the Vulindlela water supply contract – a Presidential Lead Project¹⁹ – was aided by such close links. When the rural projects started to falter, however, and when it looked more like they would be loss-making, rather than profit-making ventures, Umgeni Water “had R1-billion in surplus cash, which it needed to invest profitably in order to make its long-term debt repayments and mitigate its losses” (Mail and Guardian 16th August 2002).

Capital, after all, as I discussed in the first section of this chapter, is value in motion. A danger arises if profitable outlets cannot be found and a glut builds up in what should be an ever-augmenting circuit of capital. All too often, it seems that Umgeni Water had simply run out of useful outlets in which to sink such capital. Above all, they required new areas to be opened up for profitable investment. Whilst prising open new rural water services markets had proven deeply problematic, managers within the organisation began to feel that, in future, its survival would be better guaranteed in competing for management service contracts for district municipalities. As one commented:

“Through assisting municipalities [Umgeni Water] can partner with similar organisations and offer management contracts to municipalities. District Municipalities could then hire an Umgeni Company....The only way Umgeni will survive is if it takes on public service provision in a commercial way.”
(Interview Cummings: 11th December 2002)

¹⁹ Such projects, involving the targeting of funds to specific disadvantaged communities for long-term developments were originally referred to in the 1994 RDP White Paper.

Whilst it seems this might be Umgeni Water's best means of survival, the market for such services is by no means guaranteed within the borders of South Africa. Another possible outlet for capital is some kind of a spatial fix to local crises (Harvey 1982: 417). Thus, the possibility remained that Umgeni Water could extend its frontiers into other regions of the world.

3.4. Local Waters, Hemispheric Ambitions

“...Africa is a strategic market in which significant inroads are being made...In support of the African Renaissance and specifically the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)...The organisation now has sufficient expertise under its belt to increase its business in the area”
(Umgeni Water 2002: 4, 12)

By 2002, Umgeni Water had signed a three-year management contract with the city of Port Harcourt in Nigeria. Although originally only establishing operations in this state capital, Umgeni was quite clear about its ambition to bid for the even larger Lagos contract (see Ikeh 2002). On top of this, it was “engaged in projects and/or responding to opportunities in Algeria, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi and Rwanda” (Umgeni Water 2002: 12). It is in this regard that a proud South African Water Minister praised the organisation for working “with other African countries in bringing sustainable water services to the continent, and in some way making the African Renaissance vision of President Thabo Mbeki a reality” (Kasrils 2000).

Bond (2004), amongst others, has situated both NEPAD and the African Renaissance vision of Mbeki within what he sees as a sub-imperial strategy on the part of the South African government. Certainly, in the case of Umgeni Water, its ventures

northwards must be seen as part of a search for profitability, through the expansion of its operations territorially. For many within the company, the sense of providing services to less advantaged regions will also be a factor, but at the current juncture, profitability is more urgent. It is quite simply, as one interviewee noted, a question of the organisation's survival (Interview Cummings: 11th December 2002).

The relations between Umgeni Water's northward expansion and South African support for the continent-wide agreement embodied in NEPAD should not be seen in unidirectional terms. The South African government did not lobby so vociferously for NEPAD merely to ensure domestic capital be given the opportunity to expand northwards. Nor did Umgeni Water simply respond to the new incentives opened up by the continent-wide agreement. Instead, I would argue, NEPAD and Umgeni's search for profitability overseas are mutually constitutive. Harvey's work on the spatio-temporal dynamics of capital accumulation is, again, helpful, in this regard. In expanding upon the ideas already discussed, Harvey argues that we can distinguish between what he terms the capitalist logic of imperialism and a territorial logic. Thus, "[t]he capitalistic (as opposed to territorial) logic of imperialism has, I argue, to be understood against this background of seeking out 'spatio-temporal fixes' to the capital surplus problem" (Harvey 2003: 89). He then continues by stating how he will "try to keep the dialectical relationship between the politics of state and empire on the one hand and the molecular movements of capital accumulation in space and time on the other, firmly at the centre of the argument" (*ibid.*). Thus, the barriers Umgeni Water comes up against in the accumulation process are shaped, to some extent by the system of African states and the historically determined *territorial* logic. In seeking to overcome these barriers, individual capitals such as

Umgeni Water can seek to challenge that territorial system. Whether South African capital opts to pursue an undermining of the present territorial system through a neoliberal inspired imperialism or through pursuing an overt territorial strategy in concert with the national state depends on domestic and international conditions. NEPAD would appear to be firmly rooted in the neoliberal model.

3.5. Hemispheric Ambitions, Local Crises

Once again, however, the perceived potential in Umgeni Water's Nigerian investment failed to materialise. The overcoming of what had been thought to be a barrier to profitability, failed to produce the results hoped for. As Port Harcourt municipality failed to make quarterly payments (Mail and Guardian 23rd August 2002), Umgeni Water pulled out. This generated a further loss for the organisation of R14 million (Parliamentary Monitoring Group July 2003). Prior to this, corporate scandals had engulfed the utility as it was accused of illegally subcontracting its debt management to a company set up by a former senior manager. Then, in 2001, the Chief Executive Officer was forced to resign amidst accusations that he had bugged the offices of board members (Zondi 2002). As Harvey (2003) notes, corporate scandals, such as the Enron debacle in the United States, can often be seen as a symptom of deeper structural crises. This, I would argue, is clearly the case with Umgeni Water. Thus, in the midst of serious negative publicity, the entity still had to find somewhere to be able to invest its excess capital and, above all, some way of being able to garner the necessary profits to keep up debt repayments.

The most reliable source of income, indeed “the core of Umgeni’s business operations” had, of course, always been from bulk-water sales to Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that it was to this branch of the business that Umgeni was to turn. First, it sank some of the mounting “glut” of capital into expanding bulk supplies. Such longer-term investments allow what might be considered to be a temporal displacement of some of Umgeni’s problems (see Harvey 1982). Indeed dam projects (profitable investments lasting for several decades) are one of the most frequently cited examples of such a temporal fix. A problem, however, remained: with levelling demand from its main customer²⁰ (eThekweni Municipality) there was little reason to invest in such infrastructure. In spite of this, a large inter-basin transfer scheme is in the process of construction from the Mooi to the Umgeni River in order to ensure that the two municipalities’ supplies can be guaranteed over a longer period than ever before. Interestingly, the Department for Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) is the body responsible for financing this expansion. However, with the new freedoms afforded to water boards, Umgeni Water was in a far better position to raise finance quickly through being able to float bonds on the JSE (to a large extent it has become awash with such finance). Thus, the DWAF was able to secure a loan from Umgeni Water (Interview Lusignea: 11th December 2002). Indirectly, Umgeni Water bondholders were lending money to the government for the construction of a project from which Umgeni was set to benefit. State institutions were thereby able to provide something of an outlet for overaccumulated capital, whilst also ensuring that private

²⁰ In several instances in the thesis, I refer to the fact that this levelling (and now falling demand) results from: the imposition of restrictions on individual households – associated with the development of the free basic water policy and the restructuring of the block-tariff system; a reduction in leakage through the upgrading of the network; and a partial stabilisation of population growth because of the devastating toll of HIV/AIDS.

bondholders would remain beneficiaries. Here, once again, a symbiotic or mutually constitutive relationship between state institutions and capital can be seen to have been reinforced through each one's response to a broader crisis.

Such an expansion was authorised after Umgeni Water's 1997 projections had indicated a steady *increase* in Durban's demand for water. At the same time, Durban Metro Water Services had produced a separate forecast, suggesting that demand would remain *constant* for the next five years. Durban's estimate was far closer to the actual fall in demand that resulted, but the plans for infrastructure development went ahead according to Umgeni's forecast (Interview Gilham: 11th December 2002). The most recent estimates are for ten years of flat demand in Durban, suggesting that the new infrastructure will remain unnecessary for at least the near future. In spite of this, and in spite of the acknowledged difficulties in forecasting demand, the DWAF concurred with Umgeni Water's estimates of rising demand, before borrowing money from them and beginning construction of a vast augmentation scheme. On top of this, a vast R200 million project known as the Western Bypass Aqueduct has been mooted which would carry water directly from the Midmar to the Inanda dam. For the moment, however, such an ambitious scheme will remain a distant possibility, pending an increase in demand for water in Durban (Interview Bailey: 29th November 2002; Interview Gilham: 11th December 2002). As I show in the following chapter, such an increase in demand is unlikely given the current structure of the block tariff and, above all, because of the municipal water provider's eagerness to restrict domestic supplies. The cost of constructing such an expensive scheme as the Western Bypass Aqueduct would fall largely on Umgeni Water. Once again, however, it is the kind of long term investment

that, if allied with an increase in either water sales or (much more likely) the water tariff to Durban, would help to pull the bulk supplier out of its current difficulties. As with Marx's contrast between the miser and "the more acute capitalist" it does Umgeni Water little good to try and store its borrowed money away. Desperately, it needs to seek new investments and new ways of increasing revenues from Durban.

Recently, the question of increasing the tariff has been one of the most contentious issues over which the bulk supplier and the municipality have confronted one another. Bulk-water charges to Umsunduzi and eThekweni municipalities have been through several large increases in the past few years (see Table 1). Thus, in 2000, as financial difficulties worsened, Umgeni Water announced a bulk-water tariff increase to Durban and Pietermaritzburg of 13%. Then, in 2001, its increase was originally set at an even larger 22.3% (inflation over the period averaged between 7 and 8%). When passed on to consumers in Durban, the average tariff increase would have amounted to 28.3% (Mhlanga 2001, Bisetty 2001). Perhaps unsurprisingly, both Durban and Pietermaritzburg municipalities finally reached the end of their patience with the crisis-prone bulk-supplier. Arguing that such rises were both unfair and too high for them to cope with, they refused to accept them and court proceedings began to follow. Tensions were clearly not assuaged by the fact that, over the same period that Umgeni Water was requesting higher charges, it had made significant profits from bulk-water supplies. Its problems lay not in the primary activity of supplying water to municipalities but in the debt it had acquired and the losses it was making in its secondary activities. For Durban, the problem lies in the fact that the fabric of its socio-natural environment (indeed the survival of its entire population) is bound up in the recklessness of this borrowing.

In this instance, the pressure from the municipalities succeeded in forcing Umgeni Water to limit its tariff increase to 19.5% and then to keep future increases fixed to the rate of inflation. Umgeni Water's wings appear to have been clipped as it is limited to much smaller tariff increases in future. However, the long-term effect of Umgeni's actions is a transformation of the terrain on which the municipal water provider in Durban is acting. For the moment, the municipality sees no way of retreating from the integration of its waterscape into a crisis-prone system of accumulation. The result for many local residents, as will be seen in subsequent chapters has been a far more severe separation from their means of existence through eThekweni Municipality's disconnection programme.

4. CONCLUSION

I began this chapter by arguing that Durban's waterscape had been opened up to the crisis-prone tendencies of a capitalist system of accumulation. In fact, as this and the next chapter show, it is no longer separable from this system of accumulation. Durban's waterscape is best understood as a specific socio-natural environment produced as an accumulation strategy. I showed the workings of this process through highlighting how inextricably interwoven are the financial (mis)fortunes of Umgeni Water, Durban's bulk-water supplier. Although Umgeni Water operates, ostensibly, as a not-for-profit entity, its ability to raise capital through private markets has increased the importance of it guaranteeing returns to investors. The importance of this is now captured in the paradoxical corporate statements of the entity and its motto for 2003: "People, Planet,

Profit’. Always something of an odd entity, the water board was originally created by the South African state in order to give added legitimacy to its creation of separate Bantustans. As a democratic government replaced its racist predecessor in 1994, the water board had to find a place for itself in a radically changed world. Competitive pressures would mean that it had to drastically restructure and find new outlets in which to make profitable investments.

Looking into the financial health of Umgeni Water, it becomes clear that one of the recurring problems is the entity’s proficiency at raising capital through the bond-market and its inability to find profitable outlets for this investment. Whilst some of this can be understood to be bad corporate decision-making, I argued in this chapter that it should also be seen as related to a broader problem of capital overaccumulation both within South Africa and globally. Harvey (1982) suggests that individual capitalists seek ways of displacing the effects of such a crisis through finding longer term investments and through prising open both new resources (see also Harvey 2003) and new geographical areas in which to invest. In this chapter, I suggested that Umgeni Water has sought to pursue all of these strategies.

First, the bulk-water supplier sought to enter into a market for rural water service provision. Here, it sank large amounts of capital into rural water supply infrastructure but was unable to recover its investments because of the inability of poor, rural consumers to pay for their new services. Attempts to force residents into paying, through disconnecting an entire community backfired when human rights groups intervened. Secondly, Umgeni Water attempted to expand its operations elsewhere in the African continent, aiming to become the leading water services provider in the global South. Here, it might be seen to

be engaging in the production of new socio-natural environments elsewhere and, consequently, it might be seen to be expanding its crisis tendencies to other areas. In the process of colonising new areas and new services, Umgeni Water has consistently failed to ensure the returns it needs to guarantee to investors. Thus, when these strategies failed, it turned to its most secure asset, its bulk-water infrastructure and sales of bulk-water to Durban. Whilst investing some capital in new infrastructure that might provide longer-term possibilities for profitable investments, the organisation was also able to raise tariffs to the two municipalities it serves. The result, in Durban, was much greater emphasis on recovering the full costs of supplying water to residents and an aggressive policy of disconnecting those who are unable or unwilling to pay these escalating tariffs. Finally, as tariffs reached unmanageable levels, eThekweni Municipality refused to accept further increases. This brought to the fore Umgeni Water's ambiguous status and, as discussion began to circulate within the municipality and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry about the possible rationalisation of bulk-water provision into a single entity under eThekweni Municipality's control, Umgeni Water was forced into retreat. In spite of this, the process of transforming Durban's waterscape into a crisis-prone accumulation strategy has not been reversed.

The opening up of our socio-natural environment to such processes clearly has quite devastating consequences. As previous moments in history such as the Great Depression of the 1930s quite clearly showed, it begins to put the survival of a population at the whims of the stock exchange. Fluctuations in profit rates begin to be the deciding factor in whether a family will be able to afford its water bill or perhaps be disconnected. On the other hand, through analysing the crisis-prone path to which the accumulation

process tends, we have seen the actions of capital to be a sign of weakness and not strength. The fractious relationships between capitals (in this case between textile manufacturers in Durban and the bulk-water supplier to the city) and the sometimes-fraught relationships within tiers of the state show further signs of weakness. Rich potentials therefore lie in exploring an immanent (and materialist) critique of the metabolic processes that shape this waterscape. In later chapters some of the possibilities that might emerge will become clearer. First, however, in the next chapter, I will show some of the more direct consequences for local residents of the production of Durban's waterscape as an accumulation strategy.

Chapter 4

THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE WATER METER

“The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers”

(Marx 1976: 165)

“It is not only for the physical misery that it brings, but above all for the inversion of things and people that Marx condemns capitalism: for the fetishisation of social relations in other words”

(Holloway 2002b: 52)

For local residents the most overt manifestation of the processes outlined in the previous chapter is to be found in the array of technologies regulating and limiting the flow of water. In recent years, these technologies appear to have become powerful actors in their own right – deciding who does and who does not have access to water. In many ways, the water meter appears to have assumed a dictatorial reign over the lives of many of the city’s poorest residents. Some of the struggles for free water discussed in this chapter would seem to have elevated this role still further. Partly because of this, water meters have themselves become a target of political attack: “Destroy the meters: Reclaim the water” is becoming a political slogan in several townships throughout South Africa. My focus in this chapter, therefore, is on such technologies as they have been implemented in Durban. In analysing this, I focus on the power these technologies seem to have acquired and the manner in which people and ‘things’ come to be inverted in

what might be understood as a reified drama. As a result, the argument bears similarities to that made in Chapter 2 in which it was argued that the power acquired by the state emerges from the reification of what are actually social relations.

I begin by presenting the situation in Durban, one that I characterise as a creeping dictatorship of the water meter. Here, through interviews with residents throughout the city, I present the drama in which ‘things’ – such as water meters – seem to have acquired power over the people they are meant to serve. Then I seek to explain this through different theoretical interpretations. First I turn to the work of Lukács on reification. Then I turn to the work of theorists in the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. However, unsatisfied with such explanations, I go back to some of the historical materialist roots to such an interpretation. Here, I seek to understand how the *production of a reified waterscape* leads to the imbuing of the mystical powers then serving to dominate the waterscape. Understanding the social production of this reified waterscape leads, I argue, to a more radically political reading of recent transformations.

1. THE CREEPING DICTATORSHIP OF THE WATER METER

If any object plays an overarching role in deciding Durban’s residents’ access to water, it is the water meter. Debates around the introduction of universal water metering in Durban occurred at several key moments throughout the city’s early history, in 1919, 1934 and 1947 (Kinmont 1959). The drive behind these debates was the rapid rise in household consumption, the growth in urban population and the apparent inability of the

city to meet growing demand. This is described in the words of the City Engineer in 1964:

“The extraordinary development which Durban experienced over the two decades following the conclusion of World War II, led inevitably to the position where the essential services of the City were unable to cope with the rapid increase in demand and it became a severe struggle to expand these services at a pace sufficient to meet the remarkable progress of the City” (City Engineer’s Report 1964)

Whilst the city’s growth placed pressure on the city’s resources, in an earlier report Kinmont is quite explicit about how intertwined this “remarkable progress” has been with the ability of the City Engineers to augment water supplies. Thus “Durban itself would not have achieved its amazing progress of the last decade had it not the potential water resources that exist” (Kinmont 1959: 11)

As far back as the 1950s, in order to gauge just how high the demand for water across the city was, “check meters” had been placed on certain properties throughout the municipality. The meters had revealed consumption levels of 80-90 gallons/person/day. These, Kinmont notes, are “extraordinarily high figures when it is pointed out that a fair average consumption per person in the City of Durban – taking into consideration climate and conditions – is 30 gallons/day” (1959: 17). His report had noted that the current, unmetered consumption within the “White, Asiatic and Coloured and Bantu groups” was 70, 52 and 34 gallons per day respectively. However, when households were metered, this consumption had fallen to 40, 10 and 6 gallons per day respectively. The implication in Kinmont’s report is that this fall in demand is somehow linked to the needs (whether socially constituted or somehow “biologically” ascribed) of different groups – a White resident is assumed to require more than an African. The effect of the check meters,

however, would seem to make it clear that this reduction is more clearly related to how much a household considers itself able to pay for: there would seem to be little other reason for a person to reduce their consumption from 34 gallons to 6 gallons per day when a check meter is introduced to their supply. Metering, it was clear could become a way of using price as a way of disciplining households into economically (and thereby also racially) defined consumption norms. The norms that Kinmont thought reasonable were 50 gallons, 35 gallons and 20 gallons for the three “racial” groups. By 2000, a reasonable amount of water for a member of the Bantu population might, Kinmont felt, have increased to 25 gallons per person per day. Somewhat depressingly, when comparing this to the current assumption that 25 litres per person per day is a reasonable minimum, Kinmont’s estimate (which is roughly four and a half times larger) seems curiously generous.

Whilst Kinmont’s report in 1959 recommended a programme of installing meters throughout the municipality, he accepted the fact “that its introduction at this stage cannot delay to any degree the construction of a new water works project” (1959: 18). The reason, again, is the possibility that yet more “unprecedented industrial development or other progress” might automatically negate any reduction in demand achieved through metering. The tension between “progress” and the need to rein in what seemed to be galloping, hedonistic consumption remained as serious as ever. Thus, in the 1960s, a dynamic new department was established, the city’s purification works were expanded to become the largest and most modern in South Africa and, alongside, the largest covered reservoir on the African continent was constructed (Lynski 1982). Within a few years, these extensions were also to prove inadequate for the City’s rising demand for water. A

drastic reduction in household consumption, to be achieved through universal metering was an inevitable next step.

The City Council finally agreed to the universal metering of all properties in 1970 (Mayor's Minute 1970). Initial resentment to the programme was noted (Mayor's Minute 1971) but the next year "Relatively few complaints about installations have been received and consumers have been very cooperative". By 1974, it was noted that a 3.2% decrease in consumption had been recorded "which may be attributed to water metering and favourable weather conditions" (Mayor's Minute 1974). And then, in 1975, the Mayor's Minute records that "The universal water metering programme which commenced on the 1st May, 1971 is substantially complete and over a period of four years some 61,000 meters have been installed at an approximate cost of R2.2 million as compared with the original estimate of R2.5 million". Overall consumption through the city stabilised for the next couple of years, before resuming its inexorable rise. Presumably, this rise in demand would have much to do with the fact that most households receiving piped supplies of water were wealthy enough to absorb most of the tariff increases without even noticing them. At the same time, reports of further tariff increases would have reflected negatively on the city administration. It was only with a major drought in the late 1970s and early 1980s that households throughout the city really began to respond to the municipality's calls for consumption to be reduced. Thus in 1983,

"restrictions brought in by Umgeni Water Board as a result of the severe drought in the interior of Natal causing storage dams to fall to a dangerous level...[meant that] in May and June an almost 55% reduction in consumption was achieved"

(City Engineer's Report 1983)

Whilst demand did increase once more, it would seem that these drought restrictions had a far greater effect on generating a long-term reduction in demand (through disciplining some of the more hedonistic consumers) than did the effect of introducing universal metering. Still, universal metering has been more vigorously pursued over recent years. Thus, in 1998, new meters were installed in townships throughout the city. The head of eThekweni Water Services, Neil Macleod, described this as a “military operation” (Horner 2002), later being hailed in both national and international reports for his fine efforts in “plugging the flow”. With demand for water having stabilised within the city and actually beginning to exhibit a slight fall, the logic behind the military operation (a battle against the spectre of scarcity) was becoming less and less obvious. Whilst old decaying piping did need replacing, the new meters were also seen as part of an accord with local residents. If “the slate was wiped clean”, old debts would be dropped and a new more tightly regulated system could be put in place: the residents would thereby be more obliged to maintain regular payment of bills (Interview Bailey: 29th November 2002).

1.1. An Informal Alternative to Universal Metering - Water Kiosks

In informal settlements, universal metering was not an issue until late in the 1990s. With the vast majority of informal residents lacking access to a supply of water, it was initially far more important to consider how water could first be supplied to such areas. Household connections were considered too costly an option so instead, throughout the 1980s, standpipes were introduced. How to charge residents in these areas for a

supply of water from a standpipe then became a more pressing problem. The water kiosk became one of the most attractive options and the newly formed Umgeni Water Board became one of the major pioneers of such a system (Hill 1991) in the KwaZulu Bantustan.

The idea behind a water kiosk is fairly simple: a local “bailiff” is appointed to operate a lockable standpipe and is thereby able to charge local people, per container of water. For the water provider, this has the advantage of ensuring that water is paid for, whilst the water network in an area is still at a very basic level of development. The bailiff system has also been praised as a source of local employment with many bailiffs establishing “spaza” shops²¹ alongside their taps. Some then expanded from these small beginnings into becoming taxi operators and successful local entrepreneurs (Interview Magubane: 9th September 2002). Some reports have gone on to argue that variants of the kiosk system can be seen as a rudimentary form of public private partnership (Palmer Development Group 2000).

In an early study of such systems however, Hill (1991) developed several criticisms. These were based on both the socio-political and economic consequences of the kiosks. Within the developing relationship between the local state and bailiffs and between bailiffs and local residents, Hill saw the potential for a serious abuse of power on the part of bailiffs, a lack of representation of residents and an unfavourable distribution of water points. On top of this, he saw monopolistic tendencies, the introduction of middlemen, the exploitation of vendors, the deterioration of service provision, and the exploitation of consumers and the community. Overall, drawing on

²¹ A spaza shop is a small, semi-formal shop, usually established in the house of someone in an informal settlement and selling basic groceries ranging from tea and coffee to telephone cards.

Castells, he argued that the introduction of kiosks was a sign of the withdrawal of the state from the provision of the means of collective consumption.

Whilst in some respects Hill's conclusion holds true, the trend since the early 1990s has not necessarily been towards greater privatisation as he had feared. Rather the state has remained central to the provision of water and has, in many cases, even tightened its control. The demise of the bailiff system and the development of a free basic water policy would seem to reverse some of the other trends Hill had feared. However, the replacement of the bailiff with a plethora of technological mechanisms for the control of household supplies might in fact be seen to be more troubling. In fact, I would argue, it shows a considerable deepening of the form of dispossession first initiated in the kiosk system. Now, however, this dispossession takes on a more inhuman and rationalised form.

1.2. From Bailiffs to Restrictors – The Mechanisation of Free Water

“With the implementation of National Government's free basic water policy (currently set at 6000 litres/household/month), it was necessary for service providers to review the basis on which water was supplied to consumers...Local Authorities were therefore faced with the inevitable task of having to limit average household consumption in supply systems using some form of hydraulic control system (flow or pressure dependant) on either a supply zone basis (remote from the consumer) or customer basis (at the point of consumption)”
(Restor 2002: 5-6)²²

When eThekweni Municipality made the decision to implement a Free Basic Water Policy, and as the national government appeared to follow its example, both

²² This is one report in a much larger package assembled by the Department for Water Affairs and Forestry in order to provide advice to local government on the implementation of a free basic water policy.

seemed to have made particularly bold decisions. As the above quotation shows, however, the result was the unleashing of a wave of research into new control systems for the limiting of household supplies (see DWAF 2002b). In particular, these technologies were to be targeted at what Restor refers to as “previously disadvantaged households” (ibid: 6).

Having followed its own journey to a free water policy, Durban’s implementation of such technologies is, perhaps, not representative of the rest of the country. The water kiosk system described above eventually led to the development of a ground tank system (see Figure 5). This, it was argued, was a vast improvement on previous systems, in that household members would no longer be required to carry barrels of water and containers of stagnant water would be less likely to be left around the home. Instead, a bailiff would control a central manifold able to supply water to up to twenty homes. Water would be supplied in narrow diameter pipes from this central manifold to individual ground tanks, capable of holding 200 litres of water. It is easy to see how the development of the kiosk system led to a progression into new ways of thinking about intermediate technologies for the supply of water to individual homes. Macleod has said that the intention was to:

- “Provide an acceptable quantity of clean drinking water at an affordable price - that is, at under R10 per month per household.
- Deliver water directly to each shack or informal dwelling unit so as to do away with the need to carry water long distances.
- Provide water supply infrastructure at a low cost and in a manner that is flexible so that it could be removed or relocated in the event of the township being formalised.

- Control the volume of water supply each day, rather than controlling the price per month which was to be paid using a system of prepayment for water supplied to avoid the incidence of bad debts.”

(Macleod 1997)



Figure 5: The Durban Ground Tank – a 200 litre tank of water, filling once daily

Later, as the municipality calculated the cost of running the system to be restrictively high, it made the apparent gamble of supplying the water for free. From this time on, the last of the intended outcomes listed by Macleod became, perhaps, the most important for driving the implementation of the ground tank system: it became imperative to “control the volume of water supply each day”. This is perhaps obvious if one takes into account

the municipality's need to avert financial bankruptcy in an era when Umgeni Water escalated its bulk water charges annually. The effects on poor households, however, were perhaps not to be expected. Thus, in areas supplied by the ground tank system, the regulation of supplies was easy enough – the tank would be filled once a day and, with a ball-cock system, it was possible to limit the amount supplied to each tank to 200 litres. When the decision was made to universalise the free water allowance to the whole of the city, however, eTWS came under pressure to develop new technologies for restricting the supply of water to those households with full pressure and semi pressure connections.

A contract was originally awarded to a local Durban-based company to develop a valve that could supply 200 litres of water to households on a full pressure system and then shut the supply off (Interview Bailey: 5th September 2002). When it emerged that such valves were unreliable, eTWS reverted back to a more simple technology in which an orifice valve is installed. This, by severely restricting the diameter of the domestic water pipe, is able to restrict the volume of water obtainable to a minimum. In Britain, where these were also installed for a short while in the early 1990s, they became known as “tricklers” owing to the manner in which they reduce the flow of water at the tap to a trickle or a drip.

In the Island area of KwaMashu C²³, both types of technology (if it is fair to call the incredibly crude orifice valve a “technology”) were seen to have been devastatingly effective, reducing mean household consumption to a level sometimes well below that of the 6kl per month specified in the free water policy of the municipality. Detailed billing records were made available by the municipality for ten households with which I

²³ This was the relatively isolated part of the Section C in which we conducted follow-up household interviews.

conducted in-depth interviews. Although there is some confusion between both the municipality and the households as to when restrictive devices were installed, the last five readings for households are quite telling. Two households had an electronic flow limiter installed. For the first, the consumption for the last 5 months averaged 4.4kl. For the second, this average was 5.4kl. Although only 4 people lived in the first house, 11 lived in the second – suggesting that even by the municipality’s calculation, this was an insufficient volume of water per household member.

For a third household an orifice valve had been installed rather than the electronic method of restricting supplies. Here, the mean monthly consumption for the last 5 months was 3.6kl of water. The drastic effect of the orifice valve is quite clear in the longer-term billing records of this family. The device was installed in August of 2001 and, from then on, the family has never consumed as much as the 6kl free basic water allowance. In three months, it consumed less than 1kl per month, and the monthly average consumption has been cut from 14.4kl per month to 3.1kl per month after the device was installed. In several of these months, the three person family was clearly receiving a dangerously low volume of water. Compounding this problem is the manner in which the household head is forced to divide water between tasks and to leave stagnant water under the tap whilst she waits for a container to fill. She describes the situation:

“It takes about 1 hour to fill 10-15 litres. In some houses, it’s a little better but in others it’s just as bad. I just put a big bucket under the tap and hold water in this. I flush the toilet with water from my washing. I did go to the Metro about this but they took no notice. I did apply for it myself but didn’t know it would be like this. Other people just open it in their own way [through destroying or removing the valve] but I’m scared to do this myself. Next door has a different one. They’re on a timer and are restricted from 5 in the morning until 9 and then they have no water. I

went to the Metro in January of this year to get them to sort it but I've had no response.”

(Interview Dlamini: 18th March 2003)

One of the cruellest twists is the manner in which Mrs. Dlamini had requested the installation of the flow limiter herself. With arrears of R2700, she felt unable to cope and asked for the municipality's help. Its response was to reduce her water supply to a pathetic trickle. Now, free of the burden of debt, Mrs. Dlamini has to ensure her family somehow balance their needs for fresh water between uses. Other households in Inanda were similarly relieved to be free of the burden payment when standpipes began reappearing in their streets. Whilst admitting that in some ways standpipes were a step backwards and that an on-site supply of water might free women from the burden of carrying loads of water, several felt happier to be free of the dictatorship of the water meter:

“The Metro came some time ago when subsidies were given for the roof tanks. Most people said yes, install these but now they are disconnecting people. Too many have been disconnected in this area. Even where I live at my cousin's house has been disconnected. My cousin was scared to check on the size of his bill but is relieved now that he is cut off because there can't be any more debts. It's bad but standpipes are at least now being put in. There is now a clear alternative.”

(Interview Mthembu: 1st February 2003)

Other technologies for the restriction of household supplies are outlined in two publications supplied to local municipalities for the implementation of the free basic water policy. In a paradox quite typical of the free water policy, the focus of most of the free basic water implementation package revolves around the need to *limit* and control supplies in formerly disadvantaged areas. The main methods analysed are: Prepaid

Metering Systems; Electronic Flow Limiters; Flow Restrictors; and Standpipe Units.

Within each category, four or five different products are either tested or advertised.

Prepayment systems, it emerges “are a powerful tool for helping water services providers to control water wastage and customer debt” (DWAF 2002b: 17). The publication talks of computerised management systems, and “Dallas” touch-memory read/write data carrier “buttons”. These various technologies result in a system whereby “when the customer inserts the “Dallas” token into the prepayment unit all the credit purchased is transferred, which then allows water to flow until all the credit is used up” (DWAF 2002b: 17). And when the credit is all used up? Then, presumably, householders will be able to exchange their labour power for a money commodity, before digitising this into “Dallas” tokens and exchanging this for more water units through which their rationally mechanised life can be sustained for a few more rationally measured hours, days or weeks.

As should quickly become clear from the above examples, probably nowhere else in the world is water delivery as dominated by regulatory mechanisms at the point of delivery as in South Africa. Whilst historically the spectre of scarcity has been one of the reasons driving this enthusiasm for regulation, the above examples would also seem to suggest that, recently, the development of the free basic water policy in South Africa has been one of the key reasons driving the new technologies now dominating the waterscape. Whilst the main thrust of South African struggles for free water has been taken in the direction of ensuring a minimum amount of water is guaranteed to all households (Bond 2002), when this policy is set to work in a waterscape in which profitability is central, this minimum amount of water soon becomes a maximum to

which household supplies must be restricted. Clearly, struggles for free water have thrown up their own set of challenges. Thus, it is important at this point to consider the direction in which these struggles might have been moving. A brief introduction to national struggles for free water is important in order to understand this.

1.3. Struggles for Free Water

Bond (2002) cites the leading protagonists in struggles for free water as being the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the Rural Development Services Network (RDSN) (graciously, he sidesteps the role played by critical academics such as himself in making the technical case for such a policy). The original call from SAMWU and RDSN was for 50 litres of free water per person per day, to be guaranteed as a basic minimum. This, it was argued, was based on a World Health Organisation recommendation of the minimum for a healthy lifestyle, as well as the recommended medium-term target contained within the Reconstruction and Development Programme - the platform on which the ANC came to power in 1994²⁴. When the Minister responsible for water first made reference to a free basic water policy, citing the example of Durban, he suggested the amount should be set at 200 litres of free water per household per day (Kasrils 2000). Based on an average household size of eight, this was taken to mean roughly 25 litres per person per day. In the case of Durban, Magubane argues that this figure was arrived at independently – through calculating water usage per capita within Cato Manor, an informal settlement close to the centre of Durban (Interview Magubane:

²⁴ It should be noted that the government has often claimed a rather different interpretation of the meaning of this term 'lifeline'.

9th September 2002). Since the announcement of this basic volume of free water as a national target, SAMWU and other social movements have been calling on the amount to be increased to their original demand of 50 litres per capita per day. Some activists are beginning to call for an amount beyond this (Personal Communication: Bond).

The logic for an expansion of the free water allowance – and indeed for the free water policy in general – is simple: hedonistic users, who are presumably wealthier, should cross-subsidise the consumption of those who use less water. Households with swimming pools, hosepipes and gardens should subsidise the water usage of those with few appliances, no garden and no hosepipe. This is easily implemented through a progressive, stepped tariff. In a system providing free water, no charge is made for the first 6kl and this is subsidised by charging a supplement over and above the marginal running costs of the water system for those consuming above a certain amount. In Durban such a stepped tariff is already in place:

Monthly Consumption	Ground tank. Low pressure.	Roof tank. Semi-pressure system.	Domestic. Full pressure.	Industrial, commercial. and other users
0kl to 6kl	nil	nil	nil	5.72
from 6kl to 30kl	n/a	3.81	5.72	5.72
more than 30kl	n/a	11.45	11.45	5.72
fixed charge	nil	nil	0-44.71	39.22-4,471.08

A charge of R5.72 is the marginal running cost of the water system - accounting for the charges made by Umgeni Water and the cost of the upkeep of the network and running costs of the municipal services provider. In spite of the apparently simple logic,

however, the situation for many seems to have become qualitatively worse, when an ostensibly more progressive tariff mechanism has been used. For Bond, this is largely a result of the fact that the municipality has not yet been able to set the blocks at the right levels and also that households are not disaggregated by number of household members (Bond 2003), leading to what he refers to elsewhere as a Dual Income No Kids (DINKY) bias. One of his main claims is that the volume of water available for free should be extended to at least 12 kl per household, and that the cost curve after this should be a gently sloping concave one. The logic behind this would appear to make intuitive sense in that it would seem to target future tariff increases at the most hedonistic consumption, whilst guaranteeing a relatively large amount of free basic water for everyone. However, I suspect that deeper processes are at work within the waterscape that will inevitably lead to further unexpected consequences, and, if not careful, a further dominance of the technologies that oppress rather than liberate. Struggles for free water thereby fall into a trap of emphasising this control over supplies as opposed to genuinely free access according to need.

In the remainder of the chapter I turn to these processes, beginning with insights from the work of Georg Lukács. Building on influences from both Marx and Weber, Lukács sought to show the manner in which advanced capitalist society in its pursuit of growth and technological efficiency was reducing life itself to easily quantifiable units. Lukács thereby developed the twin concepts of reification and rational mechanisation. In both, he drew together an understanding of alienation, commodity fetishism and encroaching bureaucratic rationality. Later I turn to some of the work of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, looking at what light the ideas of Marcuse, Schmidt and

Horkheimer and Adorno might shed on the increasing dominance of technology in mediating the relation between humans and nature or between Durban's residents and the water on which they depend.

2. ON RE-SOCIALISING THE REIFIED DRAMA

2.1. Rational Mechanisation and Technological Rationality

For Georg Lukács, much of what we see happening in Durban's waterscape (and much of what we see being heightened by the free water debates) might be understood as a deepening process of rational mechanisation, something he saw developing and pervading our consciousness with the progression of advanced capitalism. He considers rational mechanisation to be an integral part of what he terms "the phenomenon of reification". From its Latin roots, this would seem to mean "the phenomenon of 'thingification'". Whilst on the one hand this refers to the inversion of people and things already referred to (and the ability of things to acquire human characteristics), in Lukács's work it refers also to the increasing mechanisation of life processes and the quantification of every aspect of life. Both aspects of "the phenomenon of reification" are important in understanding the dominance of metering in Durban's contemporary waterscape. First, I wish to turn to the latter.

In discussing the mechanisation of life processes, Lukács focuses our attention on the encroaching rationalisation of work activities in capitalist societies. With the increasing application of Taylorist techniques in order to scientifically manage the work

process, commodities come to be produced through several workers performing repetitive tasks on the same product. The production-line model is the classic form of this. Such scientific management begins to have a particular effect on the end product of capitalist production:

“The finished article ceases to be the object of the work-process. The latter turns into the objective synthesis of rationalised special systems whose unity is determined by pure calculation and which must therefore seem to be arbitrarily connected with each other...It is thus possible to separate forcibly the production of a use-value in time and space” (1971: 88-89)

In developing a formal dialectical understanding of the phenomenon of reification, Lukács goes on to argue that this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject – the worker. Thus, principles of rational mechanisation sink deeper and deeper into our own consciousness as we continue in the fragmented work process. In this way, “the principle of rational mechanisation and calculability must embrace every aspect of life...the whole life of society is thus fragmented into the isolated acts of commodity exchange” (1971: 91). Throughout this process, we find ourselves becoming “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system” (ibid: 89).

One of the most overt manifestations of this process is the ordering of our day into discrete, quantifiable units of time. Time is not only money in advanced society, it becomes life itself. It “sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’” (ibid: 90). Thus, in E.P. Thompson’s classic study of ‘Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism’ (1967) we see an encroaching dictatorship of the clock and in John

Holloway's work our struggles against fetishisation might come to be represented in the seemingly mindless destruction of our alarm clocks (2002b). For Marx:

“Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the incarnation of time. *Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day*” (Marx, quoted in Lukács 1971: 89)

Whilst in the work process hours, minutes and seconds become so crucial, in the waterscape litres and kilolitres become the measure of a human life. Thus, it is this same debasement of quality to the more calculable ‘quantity’ that we begin to see taking place within water distribution²⁵. Or rather, to be more precise, it is a deepening tension between the need to rationally mechanise the waterscape and the fact that water *remains* fundamentally a use value – something that always provides, sustains and enhances life. As this process deepens, we see a similar fragmentation of consumption to the fragmentation of the production of use values. Thus, we begin to see the increasing atomisation of water consumption, with individual households being restricted to a fixed amount of water.

Aside from this fairly small free water allowance, other individuals become increasingly dependent upon the self-objectification of their own labour in order to be able to obtain sufficient water for themselves and their families to be able to survive. The shift that occurs in capitalist society in the role performed by human labour (from being a

²⁵ This is not, of course, to argue that water quality becomes less important. Instead, I am referring to its use-value qualities.

creative, sensuous activity) to being an exchangeable commodity needing to be sold to purchase such necessities as water “reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation” (*ibid*: 92). This is something we see emerging in the desperate search for ways of paying for arrears or meeting current water bills in Durban’s rationalised and calculable waterscape. The water meter guarantees the commodity relation. It becomes crucial in upholding the dehumanised and dehumanising effects of this system.

With society itself (and the waterscape more specifically) increasingly presenting itself in this reified form, our understandings and our theories can only make sense of this ‘self-created immediacy’. For Lukács, reality is always socially mediated. As with Schmidt (discussed later in this chapter) it is impossible to conceive of an external nature or an external society outside of the manner in which both are mediated through labour. However, through the phenomenon of reification, the perverse, quantified reality increasingly comes to be seen as natural. It is in this sense that form appears to dominate content and our political decisions and actions come to be based on what we immediately experience and assume to be natural or eternal. Thus, we experience a world divided up into calculable exchange values; divided up into hours, minutes and seconds; divided up into litres and kilolitres. This immediacy, or the dominance of form over content is, I would argue, central to understanding the debates that have unfolded around the free water policy. Although ostensibly it would seem progressive to call for an extension of a measurable free-water allowance to all households, this continues to operate on a reified plane. The free allowance can only be understood, conveyed and debated over through

the commodity relation itself. For this reason, a minimum becomes a maximum, liberation becomes a fetter.

2.2. One Dimensionality

In Herbert Marcuse's work, the form of rational mechanisation that might be seen to be taking place in Durban's waterscape – and depicted so clearly in the work of Lukács – is once again understood to be central in limiting our ways of thinking to a positivist “one dimensionality”. The influence of Lukács, throughout Marcuse's writing, is quite clear. For the latter, however, we see much greater emphasis placed on the actual *technologies* being used: “technology has become the great vehicle of *reification* – reification in its most mature and effective form” (2002: 172, emphasis in original). Although writing in a society in which technology seemed to be providing a soporific life of luxury that dulled people's sense of rebellion (and in this manner the obverse of many people's experience in South African townships), this argument also presents a fruitful way into understanding the kind of dictatorship of the water meter discussed earlier.

In developing his argument, Marcuse contrasts pre-technological with technological society. In both societies, the domination of humans over one another is a common feature. However, in contrast to the former, in which this domination was on a direct basis (feudal lord over peasant and so on), in technological society, domination is dependent upon “the objective order of things” (such as the economy, the market, or, perhaps, the water meter). Thus we begin to see “the progressive enslavement of man by a productive apparatus which perpetuates the struggle for existence and extends it to a

total international struggle which ruins the lives of those who build and use this apparatus” (*ibid*: 148). In a comment that seems to have particular resonance with the argument presented earlier around the provision of free water in Durban, Marcuse writes that “The liberating force of technology – the instrumentalization of things – turns into a fetter of liberation; the instrumentalization of man” (*ibid*: 163). The instrumentalization of free water, though opening up the hope of a more egalitarian society, proves a fetter through the instrumentalization of life itself.

2.3. The Dialectic of Enlightenment

Central to this critique is a sense of the double-edged sword of technology and rationality – presenting both liberatory possibilities whilst also deepening our enslavement to a scientific form of rationality. This theme is central to many other works to emerge from the Frankfurt School. Later, several writers reworked this theme as part of a struggle between humans and nature. It is important to begin to make sense of what this might mean for the political ecological struggles within Durban’s waterscape. Could it be that the increasing importance of technologies to measure and limit water supplies is actually a result of a much deeper struggle between humans and nature? For Jay, the development of this notion by the Frankfurt School represented the last leg of their movement away from orthodox Marxism. Thus,

“The clearest expression of this change was the Institut’s replacement of class conflict...with a new motor of history. The focus was now on the larger conflict between man and nature both without and within, a conflict whose origins went

back to before capitalism and whose continuation, indeed intensification, appeared likely after capitalism would end” (Jay 1973: 256)

This shift was expressed in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002 [1947]) in which Horkheimer and Adorno contrasted two types of reason. The first form of reason seeks to discover the means for liberation from external compulsions. The second involves instrumental reason and technical control over nature, before degenerating into totalitarianism. Here we see Lukács’s concern with rational mechanisation being read into a broader account of a struggle between humans and nature. Technical control over nature and the domination of nature that emerged in the bourgeois era come to mean a greater domination of humans over one another. Thus, as we increasingly try to control nature technically – through damming rivers, capturing water supplies and distributing potable water through a highly complex array of technologies – so we dominate other people.

This argument is also central to Alfred Schmidt’s work on *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1971) – a work that both opens up and closes down possibilities for a much more nuanced reading of what is occurring in Durban’s waterscape. Schmidt begins by focussing our attention on the concept of metabolism in Marx, or more specifically on the role played by labour in the metabolic relationship between humans and nature (see also Smith 1984, Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003, Swyngedouw forthcoming). Neither nature nor humans can be understood separately from one another. In using the term waterscape, I am attempting to capture some of the sense of this interrelationship and the manner in which water cannot be understood separately from the ways in which humans have

transformed it, captured it and diverted it for specific uses. Humans existing without water would similarly cease to have meaning for long.

In spite of this, however, later in the same work, Schmidt begins to evoke something of a strong sense of a nature existing outside of human relationships. Thus, he writes of two dialectics, one in what he terms the pre-bourgeois era – in which humans and nature co-existed – another in the bourgeois era, characterised by the domination of humans over nature. In Durban, if we were to try and conceive of a similar division we might present it as a pre-colonial and (post)colonial one. Prior to colonialism, water was collected from streams, after colonialism, all three of the main rivers flowing into Durban had been dammed and harnessed to supply the city's rising demand for water. The emerging postcolonial waterscape is thus one characterised by the kind of technical control over nature discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno and developed by Schmidt. The problem, as Smith (1984) shows, is that, in spite of his elegant attempts to do otherwise, "Schmidt ends up providing us with one of the most elaborate accounts of the *bourgeois* concept of nature" (*ibid*: 23). He does this, as Smith shows because of his inability to break free from the conceptual dualisms developed throughout his work, and his inability to understand the importance of *exchange value* in determining the historical relation with nature – something I discuss in more detail later.

Overall then, the Frankfurt School seem to provide us with some fascinating insights for beginning to make sense of the waterscape. However, they repeatedly lead us into what I understand to be political cul-de-sacs by naturalising the effects of a profoundly social process. Interpreted through such a lens, the power that the waterscape has over people's lives in Durban would presumably be determined by technology and by

a naturalised split between humans and their natural environments. In the next section, I wish to take a quite different ‘cut’ at making sense of the same problems. I wish to understand these problems as radically alterable. This requires bringing the relationship between humans and nature back into the socio-natural realm, and refusing a simplistic naturalisation of the relationship. In doing this I seek to return to some of the principles from which the Frankfurt School originally proceeded. Later, I seek to show how these can be read into the approach developed by Smith (1984).

2.4. The Alienated Waterscape

“The theory of alienation is the intellectual construct in which Marx displays the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings, on their physical and mental states and on the social processes of which they are a part”
(Ollman 1976: 131)

At the heart of much of the Frankfurt School’s critique of capitalist society is an understanding of the process of alienation. As Ollman writes, this construct allows Marx to display much of the violence of capitalist society as well as the perversity of a society in which ‘things’ begin to acquire power over people. This, surely, is the process we have been trying to understand in the early part of this chapter – the inversion of people and things, in which a water meter seems to acquire its own dictatorial reign. For Marx, such ‘alien’ powers are the outcome of a capitalist work process that separates producer from product, producer from consumer and producer from producer (Marx 1974). Rather than the work process bringing about the creative social fulfilment it should, it becomes a brutalising process that deforms us and isolates us from those who consume our products

and from those who produce our commodities. Alienation is related to a specific historical period and is actively produced through those engaging in the work process shaped by the social conditions in this historical period. Already we might begin to see a more radically political edge to such an understanding. If alienation is produced by people in a particular historical period, surely we can also transform such a situation. If alienation is a process rather than a natural condition, surely it is a process that can be transformed.

It is important to consider the implications this might have in the waterscape. In the case of Durban, most of the active work involved in the production of the waterscape has historically been carried out by people working for either the municipality or Umgeni Water. As I hope to have shown in the previous chapter, the latter is necessarily more focussed on seeking profitable investments within the waterscape and has subsequently helped to transform the terrain on which people are able to access water. Daily, people go to work for Umgeni Water – at its headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, at the Midmar purification works or on the new Mooi-Umgeni inter-basin transfer scheme – and ensure that two municipalities are able to supply water to local residents. With Umgeni Water being in the financial fix shown in the previous chapter, labour relations at the bulkwater supplier have deteriorated enormously over the last few years. Paranoia has grown within the entity as employees have had their offices bugged and as pressure has been placed on the wages of those working for the entity. On top of this, Umgeni Water has sought to raise profits through increasing bulk-tariffs to eThekweni and Msunduzi municipalities. Thus, a series of tensions – between worker and boss, between bulk-water supplier and bond-holder, and between bulk-water supplier and municipality – have come to be

embodied *within* the water circulating in Durban's piped network, as well as *within* the very infrastructure itself. The problem, however, is that – on the surface – the water we receive in our taps seems to tell us nothing of these tensions. Instead, such tensions come to manifest themselves in 'things' such as fluctuating prices and in the paraphernalia of new technologies being developed to ensure that people access no more water than the municipality sees fit for them. Here we begin to see the alien power that water can have over people. However, in focussing our anger on the water meter, on the price of water or on the marginal cost-curve through which this water is priced, this power remains alien.

Similarly, as the water commodity *internalises* these tensions, so it also becomes possible for one group of people to exert power over another group. Thus, the bondholder on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the board member at Umgeni Water and the bureaucrats in eThekweni Municipality all come to exert power over individual householders in Durban through the colourless, odourless solution that flows from people's taps. Again this power should be viewed as *internal* to the commodity form²⁶. Ollman illustrates this power of human over human through the commodity with Marx's consideration of the worker's home, somewhere that should be a place for total relaxation but where, once again, the capitalist is able to exert power over the worker:

“The savage in his cave – a natural element which freely offers itself for his use and protection – feels himself no more a stranger, or rather feels himself to be just as much at home as a fish in water. But the cellar-dwelling of the poor man is a hostile dwelling, ‘an alien, restraining power which only gives itself up to him so far as he gives up to its blood and sweat’ – a dwelling which he cannot look upon as his own home where he might at last exclaim, ‘here I am at home’, but where instead he finds himself in someone else's house, in the house of a stranger who daily lies in wait for him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent”

(Marx 1974: 366)

²⁶ This understanding of Marx's work as a philosophy of internal relations is crucial to Ollman's reading, and central to the controversies Ollman's work generated.

Throughout the introductory section of this chapter, the fear expressed in the quotations from residents around water issues, the daily experience of waiting for disconnection bailiffs, and the terror of the letter summoning a householder to court for having failed to pay the water bill – all these mirror the alien power captured in the above quotation. Water remains a use value but it is also a hostile substance and an alien power. In short, through its production and distribution under capitalist relations of production, water has acquired an enormous power to subordinate (whilst also paradoxically providing) life. This power springs directly from the separation of residents from the means of their existence – achieved most effectively through the most recent range of technologies – and from the separating or splintering effect of alienation.

2.5. The Fetishised Water Commodity

Closely related to the manner in which water acquires this power is the way in which it becomes fetishised (see Swyngedouw and Kaika 2000 on the fetishism of urban (and water) networks). Essentially, fetishism tries to capture the way in which we invest powers in the things we have produced. Just as a fetishistic religion might worship a humanly produced totem, so, in capitalism, we see mystical powers emanating from the things that we have produced. In so doing, these products and the powers they embody become distanced from the social conditions underlying their production – they seem less and less within our control. Whereas this can have a slightly funny side – as we become slaves to fashion – it can also have a particularly brutal effect as we see in periodic economic crises brought about through a blind ‘faith’ in economic growth; through house

repossessions as ‘fictitious’ capital proves to be just that; or in water disconnections resulting from the fetishised water commodity. As the introductory quote from Holloway argues, this brutality is central to Marx’s critique of capitalism.

Part of the problem with some recent discussions of commodity fetishism (mainly within the geographical literature) is the manner in which the phenomenon has been read as some kind of a patronising reference to false consciousness. Within geography, much discussion has therefore revolved around the lifting of a veil of fetishism, as if through doing so the reality of capitalism will be magically revealed²⁷. For some, such attempts to lift this veil have shown the limitations of an essentialising (and arrogant) marxism that fails to give sufficient weight to consumers’ own understandings (see Jackson 2002). This, however, I would argue to be a profound misreading of fetishism.

Rather than implying a false reading of a true situation, instead, following Eagleton’s reading of Lukács (Eagleton 1994), I would argue that fetishism implies a true (or if you prefer honest) reading of a false situation. Cohen captures this well in writing that fetishism is better understood as a mirage rather than a hallucination (Cohen 1978). Our senses recognise something that does exist, although the conditions that have given rise to us perceiving this situation are part of a socially produced reality. Such conditions should not, therefore be naturalised in the way that they so often are. Here we return to the self-created immediacy discussed by Lukács. The fact that we act upon the fetishism of the commodity; shape our economic policies around the fetish of the market; or at times become the economically-maximising agents so beloved of neoclassical economics would seem to go some way in showing that fetishism has a reciprocal effect (see Ollman 1976). From the earliest critiques of political economy, we have known that money does

²⁷ For much of the time, this has been based on a misreading of Harvey (1990)

not grow naturally. And yet, in contemporary society, if I invest money in a bank or a building society, the amount of that money will presumably increase. Money *will* generate more money. In a similar way, in contemporary society, money *can* buy freedom, and (in spite of *The Beatles*) it *can* buy love. Once again, however, this must be understood as part of the false reality (the self-created immediacy) we make for ourselves in capitalist society.

If, in implying that present reality is a false one, I am seen to suggest either that *I* am able to see beyond the mirage of fetishism, or indeed that there is a simple essence to be revealed behind this mirage, this is not intended. Instead, I would argue ‘defetishisation’ necessitates a better understanding of processes of struggle. With Lukács, therefore, I would argue that “reality is not, it becomes”. But this reality only “becomes” through a process of democratic debate, active engagement and struggle *for* the connections between socio-natural entities and *against* the splintering effects of fetishism.

John Holloway’s more recent writings on the concept of fetishism are of particular relevance in such an understanding. Thus, for Holloway,

“...the concept of fetishism is concerned with the explosion of power inside us, not as something that is distinct from the separation of doing and done (as in the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘hegemony’) but as something that is integral to that separation.”

(Holloway 2002b: 56)

In emphasising the everyday constitution and contestation of this process, Holloway suggests we shift our understanding of fetishism to one of “fetishisation as process”. The problem with the former, he argues, is the possibility that it might be understood as

sealed – and thereby still requiring some external force, be it intellectuals (Gramsci) or the Communist Party (Lukács), to suggest the possibility of a better reality. The reciprocal relations of fetishism can thereby seem impossible to break free from. In contrast, fetishisation as process helps to encompass the daily struggles to put back together the splintered social relations that are shattered in capitalism. It is in this sense that I understand some of the daily struggles within Durban's waterscape that both seek to ensure continued access to water and a struggle to transform the false reality of the waterscape.

2.6. Producing Nature, Producing Alienation

Both alienation and fetishisation have serious implications for the type of metabolic relationship between (mediated) nature and society discussed from the outset of this thesis. As I will argue, it also has important implications for the type of argument and the type of strategies we might wish to adopt in debates around free water. As I have consistently sought to argue, throughout history, life has depended upon an interrelationship between socio-natural entities. Thus, as humans have collected food or constructed shelter, built tower blocks or sold hamburgers, not only have we transformed the natural environment, so too it has transformed us. To grasp only one side of this dialectical process would surely be wrong.

Thus, in Durban at present, life itself is dependent on the distribution of clean, potable water. At the same time, as we see in this chapter, this transforms society in important ways. On the one hand, this transformation takes place through ensuring the

reproduction of a fit, healthy (working) population, whilst on the other it reproduces a specific social system and, to an increasing extent, ensures the survival of a deeply fragile capitalist system of accumulation. As Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1947]) and Schmidt (1971) noted, historically, metabolisms have transformed in important ways. For Schmidt, the transformation is from pre-bourgeois to bourgeois society, for Horkheimer and Adorno the change occurs with the Enlightenment and for Marcuse the shift might be seen to occur in the transition from *pre-technological* to *technological* society. Thus, whereas workers in subsistence societies might be seen to produce for the immediate survival of themselves and their families, this process begins to transform as some societies begin to produce a surplus. Here, the production of nature can serve a secondary purpose of providing a 'second nature' for exchange as well as use. In capitalist society, this metabolic process is radically transformed as those performing the work are divorced from both the product and any means of existence outside of a capitalist system of production and exchange. In many ways what I am describing here is the same process of separation and the same abstraction of social relations that occurs through capitalist alienation.

For Smith (1984) it becomes important to consider how both 'first' and 'second' nature come to be redefined in this transformation. Whereas prior to capitalist production such a distinction had been understood in terms of a non-humanly produced and a humanly produced nature, in capitalist society, the distinction is seen to be more between nature understood in terms of a use value and its abstracted form as an exchange value. It is worth quoting Smith at some length:

“With the production of nature at a world scale, nature is progressively produced from within and as part of the so-called second nature. The first nature is deprived of its firstness, its originality. The source of this qualitative change in the relation with nature lies in the altered relation between use-value and exchange-value. At ‘different stages of the development of economic relations, exchange value and use value were determined in different relations’ (Marx, Grundrisse: 646). Under capitalism, then, the role of exchange-value is no longer merely one of accompanying use-value. With the development of capitalism at a world scale and the generalization of the wage-labour relation, *the relation with nature is before anything else an exchange-value relation*. The use-value of nature remains fundamental, of course, but with the advanced development of productive forces, specific needs can be fulfilled by an increasing range of use-values and specific commodities can be produced from a growing array of raw materials.”

(Smith 1984: 54 emphasis added)

And also:

“Once the relation with nature is determined by the logic of exchange value, and first nature is produced from within and as part of second nature, first and second nature are themselves redefined...*Human labour produces the first nature, human relations produce the second*”

(*ibid.* 54-55 emphasis added)

In Durban’s waterscape, potable water is clearly produced through human labour. In Smith’s redefinition, however, this shows us little more than the fact it is part of ‘first nature’. Rather, the conditions under which it is produced and its embodiment of the value relation, as well as the increasing emphasis on an abstract exchange value are of more interest in the course of this chapter. These place Durban’s water squarely within a second nature produced through human relations. This implies both the fetishised form of water and also its alienation from the majority of the population.

2.7. Struggles To Demystify the Waterscape

When we begin to explore the possible ways in which we could struggle against the production of an alienated or reified waterscape, we begin to enter into controversial terrain. What the obverse of alienation might be has often been a point of some controversy. As has been seen with the Frankfurt School, our hopes might be seen to rest in a romantic vision of some pre-technological society or, as is currently the case in many South African townships, the target of our political strategy might become the technology rather than the human relations that invest that technology with the power it has. In its passionate opposition to any reversion to a bourgeois conception of nature, Smith's writing contributes much to this discussion. He focuses our attention not on some sense of a re-unification of nature and society but on transforming the human relations that ensure (humanly produced) nature is transformed into an abstract exchange relation. This has further implications for our understanding of some of the debates around free water. With free basic water appearing in the form it currently does, the tensions between its necessity as a use value and its production to garner profits for speculators on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are only seen to heighten. These tensions manifest themselves in the technologies proliferating through the waterscape guaranteeing simultaneously a minimum (use value) and a maximum amount (exchange value) of free water. They manifest themselves in the anger at household disconnections and in the clashes between disconnection bailiffs (ensuring exchange value is realised) and residents (ensuring they retain access to a fundamental use value). The challenge, surely, must be to transform the human relations invested in this second nature. On the one hand this

challenge seems all the larger than building a movement to reform the free water policy or destroy water meters – we have to ensure water is not produced as a capitalist commodity, not merely ensure free water levels are set at the right levels. But on the other hand this challenge is all the more democratic because it is about investing genuinely human relations into the production of water. Thus, both the struggle and the debate over demystification of the waterscape must occur in a sphere in which we all might participate. For it is surely in this sphere that “truly human, social control over the *production* of nature” of which Smith (1984: 65) writes might actually be achievable.

3. CONCLUSION

Building on the previous chapter’s argument that Durban’s waterscape is increasingly being produced as an accumulation strategy, in this chapter I began by outlining the increasing importance of water meters in regulating individuals’ access to water throughout the municipality. I argued that this might best be understood as a drama in which objects acquire powers normally associated with humans. After recounting some of the early debates within the city over the issue of universal metering, driven as these were by a fear of scarcity, I sought to show the manner in which, in recent years, water meters have become an integral means of ensuring that individual households pay for the exact volume of water used. Again, this must be seen as related to the need outlined in the previous chapter for Durban’s bulk-water supplier to ensure profitable returns are made to investors. In a strange paradox, I argued that the introduction of a free water policy in the city had actually accentuated the importance of metering domestic supplies.

The free basic water policy as it has currently been developed depends upon a far greater surveillance of individual water usage and, I would argue, places greater emphasis on the need to ensure exchange values are realised. For most township residents, the free basic water policy has resulted in greater difficulty in paying bills and greater power being exerted by the infrastructures that monitor and regulate individual supplies.

In the second half of the chapter, I sought theoretical insights from which we might begin to re-socialise the reified drama I had described previously. First, I turned to the work of Lukács and his innovative interpretation of the reification and rational mechanisation that is associated with the universalisation of the commodity form. Then I turned to the work of Frankfurt School theorists who, building on the work of Lukács had related encroaching technological rationality to a struggle to dominate nature. This latter interpretation, however, I found problematic in that it relates this to the progress of modern society and not to the social organisation – and thereby socially alterable – organisation of that society. Returning to some of the basic propositions of historical materialism, I sought to show how this reified drama is best understood through the peculiar inversion of people and things that is characteristic of capitalist society. This is captured in Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*. Towards the end of the chapter, I sought to show how Neil Smith's conceptualisation of the production of nature has considerable relevance for understanding how this fetishism invests *nature* with particular understandings. Smith's second nature might be understood to be a fetishised nature – humanly produced, it comes to acquire a particular power over us, because of the social relations embodied within it. Throughout, I hope to have shown that current debates around free water continue to operate on a reified terrain. The search

for alternative vantage points within the fetishised world of contemporary capitalism is the subject of the next chapter. Through exploring these vantage points, we might move on to the second of our original questions: how the waterscape might be transformed in positive, democratic ways. At this point, therefore, the thesis begins to move from a charting of the topography of the waterscape, to the construction of a countertopography (Katz 2004) from which power relations might be challenged.

Chapter 5

TOWARDS A FEMINIST HISTORICAL MATERIALISM OF DURBAN'S WATERSCAPE

“Feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women’s material activity and must as well be a part of the political struggle necessary to develop areas of social life modelled on this activity. The outcome could be the development of a political economy which included women’s activity as well as men’s and could as well be a step toward the redefining and restructuring of society as a whole on the basis of women’s activity”

(Hartsock 1983a: 304)

11th February 2003 - As we drive out to Amaoti, the Durban sun seems sharper than usual. Thulani has the window wound down as far as possible and his hand on the roof; I wish we could drive a little faster along the main road in order to try and stir the air in the steel, sauna-like car, but the goats that litter the road mean we have to coast more cautiously. Turning off the main road and up the tight single-track lane to Libya and Palestina, we notice that things are different. Women are carrying buckets of water up the hill and the standpipe to which we have come to conduct interviews is surrounded by an array of yellow plastic buckets, left waiting and ownerless. Driving slightly further up the hill, we park the car on more level ground – difficult in this hilly part of Inanda. On climbing out of the car, we come across an old man carrying a wheelbarrow full of water buckets (see Figure 7). His t-shirt is drenched in sweat as the heat is already into the thirties. He explains that the standpipe hasn’t been operating for the last two weeks and that he is carrying water for local households to try and make a little bit of money. In the meantime, women have gathered around. Some remember the three of us from the

workshop we'd held last month. One engages Thulani in political strategising. Sick to death of the municipality's promises of a free water standpipe and now finding themselves in a situation with no standpipe at all, the women are preparing to mobilise.

These localised events of 11th February 2003, and the consequences of them, are explored in more detail throughout the next couple of chapters. In doing so, the thesis begins to make a transition from the survey of power relations in the first part, towards beginning to gain a sense in which we might open up possibilities for the transformation of those power relations. Through linking the situated knowledges in Amaoti with the broader analysis of power relations conducted earlier, we might begin to construct what Cindi Katz refers to as countertopographies of power (Katz 2004). We can also learn much more about the everyday political ecology of Durban's waterscape. In this chapter, I consider how situated knowledges might tell us something about the gendered division of labour within Durban's waterscape and how women's particular experiences within this might open up the potential, but certainly not the guarantee, of new forms of consciousness (Hartsock 1983a, 1983b, Katz 2004).

The gendered division of labour remains absolutely fundamental to the provision of clean drinking water in Durban. Women (and children), almost without exception, are responsible for carrying water, dealing with water bills and negotiating with the municipality over water issues. Community workshops conducted for this research were dominated by the presence of women, and interview questions about water issues would almost always be deferred to a female household member. Men often remained oblivious to the magnitude of arrears faced by the households in which they lived or they remained

unaware of the average amount of water consumed, let alone the size or scale of the problems faced by communities. Interestingly, in the above example, a man was found to be carrying water. The reasons why he might have been doing so on this day are explored in more depth later.

From previous chapters, it should be increasingly clear that there is a multiplicity of ways in which capitalism's arc engages with, transforms and is transformed by the everyday practices that constitute Durban's waterscape. Because of this, I argue that it would be insufficient to consider the gendered division of labour, and the everyday practices that reproduce this division of labour, entirely separately from the historical materialist understandings developed in the previous chapters. Clearly, men and women's experiences of the waterscape differ, just as their interactions with a capitalist system of accumulation through the waterscape differ. All too often, however, when historical materialist approaches have attempted to understand the power relationships manifest in, and constitutive of, a gendered division of labour, the relationship, intersection or interaction has been reduced to a functionalist or deterministic one. Women's subordination is then seen to be necessary for the survival of capitalism and gender equality is seen to be dependent solely upon a radical transformation of capitalism.

In what follows, I seek to avoid such deterministic arguments. However, in reviewing the work of several theorists, I suggest ways in which a gendered division of labour within Durban's waterscape *can* be, even if it does not necessarily *have* to be, beneficial to the profitable returns shown to be so necessary to Umgeni Water in Chapter 3. Here I show how some of the cheaper, low-technology water delivery options developed by the municipality (and explored in Chapter 4) continue to rest upon a

gendered division of labour. Through opting to install a standpipe, as opposed to a household connection in a settlement, the municipality relies on a pre-existing division of labour in which women will carry out the extra work that the cheaper infrastructure requires. In developing such an argument, I follow the ideas of neo-marxist theorists such as Meillassoux (1981) and Wolpe (1972).

However, as the chapter progresses, I show my increasing frustration with the approach implied by these theories. Although both Meillassoux and Wolpe can provide inroads into understanding how unpaid domestic work can benefit some fractions of capital at some moments, they tell us little about women's power to change this situation. The small-scale guerrilla battles that take place daily in order to ensure that communities are guaranteed access to water are nearly always dominated by the presence of women. Trying to make better sense of these everyday struggles, I turn to Bozzoli's (1995) critique of Wolpe in which she invokes the importance of "domestic struggle". Bozzoli argues that "domestic struggles" are directed both internally and externally. Internally they seek to transform relations of patriarchy; externally they can challenge the very foundations upon which capitalism rests. Thus, whilst Bozzoli sees patriarchy and capitalism as separate logics, women's domestic struggles can serve to challenge both logics simultaneously. In a slightly different vein, writers such as Daines and Seddon (1994) have focussed particular attention on the role of women in struggles against structural adjustment. Here, the gendered division of labour ensures that women are the most negatively affected by increases in food prices associated with structural adjustment. These struggles against structural adjustment are then seen to lead to greater

empowerment, a developing group consciousness and the possibilities for different development trajectories.

I have enormous admiration for this work and argue it sheds much light on some of the strategic possibilities within the waterscape but, as I apply it to Durban's waterscape, I am conscious of a tendency to romanticise women's struggles. Thus, in the final part of the chapter I turn to one final way in which theorists have attempted to make sense of the intersection of capitalism and everyday practices of reproduction. Here, I follow the work of feminist standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartsock (1983a, 1983b), Sandra Harding (2004) and (in a slightly different vein) Donna Haraway (1991). Rather than making the teleological argument that capitalism and patriarchy will automatically lead to a developing revolutionary consciousness amongst women, I look at the new *epistemological* possibilities that are opened up by women's experiences of oppression in the waterscape, before going on to see how this might lead to the possibility of new forms of group consciousness. First, I clarify whether it might be possible to identify a distinctive standpoint shaped by such experiences – focussing in particular on the way in which socio-natural relationships are mediated by women's labour. Secondly, I try to explore some of the latent epistemological possibilities that might be opened up from such situated knowledges. This brings me back to a consideration of the events of 11th February 2003 described at the beginning of this chapter.

The overall structure of the chapter is first to consider the ways in which patriarchy is inscribed into Durban's waterscape. Then, as I move into considering how this patriarchy intersects with, but is separate from, processes of capital accumulation, I look at neo-marxist theories of the domestic community. As I become frustrated with the

passive light in which women are portrayed in such theories, I move on to look at domestic struggles. Finally, I explore the epistemological possibilities that are opened up through an exploration of women's situated knowledges of the waterscape. In doing so, I argue we make steps towards the development of a feminist historical materialist perspective.

1. A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR

“Even for people who come to meetings and are supposedly progressive, women still collect water” (Community Meeting: Bhambayi)

For virtually anyone who has conducted research in the Global South, it will come as little surprise that women in Durban were largely responsible for collecting water and ensuring the household has sufficient access to water on a daily basis. The reasons for this gendered division of labour²⁸ are many, but might be seen to lie predominantly in social stereotypes emanating from the fact that because women bear children, they are seen to be responsible for reproductive and domestic tasks. Even if such stereotypes persist, the nature of the work conducted by women and the time taken on reproductive tasks changes with the introduction of new technologies for water delivery. Within eThekweni Municipality, these variations are geographically inscribed into the

²⁸ Hartsock discusses the “sexual division of labour” as opposed to the “gendered division of labour” in order to stress her desire “not to separate nature and nurture or biology and culture” and also “to keep hold of the bodily aspect of existence” (1983b: 233). I have chosen to use the latter term, because of the specificity of the activities discussed in the waterscape and the specific way in which water carrying comes to be gendered.

waterscape. Thus, in areas where standpipes predominate, more time is spent by women collecting water than in areas where household connections predominate.

Out of three areas in which I conducted fieldwork, the historical memory of these changes was most fresh in Mzinyathi. Here, the municipality had installed groundtanks (as described in the introduction and Chapter 4) at people's houses within the last three months. Prior to the installation of groundtanks, the majority of local women had been forced to walk anywhere between fifteen minutes and one hour to collect water from the Inanda reservoir. Prior to this, some residents remembered collecting water from the Umgeni River and others had relied on wells installed by the KwaZulu administration under apartheid. Out of the twenty residents interviewed, all agreed that the work of collecting water had been carried out by women and children (Household Interviews Mzinyathi 25th March 2003). The number of journeys to and from the reservoir to collect water had varied, depending on household size and proximity to the water source. For one household, living twenty minutes walk from the reservoir, four to six journeys had been made per day to collect water. Eight residents live in this household. If each journey permitted the collection of twenty five litres of water (the average volume of the type of plastic container used) this would suggest somewhere between twelve and nineteen litres of water being consumed by each household member per day – a relatively large volume considering the distance covered (for comparisons see Hemson 2003b). This number of journeys was dependent upon the work of one female household member.

Other households concurred that the average number of buckets required was somewhere between about four and six, for an eight to twelve person household. In contrast to the first example, in several of these households, the work would be shared

amongst women and children. Thus, another household of twelve was able to make one trip with four household members (carrying one bucket each) in the morning and one trip in the afternoon. The journey to the dam lasted half an hour. What emerges from the interviews is that, prior to the installation of groundtanks, female household members were spending anywhere between about one hour and four hours per day collecting water for the household (Household Interviews Mzinyathi: 25th March 2003). With the installation of groundtanks, this time should, in theory, be reduced to zero. Although not necessarily transforming the relations of patriarchy within the community, new technologies might be seen to liberate women from the burden of tasks associated with water collection. However, as previous chapters have shown, the liberatory potential of technology is not a foregone conclusion.

At the time of research, the central manifolds supplying the groundtanks in Mzinyathi had not yet been restricted to deliver only 200 litres per day. In an interview with the head of eThekweni Water Services, it emerged that this was simply a matter of the municipality awaiting delivery of hardware in order to programme an electronic limiter at the manifold (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003). Although I have no hard evidence for this, it can reasonably be surmised that if, when programmed, the entire 200 litres of water is used prior to the evening meal, women will again be expected to return to their trek to and from the dam. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, necessary water consumption should be seen as having social as well as biophysical limits (Arrighi 1970). Thus, it might be expected that what people feel to be socially necessary in Mzinyathi might rise slightly. Again, the work to ensure this socially necessary volume of water is met is likely to be performed by women. The groundtank thereby reduces

women's unpaid work, before being supplemented by a new technology that might increase the amount of work women perform once more.

In the areas of Inanda in which research was conducted, a variety of technologies were in place, ranging from standpipes to semi-pressure household connections. All these have reduced the amount of unpaid labour performed by women to some extent; although again, this has often occurred with an implicit assumption that female household members will still continue to carry out at least some tasks in order to ensure sufficient water. In the Bhambayi area of Inanda, where standpipes are the primary means of delivering water, households are dependent upon somewhere between about three and four visits to standpipes per day. The 2001 census suggests that in the Ward in which Bhambayi is located, 2,562 households access water from a standpipe that lies within 200m of their home and 3,036 households have to walk over 200m to access a standpipe, implying a heavy workload for many within the community. Although journey times to these standpipes are much smaller than the walk to the dam for most households in Mzinyathi, residents noted that queues would often build up at standpipes during the weekends and women might wait for as long as an hour to be able to fill one plastic container:

“Some days the standpipes do run out of water. There are queues on some days, especially at weekends. Sometimes you can wait for up to an hour, especially if people are doing their washing”

(Interview: Msami 28th February 2003)

Both the community workshop we held in Bhambayi and the household interviews confirmed that women and children were generally responsible for all this work.

In the Amaoti area of Inanda, households were dependent upon both “free-water” standpipes, similar to those found in Bhambayi and were also reliant on bailiff operated standpipes or water kiosks as described in the previous chapter. In the Amatikwe area, it was curious to note the re-introduction of a free water standpipe to an area in which semi-pressure connections had been installed. On interviewing those using this standpipe, it became clear that residents were returning to this standpipe because of the burden of bills and because several households had been disconnected from their semi-pressure connections because of non-payment of bills (Standpipe Interviews Amatikwe: 1st February 2003). From these interviews, it became clear that the burden of paying water bills was largely falling on women. Here, we begin to see some of the ways in which the burden of collecting water has been transformed from a physical one to a mental burden, as women are assumed to take on the responsibility of ensuring that households are guaranteed access to water through negotiating the payment of bills.

In KwaMashu C, this problem was much more overt. Here, as in other areas, the community workshop was dominated by the presence of women. It became clear that in the “Island” area of the township in which the majority of research was conducted, bills are almost without exception registered in the name of a female household member. Whilst on the surface, this would seem to imply some form of empowerment over the affairs of the household, with the enormous arrears being amassed by local residents, it became clear that women are increasingly viewed as being responsible for piecing together the meagre earnings of the household and for the continued survival of the

household through access to basic services. Without eThekweni Water Services having an office in the township, it was women who would make the journey to the centre of Durban in order to negotiate arrears. It was predominantly women who were responsible for ensuring a connection was restored after visits from disconnection bailiffs. Several of the issues emerging from this are explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

From this brief survey of the three areas in which research was conducted, it emerges that, although the gendered division of labour might vary historically and geographically, it remains remarkably persistent. Although there are undoubted positive outcomes from the ability of a household to access water, patriarchy persists, as will be seen in the next section, capitalism's encounter with patriarchy is also remarkably adaptive to these changing historical and geographical circumstances.

2. INTERSECTIONS OF CAPITALISM AND PATRIARCHY

2.2. Neo-marxist Articulations

In the context of African studies and anthropology, the starting point for many attempts to theorise the intersection between social reproduction and capitalism has been the work of Claude Meillassoux. Meillassoux's work lays explicit emphasis on the importance of the "domestic community" as the locus for reproduction. The oppression of women, he argues, is a result of their position as the "living means of reproduction" and a result of societal struggles to control and manipulate reproductive processes:

“The domestic community is indeed the only economic and social system which manages the physical reproduction of human beings, the reproduction of the producers and social reproduction at large through a comprehensive set of institutions, by the ordered manipulation of the living means of reproduction: that is women”

(Meillassoux 1981: xiii)

In an elegant conceptual move, Meillassoux then goes on to argue that such an analysis connects marxism with the problem of the expansion of capitalism. Thus, in the latter part of *Maidens, Meal and Money* (ibid), Meillassoux looks much more closely at the workings of imperialism and specifically at the “exploitation of the domestic community”. Here, he rejects explanations of underdevelopment based on unequal exchange (see for example the work of Samir Amin 1977), arguing that instead one should focus on “the conditions that make payment of low salaries possible” in the South (1981: 93). These conditions, he argues, are constituted by the often invisible, unpaid work carried out in the domestic community. Such a situation arises because of the ability of a capitalist mode of production to articulate with non-capitalist modes of production (subsistence economies)²⁹. The cost of reproducing labour power is thereby significantly reduced and the continued subordination of women in the global South thereby serves to encourage and facilitate imperialist expansion. Thus,

“It is by establishing organic relations between capitalist and domestic economies that imperialism set up the mechanism of reproducing cheap labour-power to its profit – a reproductive process which, at present, is the fundamental cause of

²⁹ As Tony Lemon has reminded me, this should not necessarily be understood to be *radically* different from the situation described in Engels’ *Conditions of the Working Class in England* in which low wages necessitated the entry of all family members into the capitalist economy – thereby producing a somewhat similar articulation. The difference lies in Meillassoux’s recognition of the *maintenance* of the non-capitalist economy.

underdevelopment at one end and of the wealth of the capitalist sector at the other. Socially and politically, it is also the root cause of the division in the international working class”

(*ibid*: 95)

One of the theoretical pillars on which Meillassoux’s understanding rests is an innovative interpretation of continuous or ongoing primitive accumulation (1981: Part II, Chapter 3), something that, again, he argues to be at the heart of imperialist exploitation of families in the South. This has some interesting resonances with my argument in Chapter 3 - that the part commercialisation of Umgeni Water (and the concomitant pressure on eThekweni Municipality to raise tariffs and disconnect residents for non-payment) might be evidence of a process of ongoing primitive accumulation. Thus, we have something of an appealing conceptual bridge between the previous arguments and a possible understanding of the gendered nature of Durban’s waterscape. In this bridge, we might find a productive way of theorising the encounter between a waterscape being produced as an accumulation strategy and the continued gendered division of labour. However, there are important differences with the argument I developed previously. Whereas my argument in Chapter 3 was that new aspects of public life are being prised open for profitable investment (and that *this* should be understood as ongoing primitive accumulation), Meillassoux seems to argue that the *preservation* of the domestic sector, the continued subordination of women in the global South, and the absolute surplus value to be gained through the payment of low wages, is itself a form of perpetual primitive accumulation. The intersection of patriarchy and imperialist expansion constitute primitive accumulation, as women’s unpaid work in the Global South props up profit rates in the North: “It is thus not enough to assert that primitive accumulation is a

transitory and initiatory phenomenon; it is *inherent* in the process of the development of the capitalist mode of production” (1981: 105, emphasis in original). And, earlier, “it is by *preserving* the domestic sector which is producing subsistence goods, that imperialism realises and, further, perpetuates primitive accumulation” (1981: 97, emphasis in original)

In some ways, the argument would seem to follow that of Rosa Luxemburg: capitalism is seen to depend on a non-capitalist hinterland for its very survival. For Luxemburg, however, a brutal transformation occurs through this expansion, ensuring that capitalism is the author of its own downfall. Harvey (2003), in slight contrast appears to emphasise transformative potential within a first wave of primitive accumulation as the fetters of feudalism are finally broken (and the subordination of women is at least disrupted?) but more destructive tendencies within a second phase, that period which he considers to be an era of accumulation by dispossession. For Meillassoux, however, stasis and “preservation” are more accurate features of his understanding of primitive accumulation. Transformative potential is much less of a feature.

Meillassoux’s argument bears many similarities to that of Harold Wolpe, one of the foremost theorists of the links between capitalism and apartheid in South Africa. For Wolpe, prior to 1948, cheap labour power in South Africa had been dependent on the exploitation of a domestic economy in the African reserves (as envisaged in the 1913 Land Act) and, as a result, a system of segregation of Africans and whites had developed. However, a decline in conditions in the reserves, exacerbated by an increase in population, alongside the growth of an increasingly urbanised African population, led to rising militancy in the urban areas, as workers demanded wage increases. Apartheid was

the result of a need to ensure continued access to cheap labour power and the urgent suppression of militant forces threatening the old order of segregation (Wolpe 1972).

In both Meillassoux's work and in Wolpe's, the articulation of a sphere of reproduction with a sphere of capitalist production generates a crucial space for broader societal changes. Thus, Wolpe's interpretation has been used as a theoretical springboard for analysing the role of black women in South African society (see references in Bozzoli 1995: 122). Similarly, in anthropology, Meillassoux's work was used to deepen and broaden understandings of gendered relations. Reduced to its very simplest form, the argument about gender relations runs that: whilst men are drawn into a capitalist mode of production in urban areas, women are relied on for the work of reproducing new members of a capitalist workforce and for the health and welfare of their husbands as they periodically return to the rural areas.

There are clearly several potentially important inroads into making better sense of the politics of Durban's waterscape through such an analysis. The situation in contemporary Durban, however, is quite different in several important ways from that described by Wolpe. First, families in the areas in and around Durban are no longer reliant on migrant labour to anything like the extent that they were in the model proposed by Wolpe. Since 2000, all three case study areas have been included within the expanded borders of the eThekweni municipality. Ostensibly, there is nothing like the distinction between the rural and the urban (nor, more importantly, between the reserves and the white metropolises) within the municipality. This geographical distinction is fundamental to Wolpe's analysis. Related to this, subsistence agriculture was not noted as being of

importance in any of the household interviews I conducted³⁰, so the relevance of a domestic economy – in the manner envisaged by either Wolpe or Meillassoux – is significantly reduced within such areas. Only one interviewee commented that the household, one day, hoped to grow vegetables. However, at the time, the supply of water (from a groundtank) was too limited (Household Interviews Mzinyathi: 25th March 2003).

The undermining of this domestic economy is, of course, central to the analysis put forward by Wolpe, and the contradictions opened up by the undermining of a subsistence way of life are at the heart of the theory. Thus, Wolpe notes that “The major contradiction of South African society between the capitalist mode of production and African pre-capitalist economies is giving way to a dominant contradiction *within* the capitalist economy” ([1972]1995: 88) – this dominant contradiction being the clash between capital and labour in an integrated capitalist economy. However, even if the “dominant” contradiction did not quite heighten to the point that Wolpe thought it might, and even with the current reconfiguration of the relationship between the capitalist and non-capitalist economies, the separation of domestic spaces from the workplace remains distinct (even if fundamentally related). Though no longer reliant on a domestic economy characterised by subsistence agriculture, the three areas in which I conducted fieldwork – KwaMashu, Inanda and Mzinyathi – still showed evidence of a marked sexual division of labour. It is this distinction that still remains so crucial to this chapter.

Secondly, the contemporary situation differs in that the division of labour has transformed in ways that Meillassoux and Wolpe, perhaps, did not foresee. The migrant

³⁰ Interestingly, from my brief experiences working as a researcher in rural areas for the HSRC, subsistence agriculture was relatively uncommon here too, raising important questions about whether or not a peasantry can be considered to exist in South Africa. This was brought to my attention repeatedly by David Hemson.

male breadwinner of Wolpe's analysis is now almost as likely to be female. This is not to suggest that the sexual division of labour in the home has transformed. Women carry out both unpaid work at home and waged labour in the city: the waged domestic economy providing a source of income for many female breadwinners. For some women, this has meant that they are the migrant labourers within the household, with some residing at the homes of their employer during the week whilst returning to the township or informal settlement at weekends. This became clear when carrying out interviews in Mzinyathi. On several occasions we were met by men who were unable to answer our questions, commenting that the wife, mother or partner was living in the city for the week where she was a domestic worker. Frequently, as in the case of several of the households interviewed in KwaMashu C, families are reliant on the single pension of one member of the household – often a woman. On top of this, a large informal economy provides the source of employment for several household members, with children or mothers working as hawkers on trains or commuting to the bustling Warwick junction in the centre of town.

Finally, as was shown in Chapter 3, reproduction has been more fully prised open as a terrain for capitalist accumulation and power relations have been reconfigured as families try to weave together incomes from whatever sources they can in order to survive (see Bakker and Gill 2003). Even if waged work spaces and domestic spaces remain quite separate, it is no longer tenable to see the domestic sphere as articulating with a distinct capitalist sphere. In spite of this quite different context, it is worth attempting to unravel some of the insights from Wolpe and Meillassoux in order to see

how they might inform an understanding of the encounter between the gendered division of labour and capitalism in Durban's waterscape

From the brief review of the gendered division of labour given earlier in this chapter, it seems clear that certain aspects of water provision within Durban still rely on the unpaid work of women. This situation is particularly prevalent in informal areas of the city where standpipes remain the main mode of water delivery. The examples I gave previously were from the Bhambayi and Amaoti areas of Inanda. The cost of introducing standpipes, especially in their more recent "free-water" form, is much less than what it is to introduce household connections. One might assume that budgetary constraints within the municipality would have a particularly negative effect on women, as standpipes might be favoured over full pressure connections. Already there lies in this example the possibility of seeing connections between the exploitation of a domestic community in the waterscape and the implementation of low-cost technologies.

For municipal administrators, however, this calculation is not quite as simple as it might seem. Importantly, the introduction of standpipes is seen to lead to a much greater reliance on illegal connections by individual households (Interview Bailey: 29th November 2002). If a water main brings supplies to a community but not to individual houses, individuals are much more likely to divert those supplies to their own homes. Thus, standpipes become a major source of unaccounted for water within the city³¹. As

³¹ As a somewhat patronising illustration of this point, the Head of Research and Development at eThekweni Water Services, Reg Bailey, has a poster-size photograph of a standpipe behind his desk. This standpipe was photographed in a Durban township after having been tampered with in order to ensure that the supply was constant and the tap could not be shut off. For him, this represented the waste that results from standpipes – and by implication, the waste that would result from unlimited free water. In interviews he pointed to the colloquial expression for standpipes – "Soweto Washing Machines".

an interim measure, however, standpipes are still likely to be the favoured option, based on short-term cost calculations.

More recently, so-called “Free-Water Standpipes” have significantly reduced water loss at the tap by preventing them from being left on for a significant amount of time without a bucket in which to collect the water. Figure 5 shows an example of one such standpipe in the Bhambayi area of Inanda:



Figure 6: “Free Water” Standpipe in Bhambayi

In the words of the Head of Research and Development at eThekweni Water Services, these taps “Don’t cost money in Rands and Cents but rather in energy spent”. Thus, if an unwaged household member can be relied upon to carry water from the standpipe to the home, it could be argued that the time spent by *waged* labourers carrying out *unwaged*

work can be reduced. Put somewhat crudely, the waged worker can then be expected to either work longer hours or more productive hours because they have been cared for by an unwaged member of the household. Following Meillassoux's argument, it could be argued that the continued implementation of standpipes, represents a form of primitive accumulation as profits are maintained through the exploitation of the domestic community. This argument might hold in two ways. First, the overall cost to other water users in the city is reduced. Industry, for example, can pay lower water rates because, in the short term, the subordination of women can be relied upon to ensure a healthy workforce without the additional cost of providing individual household connections. Secondly, wages in the capitalist economy can be kept to a minimum because this domestic work remains unwaged (for an attack on such a situation, see the arguments of Dalla Costa and James (1975) and the movement for "wages for housework").

Expressed in such terms, the argument seems a little conspiratorial and it is difficult to imagine either employers or municipal bureaucrats thinking in quite such functionalist terms. However, such struggles are, indirectly, continually shaping the politics of the city. Thus, industry has shown the potential power it has to be able to shape water rates as local textile manufacturers protested high water rates through threatening relocation. Working through the local Chamber of Commerce, these textile manufacturers were able to force the municipality into refusing Umgeni Water's bulk-water tariff increases in 2002. Whilst at the time it appreciated the added weight of the Chamber of Commerce in confronting Umgeni Water, eThekweni Water Services has now backed itself into a position whereby local capitalists have considerable say over the water rates they are prepared to pay. The chances of achieving the sorts of cross-

subsidisation that might be necessary to introduce household connections throughout the municipality are thereby reduced. If this is the case, women's (unpaid) labour is likely to be relied on for years to come in order to ensure cheap water rates across the municipality.

In a slightly different vein, it was shown in the previous chapter that the free-water policy is *itself* a cost-cutting measure. By permitting the municipality to intervene more than ever in domestic household supplies and by giving it greater power to restrict supplies, the municipality has ensured that bulk-water payments can be kept to a minimum. Such an argument was restated at a Department for Water Affairs and Forestry meeting on the future of rural water projects and on the consolidation of EU funding for the so-called *Masibambane* programme in February 2003³². Here, in strange echoes of Meillassoux, it was heard that the physical limitations of carrying more than a certain amount of water per day could provide the clearest case *for* a local government roll-out of free water. Reduced to its crudest terms, the argument ran that free water standpipes are a reliable way of limiting domestic water consumption because people's spines will be crushed before the local government is bankrupted. Women's bodies could be used to ensure people only consumed a limited volume of water. A preserved domestic sphere can provide a severe limitation on the potentially spiralling costs of implementing a free water policy.

The notion of a preserved domestic sphere can therefore be of some value in beginning to understand the changes taking place within Durban's waterscape. However, there are some fairly fundamental problems with the way in which the encounter between the gendered division of labour and a capitalist system of accumulation is understood

³² I attended this as a researcher for the HSRC.

through such neo-marxist articulations. Perhaps the greatest danger is that women might come to be viewed as passive objects, seemingly manipulated to fit the functional needs of an unfolding capitalist logic (rather like the manipulation assumed to be possible by the bureaucrats engineering the bodily limitations of a free water policy). Whilst located outside the capitalist mode of production in Meillassoux and Wolpe's models (but being articulated with it), in the contemporary model I have tried to sketch women are fundamental parts of a capitalist system of accumulation but their actions and struggles remain unrecognised. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this passivity and the invisibility of women in such accounts has been one of the main sources of criticism of structural Marxist, or neo-marxist, readings of reproduction. As Henrietta Moore notes, instead of analysing the form(s) of women's subordination, Meillassoux assumes it to be an established and unproblematic state of affairs (1988: 51). In a similar vein, Bozzoli says of Wolpe, "the model itself provides no explanation of the fact that it is *women* who remained behind and *men* who left" (1995: 122).

Other criticisms abound. Thus, Meillassoux has been criticised for a blunt understanding of reproduction, as Moore argues that his single conception of reproduction should actually be separated into three: social reproduction; reproduction of the labour force; and human/biological reproduction (1988: 53). In their more recent analyses of global political economy and social reproduction, Bakker and Gill refine the first category to include "social practices connected to caring, socialisation and fulfilment of human needs" (2003: 2). None of this refinement is clear in the work of either Meillassoux or Wolpe. The carrying of water in Durban might be broadly referred to as part of a "reproductive sphere", without any clarification as to whether it is capitalism,

workers or children being reproduced. The implication is that it is all three, although these mechanisms are not explored. On top of this, as Hartsock (1983a) observes, it can be politically debilitating and ontologically wrong to separate out production and reproduction into the separate spheres so crucial for the above analysis.

Finally, and it is to this that I turn next in trying to develop a more nuanced and yet vibrant understanding of capitalism's encounter with the gendered division of labour, both Wolpe and Meillassoux's notion of *struggle* is limited and vague. Although the struggle between capital and labour is clearly a crucial force in Wolpe's theorisation of the development of apartheid, the links with both rural and domestic struggles are unclear. The sense of real people or of communities of people engaged in political economic struggle is absent in the analysis. Because of this (and in spite of a few asides to rural uprisings), it is difficult not to be left with the impression that Wolpe's militants (if alive at all) remain male, predominantly urbanised workers.

2.2. 'Domestic Struggles'

In a sensitive critique of Wolpe's argument, Bozzoli urges us to develop an understanding of 'domestic struggles', arguing that these "may in fact condition and shape the very form taken by capitalism" (1995: 126). She continues

"It is not only that 'domestic struggles' are the key to unravelling the evolving subordination of women. It is also that they provide a crucial dimension to our understanding of a whole variety of other factors, ranging from the composition of the labour force, to the form of the state." (*ibid*).

Here, we see a quite different encounter between patriarchy and capitalism – one mediated and shaped through women’s struggles. Bozzoli’s broader conception of ‘domestic struggle’ can be separated into struggle *within* the domestic system and struggle between the domestic and the capitalist sphere. The wildcat battles that continually take place in Durban over water issues might lie, I argue, at the interface of these two areas of domestic struggle, neither being confined to a direct challenge to market-driven modes of water delivery nor to a mode of provisioning water that is based on a patriarchal division of labour.

Some of the history of such domestic struggles has been well documented in Durban. The aforementioned boycott of municipal beerhalls in 1929 (see Chapter 2) was dominated by women (Maylam 1996: 11). Similarly, beerhall riots in Cato Manor in the 1950s consisted of complex layers of struggle between men, women and the apartheid state (Edwards 1996). Although noting the continued gender imbalance, Hemson (1996) has written on the important role played by women in the Inanda marshals movement of the early 1990s. Curiously, however, in the foremost account of popular struggles in Durban in the contemporary era, Ashwin Desai (2002) pays no attention to the gendered nature of struggles amongst “Durban’s poors”. Rather like Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude, Desai’s description of ‘the poors’ is amorphous and undifferentiated, serving as a particularly blunt tool for understanding the complex relationships between different actors and the tensions that often emerge between those on the same side of popular struggles.

In reality, domestic struggles continue to challenge the status quo in South Africa. They continue to reshape relations within and outwith the domestic sphere. In a

particularly illustrative vignette, South African novelist Zakes Mda paints a picture of the situation in one prototypical, post-apartheid informal settlement, through the male character of Toloki and his female soul mate, Noria. The sketch captures some of the transforming relationships between a political elite emerging from the hierarchies of the ANC and some of the relationships between grassroots activists in the informal settlement:

“Toloki wonders further why it is that the people who do all the work at the settlement are women, yet all the national and regional leaders he saw at the meeting were men – except of course, for the bejewelled wife of the Mercedes Benz leader, who is also an elected leader in her own right.

‘You are right, Toloki. And I hear that it is not only here where the situation is as you describe. All over the country, in what the politicians call grassroot communities, women take the lead. But very few women ever reach the executive level. Or even the regional or branch committee levels. I don’t know why it is like this, Toloki.’

‘You know what I think, Noria? From what I have seen today, I believe the salvation of the settlement lies in the hands of women’”

(Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying*)

Just as Toloki describes the salvation of this South African community resting in the hands of women, so Saskia Sassen refers, in a global context, to the ‘feminisation of survival’ (2000). Noting how women are largely responsible for the health and education of household members, she argues that “households and whole communities are increasingly dependent on women for their survival” (*ibid*: 503). Going beyond a discussion of survival strategies and theories which, potentially, see women as victims of globalisation, Daines and Seddon (1994) attempt to document women’s responses to structural adjustment programmes in order to emphasise the many ways in which women ‘fight for survival’ and how they challenge, struggle against, and seek to defy structural adjustment in the global South. In a shorter piece, Epprecht (1993) argues for the same,

when writing the history of social change in Africa. Thus, he calls for a recovery of women's true role in making this history. In emphasising the militancy of women's protests through history, he quotes South African political scientist Tom Lodge who writes that exclusively female protest in the apartheid era "was characterised by an appetite for confrontation qualitatively sharper than that usually displayed by those in which men predominated" (quoted in Epprecht 1993).

For Moshenberg, a greater understanding of the role played by female militancy also begins to open the way to alternative ways of making sense of the world. He argues that "The struggle for survival and for dignity on the part of female militancy is a struggle for humanity, for all, in the context of imperial degradation, precisely because it defines wealth and power according to human needs" (2002). He uses this notion of female militancy as the basis for a critique of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) and its authors' apparent unwillingness to recognise the fundamental role of women in challenging the "postmodern, decentred empire".

In the following chapter of this thesis, I describe the protest in the Amaoti area of Inanda that followed the events described in the introduction to this chapter. This protest was organised and dominated by women fighting for the survival of their community and engaging in deeply political acts in order to see their goals achieved. Thus, not only does the salvation of our communities lie with women as Toloki recognises in the quotation taken from Zakes Mda, but the possibility of a better world and an emancipatory democratic politics might also lie in the hands of women. Numerous other accounts of such struggles could be recounted and it is a vital area of future research to investigate the

manner in which such struggles might lead to a transformation of the relations of patriarchy that manifest themselves in the waterscape.

However, as I noted earlier, to simply replace proletarian struggle with a more gender-aware ‘domestic struggle’ would be to reconfirm what Holloway refers to as the problematic tradition of scientific marxism and its search for the pure critical revolutionary subject (2002b: 118). There is a danger in such accounts of fetishising Third World Woman (Mohanty 1984) as the heroine saviour of oppositional history. On top of this, there is a danger of slipping into a teleological reading of society in which women’s subject positions automatically compel them to effect revolutionary change. Instead, in the next section, I wish to look at what Jameson refers to as “the *conditions of possibility* of new ways of thinking” (2004 emphasis added) about political action and how this might be seen to emerge from efforts to explore a feminist historical materialism in Durban’s waterscape. Indeed in large parts of Durban, this seems all the more important for the very *absence* of overt forms of resistance. Through exploring the possibilities for a feminist historical materialism, we see potentials for making the transition from resilience strategies to resistance tactics (see Katz 2004). Thus, I argue, we urgently need to think through the possible basis for political acts, the potential starting points for mobilisations and the distant hope for a way of thinking beyond the narrow confines of our reified minds, as described in the previous chapter. Feminist standpoint theory offers helpful ways into such an analysis and I begin the next section with a brief introduction to feminist standpoint approaches.

2.3. Locating Standpoints and Situating Knowledges

Sandra Harding writes that “standpoint theory is a kind of organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice” (2004: 3). Perhaps the three best-known theorists associated with *feminist* standpoint approaches are Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway. As Harding suggests, each theorist develops the notion of a standpoint in slightly different ways – something often related to the disciplinary interests of the individual theorist. I wish to focus in most depth on the work of the political scientist, Nancy Hartsock – partly because of her attempt to develop an explicitly feminist *historical materialism*, partly because of the explicit links she makes between the work of Georg Lukács and a feminist standpoint approach and partly because of the importance she places on the material interchange with nature involved in women’s work in patriarchal society. This allows for both a conceptual bridge with the previous chapter in this thesis, as well as providing key insights into the gendered relations of power comprising the waterscape in Durban. Throughout trying to understand these relations of power, I try to supplement Hartsock’s thinking with insights from Haraway, Lukács, and other standpoint theorists.

The starting point for Hartsock’s seminal paper on “the feminist standpoint” (1983a) is an attempt to develop what she considers to be a specifically feminist historical materialism. This, she argues, must take into account *all* human activity and not just the activity more characteristic of males in capitalist society. The importance of a standpoint, she argues, can be traced back to Lukács’s (Hegelian) reading of Marx (see Lukács 1971)

and it is important to situate the work within such a legacy (Harding 2004; Jameson 2004). Lukács's work played a key role in shaping the understanding of the waterscape developed in the previous section. In one of the key conceptual moves in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), Lukács develops the notion (from Marx) that epistemology is structured and grows in complex and contradictory ways from material life. The intriguing possibility is thereby opened up that quite different epistemologies might emerge from the different relationships humans have with material life. Specific epistemologies might, for example, be identifiable with a class of capitalists, just as specific epistemologies might be possible from a proletarian standpoint. This provides the basis for Lukács's critique of the partial vision of bourgeois theory in *History and Class Consciousness*. The same argument is made by Hartsock in her association of market-based theories of power with the exchange abstraction. Here, Hartsock emphasises that it is human activity – and therefore one's position in relation to this activity – that shapes reality. In the second of the Theses on Feuerbach, Marx writes that:

“The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man³³ must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question”

(Marx 1974: 422)

Hartsock echoes such a position:

“The epistemological (and even ontological) significance of human activity is made clear in Marx's argument not only that persons are active but that reality itself consists of ‘sensuous human activity, practice’”

(Hartsock 1983b: 118)

³³ As with most translations, the German word Mensch has been taken to mean “man” here, rather than the more gender neutral original.

In philosophical terms, this is a seemingly paradoxical position at which to arrive.

Seemingly opposed theoretical camps are brought together. Fredric Jameson summarises the apparent philosophical paradox at the heart of *History and Class Consciousness*, before emphasising how the same productive tension is evident in feminist standpoint theory:

“What is argued in this text is essentially an *epistemological* priority of a particular social group or class in advanced society. Whatever the group or class identified and “privileged” by such an argument, therefore, the form of the argument is itself unusual and demands attention in its own right, since in its very structure *it seeks to relate a truth claim to the social structure and phenomenological experience of a specific collectivity*”

(Jameson 2004: 143 emphasis added)

In developing such an approach, as I alluded to earlier, the majority of Hartsock’s claims are developed through looking at differing theorisations of power. She argues that the dominant theories of power revolve around market-based models. These, she argues, are related to an understanding of power through “the exchange abstraction”. At first, Hartsock follows Marx’s critique of political economy. In doing so, she takes us back to a remarkable passage in *Capital* in which Marx seeks to show that previous political economists failed to recognise the most fundamental insights into capitalism through remaining in the “noisy sphere” of exchange, oblivious to the ‘hidden abode of production’ in which the secret of profit-making might finally be laid bare. As is well known, through an attempt to unlock this hidden abode, Marx was able to write *Capital* from what is considered to be the perspective of the working class. As Lukács went on to show, from this perspective, the *possibility* of a radically different epistemological basis

from which to make sense of the world is opened up. From its unique position, the proletariat is able to dissolve the reified forms of the “bad” reality that comprises contemporary society, and thereby recognise the underlying processes and hidden potentials for critique. Through beginning to unlock such potentials (hidden within the developing tendencies of history), a new reality is thereby exposed.

Hartsock broadens this understanding by arguing that *other* oppressed groups engaged in specific activities are afforded specific standpoints from which to view (and transform) the social structure. Again, she argues such standpoints give rise to radically different epistemologies:

“If, to paraphrase Marx, we follow the worker home from the factory, we can once again perceive a change in the *dramatis personae*. He who before followed behind as the worker, timid and holding back, with nothing to expect but a hiding, now strides in front, while a third person, not specifically present in Marx’s account of the transaction between capitalist and worker (both of whom are male) follows timidly behind, carrying groceries, baby and diapers”

(Hartsock 1983a: 291)

She continues:

“Given what has been said about the life activity of the proletarian, one can see that, because the sexual division of labour means that much of the work involved in reproducing labour power is done by women, and because much of the male worker’s contact with nature outside the factory is mediated by women, the vision of reality which grows from the female experience is deeper and more thoroughgoing than that available to the worker”

(*ibid*)

Although, I might be slightly more cautious than Hartsock in arguing that social activity produces a *better* vantage point, her framework suggests at least (in keeping with

Lukács and Marx) that different life activities and different experiences of oppression might unlock new epistemological possibilities. This is not in any way to argue that epistemologies are ascribed to certain groups in a simple or direct manner. Nor is it to argue in an essentialist fashion that all within one group will always share the same standpoint and the same epistemology (for more on this debate see Haraway 1991, Harding 1993, Hartsock 2004). Instead, Hartsock roots her analysis in the social relations between different groups and (as with Marx), in the labour carried out by such groups.

The importance of the latter is emphasised in Harvey's discussion of situated knowledges. First, Harvey draws attention to what he terms the "vulgar" conception of situatedness which

"dwells almost entirely on the relevance of individual biographies...The separateness of language games and discourses is emphasized, and difference is treated as biographically and sometimes even institutionally, socially, historically and geographically determined."

(Harvey 1996: 354-5)

He then contrasts this with a "far profounder and more dialectical sense of "situatedness"". The latter he detects in the work of Hartsock and Haraway. Above all, he argues that in this latter conception "situatedness is not seen as *separate and unrelated* difference, but as a *dialectical power relation* between oppressor and oppressed" (*ibid.* 355).

For Hartsock, grasping this dialectical relationship involves acknowledging the manner in which "social locations are structured by power relations" (2004: 243). She goes on to argue that:

“The focus is on the macroprocesses of power, those that, although they may be played out in individual lives, can be fully understood only at the level of society as a whole. To claim that we can understand the totality of social relations from a single perspective is as futile an effort as to claim that we can see everything from nowhere”

(Hartsock 2004: 244)

Here, the argument follows the relational methodologies used by others such as Ollman (1976), Harvey (1996) and Katz (2004). As her original argument progresses, Hartsock is able to move on to argue for the new possibilities that are opened up from the epistemology that lies immanent within the struggle for a standpoint. In a similarly Hegelian move to that of Lukács, she is able to argue that new potentials remain locked within the present. Thus, with the prising open of such potentials, a radical and transformative critique of society may be opened up. And through praxis, *reality* “*becomes*”. Hartsock’s aim is far from arguing for a new revolutionary subject – “the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history” criticised by Haraway (1991) and touched upon in my discussion of domestic struggles. Instead, her aim is to explore the historical roots of the possible.

The key epistemological claims that shape Hartsock’s original argument are summarised thus:

- “Material life not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations
- If material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for different groups, the vision for one is the inversion of the vision of the other. Thus, in systems of domination, the vision of rulers is always partial and perverse.
- The vision of the ruling class or gender, structures material relations and is therefore not simply false.
- The vision available to oppressed groups must be struggled for

- As an engaged vision, the understanding of the oppressed, the adoption of a standpoint exposes the real relations among human beings as inhuman, points beyond the present, and carries a historically liberatory role.” (1983a: 288)

Later, I will take issue with some of the stronger claims made here, instead arguing that all vision is to a lesser or greater extent partial and perverse (see Haraway 1991; Harding 2004); however, the feminist historical materialist framework I have painted in such broad brushstrokes is, I argue, a liberating guide for exploring some of the claims made in interviews during the course of this work.

3. LOCATING STANDPOINTS IN DURBAN’S WATERSCAPE

In working through the possibilities opened up by feminist standpoint theory in Durban’s waterscape, I suggest it is useful to highlight: first, whether or not a standpoint can be located and, secondly, to explore what, if any, epistemological possibilities might emerge from such a standpoint. Turning to the first point, whilst the gendered division of labour emerged as a point of discussion in all of the community workshops, perhaps not surprisingly, this rarely developed into a broader debate about how men and women’s understandings of water politics might differ. In contrast, in a workshop held on 5th March 2003 in the Bhambayi area of Inanda, a lengthier discussion developed. Within this discussion, I argue, we have some particularly revealing comments on work and perceptions of the waterscape. This particular community had been waiting for individual household connections for several years and, whilst new, subsidised houses had been built, these houses lacked water connections. Free water standpipes served as the main

mode of delivery and women acted as the main bearers of water, in order to carry out the tasks of washing, cooking and flushing newly installed (but not-yet-connected) toilets. The installation of flushing toilets without a water connection had already become a major source of tension within the community. This problem seemed to result from a lack of coordination between the municipal housing department and eThekweni Water Services (Interview Bailey: 14th February 2003), although there was also some suggestion that it was the result of the provincial government “fast-tracking” the building of homes against the wishes of the municipality, in order to placate a politically volatile area (Hemson 1996). Whoever might have been responsible, the result was more work for women, as greater proportions of their days were taken up collecting water for the home. Thus, as the workshop developed, and after an initial discussion of how the community had been accessing water and how this had changed over the last decade, we opened up questions about whether all in the community still considered water to be a women’s issue. The discussion begins with the comments of a woman who had been an active member within the local branch of the South African Communist Party:

Young Woman: Even for people who come to meetings and are supposedly progressive, women still collect water.

Young Man: But, what about all the single men who live in Bhambayi, they have to collect their own water.

Second Young Man: Women should still fetch water.

Young Woman: Even when men have to collect water out of need, they would rather find some way out of the situation because of the embarrassment. If men are plastering a house, women go again and again for water for them.

Old Man: If you go out now, it’s highly possible men will be collecting water in a wheelbarrow.

Young Woman: Yes, that's true but the general norm is for women to collect water. It's because of economic constraints that men are fetching water in wheelbarrows. Men are using it for a business. You never see them with just one bucket, always with a wheelbarrow. When you see men, they will be delivering it to the elderly or the sick for money.

Second Young Woman: 85% are still women but 15% would now be men.

Young Man: No, more men than that. Even if it is not for business men will collect water, even though the expectation is for women to do this. You'll be faced with questions: "Is your wife sick". Men are collecting water but the societal norm is otherwise and as a man collecting water you have to face this.

(Community Workshop Bhambayi: 5th March 2003)

Whilst the main thrust of the conversation is centred around the fact that it is generally women and not men who are considered to be responsible for carrying water, what is perhaps more interesting, and perhaps more revealing, is the circumstances in which men might be prepared to carry water. Thus, they might be more willing to accept the humiliation of being seen carrying water if they can carry it in a wheelbarrow because this would suggest that men are carrying water for money. As the young woman notes: "Men are using it for a business". The situation is one in which a gendered division of labour exists, albeit a division of labour that might be beginning to change. The nature of the labour carried out, however, is beginning to alter, as societal pressures mean that men are only prepared to carry water for a wage.

As I noted earlier, for Hartsock, the possibilities for a distinctive standpoint emerge from the differing material interchanges with nature that develop within the gendered division of labour. In Harding's summary: "Hartsock focuse[s] on the women's work that transforms 'raw nature' into social or cultural objects" (2004: 141). Although I will discuss the implications of these differing interchanges in much more detail later on,

at this stage it would seem to suggest that within Bhambayi at least distinctive standpoints might be seen to emerge from the differing relationships men and women have towards the division of labour manifest in the collection of water.

Interestingly, the situation in other areas would seem to confirm this division between the paid work of men and the unpaid work of women. Figure 7 captures the moment described at the beginning of this chapter in which we encountered an old man, Wellington, wheeling barrows of water up and down the hill in Amaoti in order to try and make some money.



Figure 7: Wellington, Carrying Water in Amaoti

Since the community water supply had ceased, roughly a thousand people had lost their nearest supply of water (see Lumsden and Loftus 2003). A market had opened up for entrepreneurs to undertake the wearisome task of carrying loads of water up and down the hill. Wellington was one of the first to be able to exploit this niche and charge for the service of carrying water for others. Thus, in order to ensure the survival of his family through a period of great insecurity, he had turned to one of the few commodities available to him, his labour power, and had sold this to any local households unable or unwilling to collect the water themselves. It is difficult to generalise from this situation; however, judging from the previous discussion cited from Bhambayi, it might be assumed that the structural position of Wellington, as a man in a patriarchal society, might have made it more permissible for him to be seen carrying water for a wage during this period of crisis. It might also suggest that Wellington's position with regard to water issues opened up different ways of thinking through a response to the local water crisis.

Such a response, although it could be seen as 'cashing in' on the fate of others, should not necessarily be viewed as morally lacking in any way. However, as the vignette at the start of this chapter suggests, it was not the *only* possible response. Thus, at the very same moment as the picture was taken, others in the community were organising a militant delegation to the offices of the local councillor in order to bring about a political transformation of the situation. The vast majority of these organisers were women. I would like to suggest from this, and from the discussion in Bhambayi, that the everyday performance of the gendered division of labour within the waterscape actively constructs different vantage points from which the totality of social relations might be viewed. In

some senses, these different vantage points afford quite different realities. Similarly, if reality according to Marx is sensuous activity, then this is likely to differ, depending on a profoundly gendered division of labour. Acting upon these differing vantage points, and the different realities associated with them, can invite profoundly different responses. For Wellington, this response was to ensure his household had sufficient monetary income to survive the hard times ahead; for many of the women of this community, the response was to try and transform the community's access to water.

Through the concept of reification, it becomes possible to relate these differing realities back to the production of an alienated waterscape, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here we see how feminist standpoint theory prises open radical possibilities. Returning to Lukács, the kind of debasing self-alienation that results, even in times of social crisis, to us emphasising the commoditised, quantitative aspects of water is a sign of a reified consciousness. For Wellington, the crisis might be interpreted from such a position. Rather than being a result of the factory system, Lukács sees this reified consciousness as being a result of the *generalisation of the commodity form*. As I argued previously, water has been one of the most recent battlegrounds over which the universalising effects of commodification have been contested in Durban. As capitalist social relations encroach, so there is pressure for the commodity to become the universal category in society: “[o]nly then does [it] become crucial for the subjugation of men’s consciousness” (Lukács 1971: 86). Cindi Katz paraphrases Marx in this regard to emphasise how money enters the community and then *becomes the community* through a dissolving or disintegrating form of development (2004: 134). As I hoped to show in the previous chapter, the reification of both our worlds and our consciousnesses frustrates the

ability to think of ways of liberating ourselves from such a situation. In the case of Amaoti, I would argue that, for some, it clouds the sense in which change might be possible through challenging the local councillor or attempting a political resolution to such problems. Instead, this reified consciousness “transforms the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world” (*ibid*: 89) and “conceals above all the immediate – qualitative and material – character of things as things” (*ibid*: 92). The question we might reasonably pose from this, is whether the same applies to the consciousness of “woman” and the mediation of the world through women’s unpaid labour? Jameson argues the contrary and suggests this to be one of the more liberating aspects of feminist standpoint theory, in that it includes

“a capacity for non-reified consciousness, generally negatively characterized in the caricatured attributes of feeling or of ‘intuition’ but which itself ‘leaps over’ a certain historical stage of the psychic division of labour to which men have historically had to submit”

(Jameson 2004: 147).

3.1. The Dialectics of Use and Exchange Value

In order to explore this potential, I would like to turn to some of the other areas of the city and the responses of women in these areas. In doing this, I explore the possibility (before rejecting it) that through the gendered division of labour, women’s worlds might be seen to be more closely associated with use-values and men’s worlds with exchange values. Looking at different areas of the city, one might assume that, within communities where water-carrying no longer takes place, the situation might be somewhat different from that in Bhamnbayi and Amaoti. If women’s main responsibilities are to negotiate

bill payments rather than mediate the interchange between socio-natural entities through (oppressive) labour then, perhaps, the contrasting standpoints might be dissolved. Receiving water through a tap in one's home might shape a profoundly different connection to the accumulation strategy that is the waterscape – and thereby unify and limit epistemological possibilities.

The township of KwaMashu is an interesting example from which to explore this. Here, since the construction of the township in the 1960s, households have received water through a piped network. Currently, water bills tend to be registered in the name of a female member of the household and, whilst this may suggest that little has changed, in that women are still assumed to be responsible for the domestic management of the home, it might also suggest that the logic of the commodity plays a much greater role in reproductive activities than was suggested in the previous examples. The generalisation of the commodity form that has taken place in areas such as KwaMashu might, therefore, be seen to have similar consequences *regardless* of gender.

As part of the research process, we held a workshop in Section C of KwaMashu on 10th March 2003. Here, 40 of the 53 participants were women. Once again, such figures would seem to confirm that, in KwaMashu, water issues and water problems are seen to be women's and not men's. Within the workshop, any differing viewpoints of men and women are somewhat difficult to discern, largely because the groups that broke away within the session divided up randomly and, in spite of their lower numbers, spokespeople tended to be male rather than female. Many comments revolved around the popular slogan "Water is the source of life, without water there is no life".

In the week after the workshop, we conducted follow-up household interviews with many of the women present at the meeting. These are, perhaps, more revealing, often tending to revolve around the intersection of reproductive work and women's contemporary understandings of water as commodity. Thus, in the following quotation, the need for the interviewee to conserve water appears to rub up against her role as carer:

“I am almost always responsible for paying and my only income is from my pension. They said I had a leak in my toilet so I went to buy the new toilet but the bills are still expensive. Every time when the young ones go to the toilet, I don't let them flush it. They can't reach it. So I flush it only afterwards. They can't put me in jail...can't put me in jail. They told me to pay 70 something. They will think we've been playing with the water. My pension is R600 and the bill is R400. How can I pay this?”

(Interview Zuma: 18th March 2003)³⁴

Mrs. Zuma's comments show the awkward dual role she is forced to perform, as both “economic woman”, measuring every last drop of water and the caring grandmother who flushes the toilet for “the young ones” or who ensures she pays all she is able to, in order to keep the family safe and well. Although once again the sense of a non-reified consciousness is defined negatively – in the sense of *not having lost* a sense of being able to care for others – I think it begins to emerge in the interview. This is not to romanticise the patriarchal division of labour that limits the choices available to Mrs. Zuma as to whether or not she takes on this caring role. However, in line with feminist standpoint theorists, I suggest that this oppressed position might open up different epistemological possibilities.

³⁴ All references to interviews conducted on the 18th March are household interviews conducted in the KwaMashu area. The names of these interviewees are not included in Appendix 1.

Further down the road in Section C, it is the task of washing clothes which becomes Mrs. Gwala's reference point for the contradictions embodied within the commodity form. Again, reproductive and unalienated labour rubs up against the alienation of the exchange abstraction in contradictory ways: it begins to seem impossible to carry out one's role as carer, without respecting the logic of the commodity.

"It could be washing that uses the most amount of water. I'm not sure why the bill is pushing up. If washing, I try and limit the number of times I rinse clothes out. Water used to leak a little bit at the toilet but we've fixed that leak up. We normally have a shower once or twice a day. The disconnection lasted for a matter of a week. During this time water was coming through very slowly though. The father of the house went to Metro once in order to negotiate slow payment through instalments, paying this off. No advice was given to us though, just advice on payment."³⁵

(Interview Gwala: 18th March 2003)

As with the interview with Mrs. Zuma, a caring role is seen to collide with the enforced sense of the commodified nature of water, the activity of washing, presumably carried out at least every other day, and the importance of only rinsing clothes out once or twice falling on the woman of the house. Other comments from interviews, conducted on the same day in Section C of KwaMashu, are outlined below. All were made by women:

"I've been trying to do not so much washing recently because of the high bills. Once there was a very high bill so I went to complain. But interest is added on top. They suggested paying. I'm the only person who deals with it and I'm a pensioner."

(Interview Ndlovu: 18th March 2003)

"I have a serious problem with this water device. I go to Shoprite and come back and there will still only be 5litres in there...It takes about 1 hour to fill 10-15 litres. In some houses, it's a little better but in others it's just as bad. I just put a big

³⁵ It is interesting to note in this case that it is the father who was responsible for negotiating with the municipality. In most other cases this task seemed to be considered another to be undertaken by female household member.

bucket under the tap and hold water in this. I flush the toilet with water from my washing.”

(Interview Dlamini: 18th March 2003)

“Four people live in this house but my pension covers all of them. We use our own water but have to ask other families for fresh water in the evenings. Some families mind, others don’t mind. There was a problem in the past with some young people not being concerned with water. I would have to shout at them or the bill would shout at me. I decided to have this installed to protect myself.”

(Interview Mdletshe: 18th March 2003)

Such comments, I would argue, elucidate the balancing act I talked of earlier. The day-to-day activities of washing, cleaning and shopping become marker points around which the consumption – and cost – of water might be gauged. In contrast to the experience in Amaoti and Bhambayi, there seems to be a much stronger sense amongst these women of the exchange value of water and its transformation into the universal commodity form, money. To the extent that money becomes the community (Katz 2004: 136), it has more so in KwaMashu than in the other two areas. The reification of water as commodity is something women have to deal with and wrestle with in numerous reproductive activities and the heavy cost burden is beginning to transform relationships and reshape the ability of women to carry out these caring roles. In KwaMashu, the arc of capitalism’s interactions with day-to-day reproductive activities has been more encompassing. As referred to in the previous chapter, this has occurred to the extent that some will resort to requesting that the municipality install flow limiters to trickle out the bare minimum of water so that cost-burdens might be reduced. However, whilst this would seem to be one side of the story, it must be continually stressed that this encroachment of the exchange abstraction still clashes with an overt (perhaps unavoidable) sense of the *use* value of water.

This use value – exchange value nexus was looked at in some early feminist marxist writings, as theorists emphasised a link between the level of reproduction and women’s association with the production of use values over the production of commodities. I suggested such an association earlier on in this chapter. Somehow, I argued, following Jameson (2004), the possibility for a non-reified consciousness might be opened up by women’s association with the qualitative world of use-values. However, such a binary view would seem to make little sense when one sees the day-to-day intertwining of use value and exchange value and the lengths to which women are forced to go in order to juggle the two. Instead, throughout the municipality, water and women’s mediation of water through the gendered division of labour should be seen as embodying the differentiated unity of use value and exchange value. In many ways, this dialectical relationship is also expressed in the manner in which men and women mediate the socio-natural relationships that constitute the waterscape through the work that they do. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to this.

3.2. The Dialectics of Socio-Natural Relations

As stated previously, the grounds upon which Hartsock suggests standpoints are constituted, relate to the activities performed in the mediation of socio-natural relationships. Because of the gendered division of labour, Hartsock argues, women’s reproductive activity involves a far more encompassing contact with necessity and also a more encompassing interchange with nature than men’s:

“Thus, the male worker in the process of production, is involved in contact with necessity, and interchange with nature as well as with other human beings but the process of production or work does not consume his whole life. The activity of a woman in the home as well as the work she does for wages keeps her continually in contact with a world of qualities and change. Her immersion in the world of use – in concrete, many qualified, changing material processes – is more complete than his” (Hartsock 1983a: 292)

Hartsock quotes a passage from *The Women’s Room* by Marilyn French in which the protagonist notes the “coming face to face with necessity” through cleaning the toilet bowl: “they were in touch with necessity, they had to wash the toilet bowl and floor”. It is exactly this coming face to face with necessity that women in KwaMashu, and those organising the demonstration in Amaoti, spoke of in their experiences of washing, shopping and flushing the toilet.

What though of the more encompassing “interchange with nature”? To some extent, this claim might seem to resonate with the arguments of (social) eco-feminists who argue that the work performed by women in a patriarchal society produces a particular knowledge of environmental issues (see Mies and Shiva 1993 for how this is related to “the subsistence perspective for Third World women peasants). However, I would argue that Hartsock goes beyond this. Her argument is explicitly aimed at rectifying failings in Lukács’s understanding of socio-natural relationships. Noting these failures in his mature auto-critique³⁶, Lukács claims that one of the central failings of *History and Class Consciousness* is its *separation* of the natural and social worlds (1971: xvii). Thus, “the purview of economics is narrowed down because its basic Marxist

³⁶ I use “mature” to distinguish this critique from an earlier one written under severe pressure from the Communist Party’s central apparatus. This was later retracted but the retraction not discovered until after Lukács’s death (and the collapse of state communism in Eastern Europe).

category, labour as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature, is missing” (*ibid.*). In contrast, Hartsock argues,

“Interchange with nature, a dialectical unity of human and natural worlds, lies at the heart of a non-dualist vision and practice. Interchange with the natural world is central to production, though not to exchange. Whereas in exchange, the focus is on the purely social change of status the object undergoes, in production the materials themselves involve no social change of status. They remain throughout this process the property of the capitalist, while their form, shape and even chemical composition change with and because of the activity of the worker”

(Hartsock 1983b: 124)

and later:

“Women and workers inhabit a world in which the emphasis is on change rather than stasis, a world characterised by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of mind and body is inherent in the activities performed”

(Hartsock 1983b: 234)

In the earlier examples, I cited claims that men in Bhambayi and Amaoti are only likely to be seen carrying water if doing so for money. As the young woman in Bhambayi was quoted as saying: “Men are using it for a business”. This, I argued represented the alienation of their labour. In turn, this also contributes to something of a separation of natural and social worlds. As workers, men are still engaged in an interchange with nature; they still struggle to fill buckets and still drink water to survive and fuel the work they do. However, the work they perform is no longer for the direct sustenance of themselves and their family. Instead it is for monetary income, such that the family might then be able to survive through the purchase of commodities. The separation of the

“doing” from the “done” – so fundamental to Marx’s understanding of alienation – is represented most clearly in men’s work in the waterscape. The mystification and the alien power acquired by both water and the waterscape are thereby more fundamental to the work performed by men in patriarchal society than for many women. As argued earlier in the chapter, these differing socio-natural relationships – based on different activities – can be seen to produce different realities. Thus, for men, the waterscape might be understood to be alienated, whereas for women, it might be understood to be less so.

However, this account pays little attention to the ability of powerful groups to shape the *overall experience* of the waterscape for others. Here we return to the overall aim of the chapter, to theorise the encounter between the gendered division of labour and capitalism within the waterscape. Hartsock’s argument is that an overarching “bad reality” can emerge from “the ability of the ruling group to define the terms for the community as a whole” (Hartsock 1983b: 132). At a basic level, one might argue that the standpoint of municipal administrators within the city of Durban or the standpoint of entrepreneurs further along the water supply chain shape a perverse epistemological basis around which water issues are then (materially) framed. Although the struggle for a feminist standpoint might capture different epistemological possibilities within this, it cannot escape the fact that the transformation of the waterscape into an accumulation strategy (based on a perverse epistemological framing) affects all of us, albeit in different ways, depending on gender, wealth, race and class. Thus, the production of the alienated waterscape described in the previous chapters now frames the experiences of how all in Durban relate to one another, and how they relate to their socio-natural environments.

Thus, just as the tensions between use and exchange value come to be unified in a consciousness that balances the reification of the waterscape and a sense of the non-reified qualitative properties of water, so a sense of the unity of socio-natural relations might be seen to contradict with the fact of the increasing separation of these relationships through the production of the waterscape as an accumulation strategy. The struggle for a feminist standpoint, whilst opening up the possibilities for challenging the rigid separation of natural and social, might also rest upon this view of the interweaving socio-natural relations rubbing up against the perverted form in which that reality is materialising. In no way should this romanticise either the position or the labour of women in patriarchal society. Reproductive work is often carried out not by choice but by constraint. And carrying water (as some mythical return to some unalienated utopia) is not something I would romantically place in *any* vision of a future society. Here we return to Harvey's cautionary words concerning an understanding of socio-natural relationships based on the concept of alienation:

“For Marxists there can be no going back as many ecologists seem to propose, to an *unmediated* relation to nature (or a world built solely on face-to-face relations), to a pre-capitalist and communitarian world of non-scientific understandings with limited divisions of labor. The only path is to seek political, cultural, and intellectual means that “go beyond” the mediations such as scientific knowledge, organizational efficiency, technical rationality, money and commodity exchange, while acknowledging the significance of such mediations”

(Harvey 1996: 198)

But nor is such a romantic vision part of the work of feminist standpoint theorists. Instead, as stated at the outset, feminist standpoint theorists argue for specific ways of thinking through new political possibilities that might lie within the marginalisation of a

specific collectivity. Just as both EP Thompson and Antonio Gramsci suggest in their quite different ways the manner in which a contradictory consciousness can be generative of political possibilities, I have sought to show how such potentials might lie within the tension between a non-reified and an-increasingly-reified consciousness within one person. And similarly how such possibilities might lie in the contradictory experience of a world in which the material interchange with nature is shifting from one inseparable to one increasingly separated by the exchange abstraction. Here, Harvey seems to be in agreement:

“it was surely Marx’s intent to search for the unity within the duality of *existential* and *mediated* experiences of the world. Exploring that duality has to be at the centre of ecosocialist politics, implying an uncomfortable but instructive duality of values between the purely instrumental (mediated) and the existential (unmediated)”

(*ibid*: 199)

Feminist standpoint theory, I argue, opens up great possibilities for exploring this dialectical tension. I hope to have shown some of these possibilities and the insights they might generate through Durban’s waterscape. Above all, I hope to have suggested ways in which they might open up alternative frameworks for beginning to think through valuations of the waterscape, through the tension between use values and exchange values, and the interweaving of socio-natural relationships, through women’s labour being positioned at the cusp of a mediated and an unmediated interchange with nature.

4. CONCLUSION

Relationships based on a capitalist form of organisation encounter those based on pre-existing social differentiations in contradictory ways. Exploring this encounter through the everyday practices of social reproduction can be particularly instructive. In this chapter, I have looked at several different ways of theorising the specific encounter between capitalism and the gendered division of labour through people's everyday interaction with a waterscape already defined as an accumulation strategy.

At first, I sought to show how a pre-existing gendered division of labour could be beneficial to capital accumulation in several ways. By relying on women's unpaid labour, cheaper modes of water delivery can be installed across the city and the overall water tariff kept low. Similarly, wages can be kept lower within a specific territorial area because the extra work required to keep a family fit and healthy can be conducted through the unpaid work of women. Although such an understanding of the operation of water politics in Durban might seem somewhat conspiratorial, when actually understood through the day-to-day struggles over the water tariff and the technologies that are subsequently implemented, both can be seen to be amongst many accumulation tactics based on the unpaid work of women.

Secondly, I sought to show how domestic struggles are of crucial importance if one is to make sense of the myriad ways in which, through experiencing the encounter of the gendered division of labour and capitalism, women transform both. The small-scale and usually unreported battles by women to challenge the unequal distribution of water through the city can be understood in such terms. As women also challenge the

patriarchal basis upon which the gendered division of labour rests, they can be understood to be directing domestic struggles both internally and externally. In recognising the importance of domestic struggles, however, we must avoid the danger of romanticising a new subject of oppositional history.

Instead, I argued that the gendered division of labour, and the manner in which this intersects with capitalism, shapes particular vantage points from which differing epistemological possibilities might be developed. At first, I suggested that women's labour in the waterscape might be based on the inseparability of socio-natures and on an association with a qualitative world of use-values. Turning to interviews with women, however, it becomes clear that women's labour is positioned between what might be understood as a reified and a non-reified world: women's work is based on the continual negotiation of the differentiated unity implied in the use and exchange values of commodities. Thus, in struggling for a feminist standpoint, I argued for an embrace of the *productive tensions* that might lie within such vantage points. In the next chapter I build on these productive tensions, developing them through the work of Gramsci.

With Hartsock, I agree that Gramsci provides a "useful and complex theorization of relations between 'individuals' and society as a whole, one that opens up possibilities for both new knowledges and new collectivities" (2004: 245-6). Katz might term this movement between individuals and society, or between situated knowledges and the social totality as being a project involving the construction of countertopographies (Katz 2004). Indeed the next chapter involves connecting some of the vantage points obtained from this chapter to form a more three-dimensional mapping of the possibilities latent within the waterscape.

Chapter 6

EXPLORING THE LATENT POTENTIALS WITHIN THE TERRAIN OF CIVIL SOCIETY

“Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right”

(Ani Di Franco cited in Hardt and Negri 2000)

“We are women and men and children and old people who are quite ordinary, that is to say, rebellious, non-conformist, uncomfortable dreamers”

Subcommandante Marcos

“French political life served for Marx, and in a sense for all historians and social scientists, as a barometer of all modern politics in its usage, language and innovations. Taken in proportion, and obviously to a lesser degree, Inanda shows more explicitly the latent potentialities and contradictions in political practice on a national scale by exhibiting the extremes in their development”

(Hemson 1996: 78)

In this chapter I seek to build upon and develop some of the political possibilities developed in the previous chapter. There, I tried to show some of the ways in which a specifically feminist standpoint might be linked to the broader power relations comprising the waterscape and in this chapter I would like to suggest several further possibilities. For Katz, (2001, 2004) such a project involves constructing countertopographies of power. She writes:

“Precisely because globalization is such an abstraction, albeit with varying forms, struggles against global capital have to mobilize equivalent, alternative abstractions. Built on the critical triangulation of local topographies, countertopographies provide exactly these kinds of abstractions interwoven with local specificities and the impulse for insurgent change”

(Katz 2001: 1232)

As the chapter progresses, therefore, I attempt to construct such a countertopography within Durban's waterscape, through critically triangulating some of the historical and geographical specificities of civil society in Inanda with broader global and national power relations. Civil society can be understood in many different ways, but in this chapter I try to develop a specifically Gramscian understanding. As Hartsock (2004) notes, Gramsci provides fruitful ways for theorising the relations between group forms of consciousness and the individual. This, she argues can have a synergising relationship with feminist standpoint approaches. On top of this, I argue that a Gramscian interpretation of civil society allows us to see the manner in which a new hegemony is being consolidated within and *through* Durban's waterscape, whilst also pointing to ways in which this hegemony might be subverted through everyday resistances. I attempt to situate this analysis historically and geographically through looking at the fortunes of social movements within the informal settlement of Inanda over the last few decades. Within this context civil society and hegemony provide simultaneously complicated obstacles and potential weapons through which a more egalitarian distribution of water might be achieved. In making this case I hope to overcome the oft-presented sterile opposition of either participation in contemporary South African politics or abstention from politics. Through looking at both the allegorical network of tunnels constructed by a generation of township activists within civil society, and the sporadic uprisings that seem to emerge from these, I wish to show how contemporary activism is both implicated in consolidating this new hegemony and, potentially, deeply subversive.

Ellen Meiksins Wood is correct to note the various ‘uses and abuses’ of the term civil society (Wood 1990). In the 1980s and 1990s, the concept rose to particular prominence within debates around new forms of governance (Jessop 1998), the direction of development projects and democratisation (Anheier et al 2001, 2002, 2003³⁷). Thus, civil society is variously considered by defenders and critics as both panacea and Trojan horse whilst continuing to polarise liberals and radicals over its meaning and potential meaning. For the World Bank, civil society enhances “operational performance by contributing local knowledge, providing technical expertise, and leveraging social capital” bringing “innovative ideas and solutions, as well as participatory approaches, to solving local problems” (World Bank 2004). Within academic spheres, some refer to it as a sphere, autonomous from the state, in which a liberatory politics might flourish (Keane 1988). Whilst for others, it has become “a codeword for capitalism” serving to distract the left from a politics that might focus on the genuinely totalising effects of a capitalist system (Wood 1990). In South Africa, debates about civil society gained particular prominence, as civic activists searched for a foothold in the post-apartheid political landscape (see Swilling 1992, Friedman 1992, Mayekiso 1996, Glaser 1997). In some ways echoing – and yet also extending – previous definitions of civil society, it was defined in the South African context as: a watchdog over the state; a tool for the consolidation of ANC hegemony; a sphere for the development of an associational socialism; and a voluntary sphere that could coexist alongside the state, for the provision of services (see Marais 2001 for a review). In this chapter, following Gramscian writers, I argue that civil society is both none and all of these. It is best thought of as a terrain over

³⁷ These three editions of the Global Civil Society Yearbook provide a useful review of the ongoing debates.

which hegemonic struggles are fought - struggles that aim to transform civil society into a sphere in which capitalist hegemony is consolidated but also a sphere in which this is subverted.

In developing this, I focus on the settlement of Inanda. As Hemson argues in the opening quotation, Inanda serves as a unique barometer for social change in South Africa. Here, a powerful militant movement of the late 1980s seems to have melted into air and been replaced by a passive, and yet seemingly deep, loyalty to the African National Congress. Tracing where this militancy has gone, what it has become, and how the ANC has remained such a dominant force in the hearts and minds of Inanda's residents is central to this chapter. But, as one hegemonic project seems to be consolidating, new processes are also unfolding that work to subvert the power of a hegemonic neoliberal ideology. The sporadic struggles alluded to in previous chapters are emerging from within. Thus, I suggest that the militancy of yesteryear has perhaps not fully melted away but has been transformed and reshaped. Submerged discourses of the past have transmuted into a new and quite different radicalism – one influenced as much by the new government's consolidation of power, as by a sense of how this might be surpassed. Marx once wrote that “The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future” (1977: 302). In this chapter, I argue that the dialectical tension between the Congress tradition of the past and the need for the birth of a new liberatory politics from the womb of a liberal civil society dominates Inanda. Narratives of the past meet tales of the new and shape a cultural transformation, which forms the potential basis for a dialectically transforming counter-hegemony.

Throughout the chapter, as in previous ones, the waterscape serves as my lens. In particular, I look at the launch of a trisector partnership in Inanda between Vivendi Water, eThekweni Municipality and Mvula Trust (a rural water services NGO), the prime motivation for which seems to have been an attempt to consolidate a “culture of payment” for services. Thus, much of the trisector partnership served as a complement to the national and local governments’ *Masakhane* campaign, calling on citizens to “Build Together” – and, above all, act as loyal consumers of part-privatised services. I then go on to focus on particular examples of the sporadic struggles that have occurred around water issues in the municipality – a mobilisation of residents in one particular part of Inanda known as Amaoti. These mobilisations, I argue, both liberate residents from hegemonic ideologies whilst also, in some ways, being born out of them. Before looking at the particular case of Inanda, I begin by considering the theoretical foundations for my conception of civil society. In particular, I look at the relevance of applying aspects of Gramsci’s thought to a radically different context – South Africa in the twenty first century. In order to do this, I turn to the seminal work of Mahmood Mamdani on “actually existing civil society in Africa”. Gramsci is relevant, I argue, but not if we are to read history by analogy (Mamdani 1996: 22). As E.P. Thompson reminds us “Minds which thirst for a tidy Platonism very soon become impatient with actual history” (quoted in Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Neither tidy Platonisms nor neat theoretical models are adequate for understanding the uneven landscape of Inanda’s contradictory and confusing politics. Indeed, the messy way in which this reading of civil society rubs up against the understandings developed in previous chapters is vitally important.

1. “CIVIL SOCIETY”

1.1. A Gramscian Reading of Civil Society

In tracing the genealogy of present-day notions of civil society, most writers begin by asserting that the concept emerged with notions of property rights in Roman times. It then went through several transformations in meaning before Hegel made his major contribution in asserting the separation of state and civil society (Wood 1990). For Hegel, civil society comprised largely economic relations. It was an arena of fractious and self-interested competition that had the potential for self destruction, partly through the immiseration of a growing mass of the population. The advancement of the public good, therefore, tended to come through the state. Marx developed a notion of civil society in a slightly different direction, tending to focus greater attention on the *relation* between state and civil society. As I argued in Chapter 2, the state is brought into being through such relations, struggles and practices.

In many ways, Antonio Gramsci completely transformed these earlier understandings of civil society and it is important to recognise how distinct the Gramscian understanding of civil society is from both the contemporary understanding and previous theorisations. Gramsci “appropriated the concept of civil society to mark out the terrain of a new kind of struggle which would take the battle against capitalism not only to its economic foundations but to its cultural and ideological roots in everyday life” (Wood 1990: 63). Because of this, several have argued that Gramsci’s work

provides a “missing link” in marxist theory, freeing it from the confines of economism (Simon 1991: 17). As Stuart Hall expresses it “Gramsci came to ‘inhabit’ Marx’s ideas, not as a straight-jacket, which confined and hobbled his imagination, but as a framework of ideas which liberated his mind, which set it free, which *put it to work*” (1991: 8). Thus, in Gramsci’s work we begin to see a stress on nuance, ambiguity and complexity. His writings show a recognition that we are political agents imbued with contradictory perceptions of the world, based as much on “common sense” as conscious political thought. In Inanda, as in Oxford, or in E.P. Thompson’s England of the early 19th Century, these twin or multiple consciousnesses are shaped by both ideology and a moral economy – our norms and habits, our beliefs and non-beliefs, our loyalty to the ANC, the Labour Party or the Methodist Church, as much as any deeply considered political action.

Thus, for Gramsci, civil society is the terrain over which such ideologies are consolidated and contested. It is not always clear, however, *exactly* what Gramsci means when he discusses civil society³⁸. In one of the selections from the Prison Notebooks he argues that

“What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural “levels”: the one that can be called “civil society”, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called “private”, and that of “political society” or “the State”. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of “hegemony” which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of “direct domination” or command exercised through the State and “juridical” government”

(Gramsci 1971: 12)

Here, he argues, there is a *separation* of the coercive acts of the state from the consensus building sphere of civil society. Elsewhere, Gramsci continues to assert such a separation,

³⁸ Many writers quite rightly argue that much of the confusion surrounding Gramsci’s prison writings is a result of the conditions under which he was writing, forcing him to use code-words and pseudonyms.

referring to civil society as “the so-called private organisations, like the Church, the trade unions, the schools etc” (1971: 56fn) (although already any sense of civil society and political society being hermetically sealed spheres is undermined in the case of many of these “so-called private organisations”). Later, however, Gramsci refers to the state as political society + civil society and, importantly, as “hegemony protected by the armour of coercion” (1971: 263). In this latter understanding, civil society and political society are inseparable in the form of the state. Consent and coercion are brought together in one single entity. Sassoon notes these two contrasting definitions of the state, referring to the former as a more limited definition and the latter as an extended definition (1987: 112). The dominant conception she argues is the extended understanding. Sassoon develops this point by arguing it to be central to Gramsci’s double or dual perspective. As with Harvey, Gramsci seems to know no “either...or” but only a “both...and”. Sassoon argues that this may be presented at various levels which can be reduced theoretically to

“two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli’s Centaur – half-animal and half-human. They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation, of the individual moment and of the universal moment, of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy, etc.”

(Gramsci 1971: 169-70)

Whilst this double perspective might be of great value, there is potentially something of a contradiction between the decentred conception of the state I have sought to develop throughout this thesis and the centrality of the state – including *both* political society *and* civil society – developed in Gramsci’s work. As if to put pay to the argument furthered in Chapter 2, Gramsci once famously noted “little understanding of the state

means little class consciousness” (1971: 275). However, perhaps ironically, I would argue that through Gramsci’s broadened (and dual) understanding of the state, we might actually move closer to the conception with which I have tried to work throughout the thesis. The central thrust of Gramsci’s work was to attempt to undermine ‘economistic’ theories through showing the key role played by the struggle over hegemony in the sphere of civil society. His understanding of civil society is surely that everyday world of teachers and lawyers, vicars and bus drivers that I have tried to place at the centre of my thesis: Gramsci’s understanding of the state clearly involves more than the high politics of government I have sought to move away from. Whilst in the last instance seeing hope in the form of the Communist Party, one of Gramsci’s most lasting contributions was to prise open the political and to see it existing everywhere. I have tried to do the same in this thesis. Thus, we encounter a politics in the journey to the tap, the water flowing from this tap is politicised and the debates over rational distribution of water are profoundly politicised.

Overall then, I do not accept a Gramscian understanding of the state uncritically. I continue to argue that the state is neither an agent, nor a privileged ‘site’ for political change. However, the broadened conception of politics and, in particular the conception of hegemony developed by Gramsci is of real value in beginning to make sense of some of the possibilities that might be exploited within Durban’s waterscape. This can be reconciled with the understanding of the state as the fetishised form of broader struggles developed elsewhere. A space might be created within civil society in which counter-hegemonic struggles might proliferate. These counter-hegemonic struggles are as much about achieving a “cultural transformation” (Hall 1991: 128) which is seen as a key

strategic goal prior to challenging state power and subsequent to its potential overthrow. This critique of civil society lies immanent within the original conception. In such a vision, a tool for the consolidation of capitalist hegemony becomes transformed into its opposite by the work of insurgent activists: it becomes a weapon with which to challenge the fragile reproduction of the capitalist order through attempts to foster a counter hegemony.

Gramsci refers to this as a task requiring a modern Prince. In contrast to the Prince of Machiavelli's writing, he argues that

“The modern prince, the myth prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognised and has to some extent asserted itself in action begins to take concrete form”

(Gramsci 1971: 129)

Gramsci's modern Prince has been taken to refer to a developing working class consciousness beginning to assert itself in the form of the Communist Party. In the post-Seattle-Teamster-Turtle-alliance, some writers have begun to see the tentative signs of an emerging 'postmodern Prince' that might challenge the hegemony of neoliberal globalisation (Gill 2000) through a radically decentralised non-hierarchical organisation. In the case of Inanda, I argue that our hopes for the subversion of the individualising and atomising hegemony being consolidated, lie neither in the Party nor in the amorphous movements emerging in recent years. Rather they lie in the historical transformation and coming together of both of these. My argument is that we should read the Prince dialectically.

1.2. The Italian Prisoner in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Gramsci's writings have been used widely in interpreting the current historical juncture in South Africa. Indeed, many of the finest contemporary accounts of South African civil society and of post-apartheid state-society relations have been influenced by Gramsci. Hein Marais' compelling account of South Africa's transition devotes significant chapters to a Gramscian interpretation of post-apartheid, popular politics. And in her seminal work, *Disabling Globalization*, Gillian Hart states at the outset that she will start with

“the work of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian revolutionary and intellectual, whose writings in an Italian fascist prison in the late 1920s and early 1930s suggest particularly compelling ways of thinking about questions of social change in the face of a reversal of a revolutionary moment.”

(Hart 2002: 26)

There is something of an irony in using a theorist so concerned with the specificities of history and geography in a radically different context from that in which his ideas were developed. As a result, both Hart and Marais stress the place-based context in which Gramsci was writing, whilst arguing that his work has vital insights in understanding the specificities of the current moment in South African history. Hart is more explicit in noting the potential pitfalls in such transplanted theory. She quotes Stuart Hall's cautionary words.

“We can’t pluck up this ‘Sardinian’ from his specific and unique political formation, beam him down at the end of the twentieth century, and ask him to solve our problems for us; especially since the whole thrust of his thinking was to refuse this easy transfer of generalisations from one conjuncture, nation or epoch to another”

(Hall 1988: 161)

Hart’s response seems to be to internalise Gramscian concepts whilst turning her attention to generating fresh insights on *specific* historical and political conjunctures.

Other problems remain. First, does it make sense to even speak of a developed “civil society” in the South African context? Such questions are again central to Gramsci’s analysis. He urges us to reconnoitre the terrain ahead and consider the need for a war of position or a war of manoeuvre depending on how well developed institutions of civil society are in each context. Thus, whereas a more direct war of manoeuvre was possible in Russia, an exploration of the conditions in the West would have shown that a more subtle war of position would be needed to precede this, owing to the developed network of fortresses and earthworks supporting such a system. Thus,

“In the East the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying – but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country”

(Gramsci 1971: 238)

In conducting the reconnaissance of this terrain, the principal danger is that of reading an individual society's experience off that of European countries. Already, I seem to have slipped into a habit of talking of more developed and less developed institutions of civil society. In this manner, South African civil society might either be seen to be 'as developed *as*', or 'less developed *than*' European civil society. This writing of African history by analogy prompts Mamdani to write of "actually existing civil society" in Africa (1996: 19). In doing this, he highlights four historical moments contributing to its shaping. In the first moment, the state acts as protector of the society of the "colons": the rights of citizens are guaranteed to those under direct rule of the colonial authority, as opposed to the subjects under indirect rule. In the second moment, there is a shift in the relation between civil society and the state, as a result of anti-colonial struggles. The consequence is the creation of an indigenous civil society. Independence for the colonies marks a third moment, in which the state is deracialised but civil society is not, thereby shifting state-civil society tensions to within civil society. This is the era of affirmative action and "Africanisation". In a fourth moment, there seems to be a collapse of this embryonic indigenous civil society as it is absorbed into political society. Civil society based social movements are demobilised, as political movements are statified (1996: 19-21).

A potential problem in such a periodisation is that one set of generalisations about civil society is simply replaced with another, the latter being based on Mamdani's work. However, his intention is to draw our attention to the shared (but not identical) experience shaped by colonial institutions – in particular a bifurcated state creating both citizens and subjects. In many ways, this experience reaches its epitome in the

development of apartheid in South Africa. Here, Mamdani allows for a limited degree of South African exceptionalism, arguing that “South Africa has been an African country with specific differences” (1996: 27). Perhaps most importantly, he argues that the most important specific difference in the South African experience lies in the *strength of its civil society*.

Although Mamdani’s analysis does not draw on Gramsci (and in its institutional focus differs significantly), I see little reason why a Gramscian understanding cannot be used to deepen our understanding of actually existing South African civil society. Both Mamdani and Gramsci urge us to look at the battles within a sphere they refer to as civil society. Both require us to pay closer attention to the consolidation of power, the challenges to power and the relationship between state institutions, markets and civil society. Above all, both writers urge us to look at what is actually happening in a particular historical-geographical moment. Before looking at one final pitfall, the majority of this chapter is concerned with working out such an approach for contemporary South Africa and looking at the broader lessons we might learn from such an undertaking.

1.3. South African Civil Society For Whom?

One final cautionary note relates to the danger of assuming that civil society should be *for* one group or another, or that civil society is *either* for progressive change *or* for the consolidation of hegemony. Glaser’s (1997) review of the civil society debates

in South Africa makes a somewhat similar point. The two key positions with which he engages are Mark Swilling's conception of civil society as a sphere for building an associational socialism (1992) and Mzwanele Mayekiso's concept of "working class civil society" (1996). Both, Glaser argues, may be criticised for their instrumentalism and lack of attention to the requirement that a state guarantee an autonomous space in which to act. His alternative, normative ideal is a liberal one, consisting of an empty public space, protected by formal state guarantees and open to multiple uses by free and equal citizens.

It is interesting to note, however, that even Glaser's non-instrumentalist position revolves around what civil society *should* be rather than what it currently is and how it came to be this. As Mamdani writes "The current Africanist discourse on civil society resembles an earlier discourse on socialism. It is more programmatic than analytical, more ideological than historical" (1996: 13). Within South Africa, this, perhaps, reflects a broader trend – a post-apartheid rush to advise on policy related matters (see comments by Fine and Rustomjee 1996). Historically, civic organisations played a fundamental (and yet not always acknowledged) role in the ending of apartheid. With the return from exile of an ANC hierarchy in the 1990s, many academics and activists questioned what would happen to the grassroots organisations that had flourished in the interstices of apartheid authority and lack-of-authority. When, in 1991, the main umbrella organisation for civic movements across South Africa, the United Democratic Front (UDF), disbanded in loyal supplication to the Party, the local organisations that had existed under the UDF umbrella still remained in existence (Seekings 2000). Thus, in the early 1990s, various programmatic conceptions of the future role of civic bodies proliferated, each suggesting ways in which these could perform a function in constructing the new post-apartheid

society. Marais summarises the central positions as being: those who saw civil society deepening the imminent liberal democracy; those with a more leftist edge to such an understanding; and those who viewed the still existing civics with a certain scepticism, arguing for the need to work “within the ANC” (1998: 208). Once in power, the ANC accepted the continued existence of the civics but “their former oppositional character has been declared an anachronism and they have been urged to move from ‘resistance to reconstruction’”.

Marais continues by describing how

“Lechesa Tsenoli, former South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) president, has judged the slogan [‘resistance to reconstruction’] ‘undynamic and undialectical’ since it presumes that South Africa in 1994 passed through a magic portal beyond which the contradictions that had fuelled resistance dissolved into a common national endeavour”.

(Marais1998: 209)

The more appropriate question for this chapter must surely be not what civil society *ought to be* (much less about who civil society is and is not for) and much more about what it actually *is*, where it came from and the immanent potentials that might unfold from this.

2. A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN INANDA

Given such an understanding of civil society, it might seem odd to focus a case study upon the informal settlement of Inanda. Many, drawing on a non-Gramscian conception, would consider civil society to be crushed (Interview Hindson: 12th November 2002), dysfunctional or simply non-existent (Interview Bailey: 29th November 2002) in the area. Whilst the University of KwaZulu Natal's Centre for Civil Society in Durban has generated several inspiring analyses of the revival of popular struggles in *other* parts of the city, Inanda remains almost entirely forgotten. Ashwin Desai's work on the Concerned Citizens Forum has provided a rich picture of mobilisations in Chatsworth township, Mpumulanga township and the South Durban industrial zone (Desai 2000, 2002), yet his books make not one reference to the 150,000 or so "poors"³⁹ of Inanda. Civil society has, of course, not disappeared in Inanda at all. The nature of the terrain upon which popular struggles are being waged has transformed considerably, but this does not mean there is an absence of opportunities for the flourishing of a new counter-hegemony. Nor does it mean the absence of the institutions comprising civil society to which Gramsci refers us – the schools, churches and trade unions. As I stated at the outset, it is my intention to survey this terrain and it is precisely because of its unevenness and variability in Inanda that make it such an interesting case.

It is already becoming clear, whether through metaphor or analysis that civil society in Inanda can only be understood in historical *geographical* terms. Lying in the border zone between town and country, Inanda comprises 33 distinct communities, each

³⁹ A reference to the title of his most recent book *We are the Poors* (2002)

with its own collective memory of mobilisation and each with its own distinctive politics. Links between Durban and Inanda strengthened considerably in the period from 1960 onwards and with this, so, perhaps, did political consciousness and what we refer to as civil society. Prior to this, in the colonial era, both small and large landowners were able to establish plots in the area. Indentured Indian labourers, once freed from the contractual obligations of their employment, purchased land and, subsequently, both an African and Indian landowning class developed. The 1936 Land Act earmarked several of the local farms as Released Areas 33 and 34 for eventual acquisition by the state (SPPR 1983), thereby preparing for solely African occupation of the area at some undisclosed future date (Hughes 1996). Lying in the mist belt, nearly all of Inanda is just too high to form part of the lucrative sugar lands situated to the East. As a result the lower value land and the high number of landowners amongst whom it is distributed served to ensure that throughout the apartheid years it retained its ambiguous, released status. Being designated so, as noted above, formal authority fell outside of the two main branches of Mamdani's bifurcated state; the Verulam Magistrates Court being thus established as a temporary authority for the area. Apart from this, the 1936 Land Act had little immediate effect on Inanda, although later, with the commercialisation of Natal agriculture in the 1960s, the livelihoods of local Indian and African landowners came under serious threat and many found greater security as *landlords*, turning their attention instead to 'shack farming' as a way of ensuring a steady income. Gradually, the rural settlement began to take on certain urban features. Distinct class groupings began to emerge and the tensions that resulted from this – in particular between landlords, tenants and the state – continue to play a significant role in local politics. One local landlord commented: "Landowners

are often taken to be the enemy. Only slowly are they being treated as humans”

(Interview Dladla: 25th November 2002).

The most direct stimulus for the shift from a rural to an urban way of life was, however, the clearance of Cato Manor in the centre of Durban. Those forced to move from this shack settlement were generally housed in the purpose built township of KwaMashu, adjoining Inanda. A weekly, or even daily, commute to work in Durban was then made possible by the extension of a bus service to KwaMashu (Hughes 1996). At this point, we begin to see the manner in which Inanda came under the sway of the structured coherence of the urban region (Harvey 1989) discussed in Chapter 2. A more distinctively urban politics and more distinctively urban civil society began to develop as a result. Contrasting the strength of civil society within South Africa with other parts of Africa, Mamdani quite rightly notes how “The depth of resistance in South Africa was rooted in urban-based worker and student resistance, not in the peasant revolt in the countryside” (1996: 29). With the urbanisation of civil society in Inanda we might, therefore expect to see a growing coherence to resistance politics and an increase in militancy. Thus, whilst it can be assumed that some migrants from Inanda would have been active in the pivotal Durban strikes of 1973, it was not until 1985 – with the development of Inanda Newtown and with the population having grown from 68,000 in 1977 to 250,000 in 1985 – that resistance to apartheid really seemed to take hold in the area. Unfortunately, it first seemed to take a thoroughly depressing twist. Uprisings in other parts of the city, provoked by the murder of UDF activist Victoria Mxenge, resulted in a wave of violence which manifested itself in Inanda through the expulsion of the local

Indian community by armed Inkatha militias. The roots of the tensions within civil society are worth exploring in some detail (Hughes 1987).

The co-existence of Africans and Indians in Inanda had posed serious problems for the apartheid authorities, appearing to undermine the core of apartheid's "separate living". One of the overt expressions of the subversive influence of this harmonious coexistence were the local peace camps - organised by Rick Turner, a Durban philosopher-activist (assassinated in 1978) and Mewa Ramgobin, a prominent Natal Indian Congress and later UDF activist. Ramgobin is married to the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi and the camps, designed to promote non-racial harmony, were held at Gandhi's former home in Inanda, known as Phoenix. For some, these meetings are still remembered as key platforms for building a more progressive politics in Natal (Personal Communication: Hemson) and, in many respects, they represent what, at the time, was an emergent counter-hegemonic politics, disrupting the project of apartheid through attempts to develop a body of organic intellectuals from a non-racial base. However, at the same time as this counter-hegemony was building, the central state was making a concerted effort to open up new faultlines. Heather Hughes charts these fractures in trying to get to grips with the violence in Inanda of August 1985.

"One can accept the point that it is wrong to view shanty towns as 'problems', characterised by crime and vice, social despair and political instability. Yet it is also true that in the case of such speeded-up urbanisation, pressure on lines of social tension has often resulted in fracture: ethnically, between Mpondo and Zulu people; racially, between Indians and Africans; between those with 'proper' housing and those possessing only shacks, after two blocks of Inanda were set aside by the state for formal township development in 1982; between the youth and their elders; and between tenants and landlords, as each struggled for a more beneficial arrangement. If these forms of tension are 'situational', then looming large in the creation of the

‘situation’, first by its non-action and then its method of intervention, was the South African state under the apartheid regime”

(Hughes 1996: 306)

In other articles, Hughes (1985, 1987) shows that many of these lines of social tension manifested themselves around water issues. Burgeoning immigration in the late 1970s, as a result of a severe drought in rural areas of KwaZulu, placed enormous pressure on informal areas. When Inanda’s main sources of water, the Riet and the Piesang Rivers then dried up, a typhoid outbreak killed 30. After debates over which authority might be responsible for the provision of water to the area, the national government intervened with emergency water supplies, a “do-it-yourself” addition of a new township in the area (eventually becoming Inanda Newtown) and the targeting of Indian landlords for not providing water and sewerage services to shack dwellers on their land (no African landlords were targeted). Partly as a result of such acts, Fatima Meer interprets the 1985 violence as a state sponsored effort to rid the “Released Area” of Indian landowners, the state lacking the money to pay a reasonable price for this land (1985). In contrast, Hughes sees much deeper tensions being exploited by the state and argues that there is no need for conspiracy theory, but rather a recognition that such deep tensions were finally reaching a climax in 1985.

In a brief review of the political responses to the violence, Hughes notes how “even those at the ground floor level of the UDF had lost control of events, so that the leadership, with its strong commitment to non-violent change, had little hope of reimposing it” (1987: 352). Importantly, she argues that the violence locked the main political groupings in a political discourse that focussed, above all, on African-Indian

relations rather than on inequalities of wealth and poverty or on “how race had been hitched to vested interest over many years” (1987: 353). Having shown how deeply implicated Inkatha *impis* (armed vigilantes) were in the August violence, Hughes goes on to argue that Inkatha lost much of the support it might once have had within Inanda by turning on other communities in the area (1987: 350). As a result, the possibilities for a more progressive politics within Inanda were opened up and a terrain could be explored on which a quite different set of struggles within civil society might be possible.

However, as in other parts of Natal, the apartheid state was able to continue exploiting “ethnic” lines of friction between Inkatha and a supposedly Mpondo dominated UDF. Hughes notes the appearance of such tensions in an embryonic form in clashes over access to water, as “Xhosa-speaking people” from Piesang river clashed with residents of Inanda Newtown over the use of taps in the new site and service scheme (1987: 351). Such clashes worsened as Inkatha, in trying to consolidate relations with reformist Indian parties, sought to blame the violence of August 1985 on the UDF and the ANC.

Rather than a politics united around opposition to the apartheid government, what seemed to emerge from the ashes of 1985 was a politics polarised around clashes between Inkatha and a youth dominated comrades movement. The terrain of civil society had become one traversed with lines of “ethnic” tension and from which the comrades sought to liberate a united anti-apartheid politics (Interview Ncwane: 8th November 2002). Over much of the next decade, tensions between Inkatha and the comrades would, on occasion, turn into a violent turf war. Support for both groups opened up several cross-cutting lines of tension. “Ethnic” differences were mobilised by Inkatha, whilst generational and gender divides were also exploited (Hemson 1996). Although ostensibly opposed to the

creation of an independent KwaZulu state, Inkatha was viewed by many of the urban-based comrades as a clear puppet and proxy army of the apartheid state. Again, the form of indirect rule Mamdani sees in the apartheid state was opening up tensions within a locally based civil society.

2.1. The Comrades Movement

No understanding of the *contemporary* terrain of civil society in Inanda could avoid dealing with the influence of the comrades movement. This seemed to influence a whole generation and, in Inanda, acquired a depth not always present in other South African communities (Hemson 1996). To many, the comrades movement seemed a desperate, suicidal expression by youths of a loss of hope in the potential for change. In contrast, Sitas (1992) makes a convincing argument that the comrades movement in Natal should be understood as “a large scale social movement with its peculiar Natal overtones”. In Inanda, I would argue, whilst some of the ugliest politics of the late-apartheid era were displayed, the Inanda comrades represented a movement of genuinely transformative potential. It focussed the energy of a cadre of progressive youths and, whilst short-termist in certain respects, it also seemed to contain the potential seeds for consolidating a progressive, even socialist, project into a lasting hegemony – a modern Prince, indeed. Hemson writes of the comrades,

“The comrade phenomenon in Inanda would be quite unexceptional and hard to distinguish from that in townships throughout the country were it not for two main

features. Firstly, the robust dynamism of the Inanda movement which gave a greater coherence to the comrades in the form of the marshal movement which combined spontaneous self-organisation and a militia formation. Secondly, the growing oppositional character of this movement towards the official leadership [of the Congress movement], most concretely expressed by the leadership of the Inanda marshal movement”

(Hemson 1996: 79)

Thulani Ncwane was a key activist in both the Inanda Marshals and the comrades movement that preceded it. His political biography serves as a helpful window from which to gain an understanding of the motivation for political mobilisation and also the constraints to this mobilisation later on. Such experiences also provide a window upon the changing hegemony operating through civil society in Inanda and provide a bridge between our understandings of the comrades and of contemporary manifestations of popular struggle within the waterscape. Born in Ndwedwe, in rural KwaZulu, Thulani finally came to settle in Inanda in the mid 1980s. From about the age of 13, he was a hawker on local commuter trains in order to earn money for his family. In the process, he was beaten by white police officers, force-fed his produce and even thrown out of the window of a moving train. During these journeys he came into contact with UDF activists who “helped him to set his suffering in a wider political context” (Interview Ncwane: 8th November 2002). During the violence of August 1985, he was shot in the neck whilst pamphleteering for the UDF, being forced to spend 5 days in hospital. It was in 1987, at the age of 17, and after two comrades had been shot dead for attending a stay-away that Thulani really began mobilising politically within Inanda. He and fellow comrades called meetings in order to popularise the UDF and, by the beginning of 1988, the comrades seemed to have a broad base of support throughout Inanda (Ncwane 1990).

Thulani describes how in the stayaway to mark the Sharpeville massacre “no one from the area went to work”. Inkatha was opposed to the stay-away and, feeling threatened by this mass act of defiance, they began burning the houses of UDF comrades and their families. The house of Thulani’s mother was burnt, barely five years after their previous home had been bulldozed by the apartheid authorities. From then on, many of the comrades dispersed throughout the city for their own safety – Thulani’s brother being hacked to death by Inkatha youth on a rare trip back to Inanda. At his funeral, the mourners were also attacked. Returning to the shelter of the city after this attack, Thulani describes how he searched for the space to be able to rationalise the intense violence of the last year. He returned to help to spearhead a peace process in 1989 between Inkatha and the remaining comrades. In November 1990, he described how “Since then we have been fighting for all people to stay alive. Inkatha and our people who are alive must stay alive, and those houses not burnt must stay like that” (1990). This was a crucial turning point. Many of the serious tensions within the area (as documented by Hughes 1987), could potentially be overcome. The comrades had the potential to consolidate a powerful anti-apartheid feeling and in some senses occupied a key position holding the fabric of the community together through the period of transition (Kaarsholm 2005).

The importance of their role in uniting the community was accentuated by the serious potential for a power vacuum developing. With the apartheid state arming Inkatha militias in other parts of Natal (Murray 1994), and with the majority of the older Congress generation still ‘in exile’ this “fight for all people to stay alive” was by no means over. As referred to in the quotation by Hemson, the comrades in Inanda formed their own self-defence group or “peoples’ militia” – the Inanda Marshals – as one step in

combating this vacuum. After a launch in October 1989, within less than five months, the marshals were faced by yet another source of tension, as the old Congress leadership began to return. Hemson (1996) argues that a crucial juncture for the marshals was Nelson Mandela's speech at Durban's main stadium immediately after his release from prison. In his typically conciliatory style, Mandela called on all to throw their weapons into the sea, which, as Hemson argues, denied the whole experience of the comrades and threatened to re-open the very power vacuum the Marshals had attempted to close. It is important to note that the marshals' position in Inanda did not rely on weaponry but on the fostering of the kind of consensus of which I talked earlier. Mandela's speech, however, seemed to reduce this complex struggle to one of a turf-war based on guns and knobkerries. It is at this juncture, I would argue, that we begin to see early attempts to shift towards statising a new hegemony within civil society: civil society was to become a key element in the fostering of the state *idea* (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Having resolved many of the tensions of the 1980s, the marshals had to face a new challenge owing to their potential subsumption into the ANC hierarchy. In name at least, all the marshals had fought (and many had died) for the Congress movement, but, in closed door negotiations, the ANC was aligning itself with a radically different set of forces from its democratic base⁴⁰. The gap between the 'idea' of the ANC and the 'reality' of a party preparing for government was beginning to open up painful splits within Inanda. Although perhaps not aware of all these transformations, locally, the marshals felt the brunt of a move to consolidate forces under the banner of a single leadership and to transform local social relations. Thus, local organs of opposition became targets for the consolidation of a quite different 'idea' of the ANC. Hemson describes how key figures within the Party

⁴⁰ For the best summary of these see Bond (2000)

demanded the demolition of the Inanda marshal organisation and its replacement with the ANC Youth League. A meeting was held in March 1990 for all local youth organisations of the area. Thulani Ncwane describes this:

“If a democratic resolution was passed to dissolve the committees and join the ANC Youth League then we would do this. But instead, this guy came along with a shirt, tie, gold watch and brief case. In the past we had only seen Dube⁴¹ dressed like this. And then he said, I am from the ANC Youth League convening committee and have come to organise your local branch”

(Interview Ncwane: 4th March 2003)

The ANCYL was to be imposed whether Inanda’s residents liked it or not. As if to stress the sidelining of the marshals still further, when one of their commanders died in police custody and a campaign was initiated to ensure the release of those still in jail, the ANC leadership opposed this. It seemed that they had served as an unwanted autonomous power base, complicating the consolidation of a new Congress-dominated consensus. By mid-1992, the structures of the Marshals were in disarray and then, in the same year, Thulani Ncwane and another Marshal were suspended from the ANC. It is almost impossible to understand his lack of bitterness over this suspension. But what is perhaps stranger is the manner in which he did not accept it: “I refused to leave. But it was easier to be a part at a provincial level. I was passed each hot situation that no one wanted to deal with” (Interview Ncwane: 2nd February 2003).

The crucial choice (and this is vital for understanding the final part of this chapter) seemed to be abandoning politics altogether, or continuing work, with more

⁴¹ A reference to John Langalibalele Dube (1871-1946), one of the founders of the ANC and a prominent Inanda landowner. Dube’s family continue to play a major part, as large landowners, in the politics of Inanda

limited autonomy within a civil society increasingly being subsumed within the state idea. Thus, the terrain on which remaining activists are able to organise has become more limited, whilst it has become extremely difficult to organise politically outside of the Congress movement. At the same time, there has been a serious decline in overall levels of political mobilisation. Writing in 1996, Hemson noted the apparent decline in levels of mobilisation. He argued that, apart from a short burst of political organising in the run up to the 1994 elections, it seemed that most ANC branches “had become inactive and empty shells” (1996: 79).

After an intense period of mobilisation for radical democratic change in Inanda, we have to begin to make sense of this dramatic change in the climate for progressive, autonomous political organising. Thulani sums up the complex challenges facing activists now:

“It’s like this. In the past if, say there was a leak in the roof of your house, you would know exactly who was to blame. It was Pretoria. For they had caused the terrible conditions in which we were living. We would mobilise and toyi-toyi. They were to blame. Now it’s different. If there is a leak we wait to see if it will be repaired. If it isn’t we need to think who might be responsible for fixing it. Then we need to think how best to get things changed. This means being less confrontational and more reminding elected officials of their responsibilities. There is still a need for protest but this must now be justified”

(Interview Ncwane: 2nd February 2003)

Although not necessarily saying the terrain ahead is *less* favourable, Thulani argues it is more complex, the target for dissent less clear, and the need for new strategies more pressing. As I stated at the outset, one way into making sense of some of these complexities is through the lens of water. The provision of water services has been one of

the clearest foci of community dissent throughout the country in recent years (McDonald and Pape 2002, McDonald and Ruiters 2004, Desai 2000, 2002) and it has also served, I argue, as a sphere, at the micro-level, around which hegemonic ideologies are both consolidated and contested. Therefore, having attempted to lay out some of the background to the historical-geographical formation of civil society in Inanda, it is to the task of analysing the contemporary terrain that I now turn.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY IN DURBAN'S WATERSCAPE

Although I have continually tried to emphasise the manner in which civil society for Gramsci should not be understood as simply an oppositional sphere, much of my focus in the last section has been on oppositional movements within Inanda. In turning to the terrain of civil society as it is constituted within the waterscape, I wish to show more clearly the dual ways in which civil society might be understood from a Gramscian point of view, as both a sphere for the consolidation of civil society and, potentially, a sphere in which this might be undermined. In doing this, I begin with an example of one of the contemporary uses of civil society organisations within the waterscape. Here I show the attempt to establish a specific ideological conception of the atomised, fee-paying consumer through civil society. Secondly, I return to oppositional movements, showing how these might be seen to emerge from some of the contradictory ways in which this new hegemony is being established.

In the first example, I describe a trisector partnership that brings together a private sector water provider with the local municipality and “civil society groups”. Known as the Business Partners for Development (BPD) initiative, “civil society” is here being mobilised to attempt a re-choreographing of the relationship between the state, the market and individual citizens. The second moment I focus on is a seemingly spontaneous protest in which one community within Inanda was able to challenge the “common sense”⁴² notion that water must be paid for, thereby ensuring that some kind of a water supply would be available for free. I write that it was ‘seemingly’ spontaneous because I think connections can be made to the historical geography of civil society outlined in the previous section and also, importantly, connections can be made with the hegemonic project used as the first example of civil society mobilisations within the waterscape. Both examples serve as a preliminary attempt to map the terrain of civil society in Inanda.

3.1. Unequal Partners for Business⁴³

Turning to the first of the examples developed, the Business Partners for Development (BPD) initiative – or “Building Partnerships for Development” project as it has since been renamed – claims to be “a worldwide network of partners involving government, donors, business and civil society” (BPD 2004). Created by the World Bank in 1998, it has helped to coordinate tri-sector partnerships between governments, “civil

⁴² I use this both in a Gramscian and in an ironic sense.

⁴³ For a more detailed analysis of the BPD partnership in Inanda see Lumsden and Loftus, 2003.

society” and the private sector throughout the world. The water and sanitation cluster of the group has pioneered 12 local-level projects, one of which was based in KwaZulu Natal – Inanda being one of the two focus areas in the province. Thus, Inanda has become an important testing ground for an international drive towards such tri-sector partnerships. Here, a project evolved between eThekweni Water Services, Mvula Trust (an NGO specialising in the provision of water to rural communities) and Vivendi Water. The aims and results of the partnership remain somewhat ambiguous: much of the time the project appeared more like a period of courtship between the main partners, prior to what many hoped would be a private concession contract (see Hemson 2003c). Tangible results are minimal – amounting to little more than a slight change to the municipality’s ground tank system and steps being made towards the piloting of a new sewerage system for informal settlements. The self-acknowledged principal outcome, however, seems to be the establishment of a “learning partnership” (Hemson 2003c). In many ways the effects of the learning partnership have been more subversive than the presumed effects of an outright divestiture; it is here that we see, what might be understood as, the attempt to consolidate a new hegemony within civil society.

For eThekweni Water Services, one of the principal lessons they claim to have learnt from Vivendi Water is how to deal with “customers” (Interview Bailey: 14th February 2003; Interview Macleod 26th March 2003). The language used in both interviews and in the BPD documentation is quite explicit about residents of the municipality being customers and a large part of the BPD seems to have been an attempt to re-script citizens as atomised, fee-paying and yet passive consumers of services. The outcome of such attempts is far more ambiguous, of course, but, nevertheless, this would

seem to be a clear aim. The sphere I defined earlier as civil society becomes a space in which these ideas might be consolidated.

eThekwini Water Services has clearly felt compromised in its dealings with “customers”. Interviewees from both Umgeni Water and eThekwini Water Services commented on the political astuteness of the South African consumer (Interview Pillay: 11th December 2002; Interview Bailey: 14th February 2003) and this seems to have served as both a powerful source of opposition to water privatisation and a source of discontent over attempts to introduce cost-recovery initiatives (see McDonald and Pape 2002). Locally, the agitation of the Concerned Citizens Forum (see Desai 2000, 2002; Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003), the higher than average profile given to the Christina Manquele court case that challenged eThekwini Municipality’s reading of the right to water (Community Law Centre 2001), and the apparent willingness of the council to side with the “poor black majority” (Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003; Interview Khuzwayo: 11th April 2003) - all point to major failings in eTWS’ approach to concerns over high bills and serious problems around its ability to impose water meters and disconnect supplies. The killing of two disconnection bailiffs is one of the more overt signs of the limits to the municipality’s more conflictual approach to imposing charges on poor residents. Now, the head of eThekwini Water Services seems to argue for a slightly more conciliatory approach to ensuring bills are paid. A two-pronged strategy is, he argues, necessary. One prong is to combat the agitation of the social movements organising around water issues and win back the support of the council. He begins by describing the Exco – the cabinet committee of the municipality:

“The Exco is a fairly amorphous group. They’re beginning to understand the issues and are beginning to understand that some people are not paying for water when they could pay. I spoke with a leading representative in the Exco recently and he now admitted that there were possibly hundreds or even thousands of households who are not paying and should be paying. They’re coming over to our side but then we have these “Concerned whatever they are”⁴⁴ – telling people that all water should be free. I’ve got some of their information somewhere. But we’ll deal with this source of opposition soon too.”

(Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003)

The second prong is to overturn the “culture of non-payment” that he assumes to be the haunting spectre at the heart of all problems experienced by eTWS. As well as the tighter quantification of supplies referred to previously, the strategy to be developed to counter this, lies in the more “decentralised” approach “learnt” from Vivendi:

“We’ve learnt a lot from Vivendi...Vivendi have a particularly refreshing approach to customer management. At the moment the Metro is communicating a lot with its customers but this communication is not working. It’s important to establish a person in an area responsible for community liaison. This will lead to more empowerment. We’re now thinking of employing somebody working in a [ship] container. My hope would be for more private sector involvement of this kind in future.”

(Interview Macleod: 26th March 2003)

Perhaps not surprisingly, a representative from Vivendi feels the same, arguing that the company’s most important gift lay in fostering this decentralised approach to customer management:

“In terms of customer management we favour a more decentralised approach. We have been arranging for a decentralised office in the community with a trained

⁴⁴ A reference to the Concerned Citizens Forum

person from the community working in this. They will handle technical problems, explaining bills, general queries and household visits.”

(Interview LeMaux: 15th April 2003)

On the surface, this seems relatively unproblematic. An office in the community providing people with a space in which to seek information, lodge complaints or query bills, is surely vital for the provision of a quality service. However, beneath the surface, it becomes clearer that the prime motivation for this decentralised approach to customer management is less to answer technical queries and much more about ensuring the regular payment of bills:

“It is too easy not to pay for bills though...A form of “punishment”, if you might call it that, needs to be quicker. And education needs to take place around this issue.”

(Interview Le Maux: 15th April 2003)

Interestingly, the representative from Vivendi emphasises both the coercive and the consensual. Whereas previously the municipality had been heavy on the coercive approach to ensuring regular payment of bills (provoking both protest and anger), lessons from the private sector on the need to foster consent became available through the “learning partnership”.

Apart from the attempt to shift to a more decentralised approach, the BPD project has initiated a flurry of research into the reasons for the persistence of a culture of non-payment and initiated various educational programmes prior to the installation of new

water connections, urging residents to keep up regular payments and arguing the case for the necessity of charging. The BPD website states that:

“Within the townships there is a strong culture of non-payment and entitlement, stemming from the apartheid-era resistance movement. This low willingness-to-pay is proving difficult for the pilot to overcome and impairs cost recovery”

(BPD 2004)

As I hope to have shown throughout this thesis, in most cases, non-payment is not a matter of choice but a matter of necessity (Community Workshop Bhambayi: 6th March 2003; Community Workshop Amaoti: 16th January 2003; Community Workshop KwaMashu C: 10th March 2003; Household Interviews Amatikwe: 11th February 2003; Household Interviews KwaMashu C: 18th March 2003). Still, educational visits were aimed at conveying to people “the advantages of paying” and the “disadvantages of an illegal connection”. Mvula Trust was the partner in the BPD project responsible for coordinating educational visits and their strategy was one of selecting civic activists to bring this message to the communities. In doing this, they gained privileged access to the community. As one of the participants, a key civic organiser in the Amatikwe area of Inanda, commented:

“as we knew the advantages and what people would say and think, we were told to send the message that this [illegal connections] was not helping plumbers who would be employed in the new system, and that there were problems with burst pipes and pressure dropping”

(Interview T. Ndlovu: 30th January 2003)

A message was thereby conveyed by respected community members that water must be paid for and that to argue otherwise was to endanger contracts for local people and endanger overall access to water.

In 2003, a second phase of the trisector partnership was launched. This time, it was no longer under the umbrella of BPD, involved liaising directly with “civil society groups” and was given the isiZulu name *Sisondela Kuwe* (Interview Le Maux: 15th April 2003). This time, the sole focus of the partnership was customer management and overturning the culture of non-payment through the recruitment of local activists and a vigorous education programme at the micro-level (Desne 2003).

The attempt to consolidate this ideology of the responsible, bill-paying consumer of services cannot, of course, be seen in isolation from other shifts taking place within South Africa. Principal amongst these must be the Masakhane campaign. This appears to have been first launched in the 1995 local election manifesto of the ANC but was then reiterated in the 2000 manifesto. Its aim is “to inculcate the *culture* of payment” (ANC 2000 emphasis added) and to reverse a supposed continuing economic boycott of payment for services. As with *Sisondela Kuwe*, Masakhane is given an isiZulu name to ensure its insertion into communities is given a veneer of indigenisation. Local Masakhane projects vary from area to area with local committees drawing up ideas for street theatre, cartoons and billboard or radio adverts. It is difficult to assess the overall significance of the projects. Certainly, Masakhane t-shirts, folders and leaflets have a high profile within communities. And certainly there is a strong desire on the part of people to be able to pay bills (Community Workshop KwaMashu C) but this seems to stretch much further back than the implementation of the Masakhane campaign with few

even acknowledging a conscious effort under apartheid to boycott payments. Against all the claims on the surface, neither Masakhane nor *Sisondela Kuwe* can therefore be understood as challenges to a genuine culture of non-payment. Rather they seem efforts to generate a hegemonic consensus based on pressuring fellow residents to pay for what is actually unaffordable, and on the stigmatisation of non-payment.

Clearly, in both the Masakhane campaign and in the BPD project, the local and national state administrations have played a central role in attempting to foster this consent. In part, I would argue this can be seen to be a response to contradictions developing at the local level. With Umgeni Water having raised tariffs to the local administration, textile manufacturers threatening relocation over high water rates and the municipality trying to balance a free water policy with a policy of disconnecting residents for non-payment, it was beginning to find itself caught in a web of tense relationships. A coercive response to try and boost revenues from local residents was proving ineffective, so, through working with the Business Partners for Development initiative, the local administration attempted to foster a more consensual approach. Civil society is thereby mobilised as part of an *ad hoc* response to a local crisis.

3.2. Hydro Counter-Hegemony

However, whether couched in a native tongue, conveyed through respected local activists, or supported by wealthy multinationals, individuals are never merely passive recipients of hegemonic projects nor ballerinas to be neatly choreographed into a

different dance. People resist, contest and rebel against attempts to foster elite consensus. Above all, we transform hegemonic projects, taking some aspects on board whilst radicalising other elements. In this next section I look into the hopeful (although not over-optimistic) signs that such transformations are occurring in Inanda.

3.3. Skirmishes in Amaoti⁴⁵

On 11 February 2003 around 150 protestors descended on the offices of their local councillor in Amaoti – an informal area on the Northern edge of Inanda. The protest was the culmination of two weeks of anger that had been building up within the Libya and Palestina⁴⁶ areas of the settlement over the lack of a water supply. I described the beginning of these day's events in the introduction to Chapter 5. Since 1998, water had been delivered to these two communities through a large water tank filled daily. Women (and on rare occasions men) would walk to the tank once or twice a day in order to fill their 25 litre plastic containers with water, at a charge of 50 cents per container. This made the supply one of the most expensive in the municipality. The local councillor at the time the supply had been established argued it was a necessary charge that had actually been reduced, owing to the fact that he had personally negotiated with a contractor to supply the water to the tank. The councillor was shot dead on 2nd February 1999, but the relationship with the local tanker firm remained in place. Slowly, a piped water network was enclosing around the area and by 2002 most of Amaoti's residents

⁴⁵ For a more detailed summary, see Lumsden and Loftus 2003

⁴⁶ Amaoti comprises 13 communities named after places linked with the struggle days (Cuba, Angola etc.)

were within walking distance of a standpipe delivering clean water for free. Libya and Palestina, however remained an island, still locked in the costly agreement and with free supplies in these areas far from a reasonable walking distance (Community workshop: Amaoti 16th January 2003). Two weeks prior to the February protest, the relationship between the municipality and the local contractor appeared to break down (the chain at the time comprised: Umgeni Water; the municipality; a private contractor; a bailiff; and finally the residents). Once this second stage of the chain broke down, the tanker no longer delivered to the Libya and Palestina areas. Residents were thereby forced to walk 30 minutes down the hill and 1 hour back up, in order to buy water from those with household connections at the bottom of the road.

In the run up to the February protest, residents had been trying to negotiate with their new councillor (the wife of the councillor shot dead) for the provision of free water. At a workshop in January, one woman had commented:

“we have been working and fighting on these issues during the first session for five years and now it looks like another five years will pass and nothing will be done. Something else needs to be done that is more direct and gets things done”

(Community Workshop Amaoti 16th January 2003)

For her part, the councillor seemed to have reached a dead end with the Municipality, as bureaucrats referred her to legal documentation proving the municipality had no obligation to respond to the situation. Cowed by the bureaucratic twists, she had given up on negotiations and seemed to be hoping that, sooner or later, an extension of the piped network to Libya and Palestina would mute the growing radicalism within the settlements

(Interview Hlophe: 11th February 2003). On the morning of 11 February, women were organising, agitating and subverting; they were not prepared to hear yet another obfuscation of the issue and wanted to see their demands answered. As they descended the hill, others joined the protest – support growing further still as they walked the half hour stretch of road to the councillor’s office.

On the arrival of the protest, the councillor knew she had to act decisively and immediately called eThekweni Water Services to request that a representative come to negotiate directly with the women. In a fruitful alliance, she permitted her computer to be used by the protestors in order for them to draw up their demands. These cited the community’s *right* to free water and demanded this be ensured with a regular cleaning of the tank and, eventually, a consistent supply of water within each resident’s home. As the mediator from the municipality arrived, he was faced with an organised group of protestors, with a well argued and consistent set of demands. This was presented to him, whilst protestors locked the gates to the compound in order to ensure that no one left until a satisfactory agreement had been reached. After an hour of intense negotiations and mobile phone calls, the municipality’s representative – perhaps worried by the locked gate to the compound (Interview Ngceshu: 11th February 2003) – backed down to the demands. Women scrambled into the back of his pick-up truck and called for him to drive them back to the tank and present them with the key to the locked tap so that surrounding households would never again have to hand over money to have their right to water fulfilled (see Figure 7).



Figure 8: Protestors climb onto the back of a municipal pick-up truck to return victoriously to their free supply of water

The final outcome was not quite as romantic as the day's events suggested and, whilst the municipality *did* ensure that the tank was filled daily, the tap has since fallen into disrepair. Now people have been forced to return to siphoning water from the tank with a hosepipe (see Figure 8). On February 11, however, the victory seemed complete. "We aren't prepared to pay for water anymore" said one woman "We have gone without water for more than two weeks. We are having to carry it up the hill and it's not even free from those people at the bottom. *That's not right.*" (Interview Protestor: 11th February 2003) On that day, it seemed her call had been answered. Hopeful signs of the emergence of a dynamic opposition to some of the locally entrenched inequalities seemed to be

emerging on the day. For a few moments, the terrain of civil society seemed more favourable for an alternative project. It is important to explore the distant potentials within this and the links it has with movements of the past and potential movements of the future. Overall, the protest seemed to combine elements of spontaneity with a longer-term network of loyalties and a durable sense of both rights and political process.



Figure 9: Woman Siphoning Water in Amaoti

On the surface, the protest appeared a purely spontaneous uprising. A problem had emerged – lack of access to water – and residents had responded, quickly, forcefully and effectively. Praising such action Hardt and Negri (2000) juxtapose Guattari’s snake – coiled and ready to strike – with Marx’s tired old mole – endlessly excavating subterranean passageways and only emerging in times of heightened contradiction. Here, they might also reject a Gramscian emphasis on the role of education in cultivating revolutionary change. This is not the point to enter into these debates, but it is worth pointing out that, in the case of Amaoti, such a binarised view – between spontaneity and

structure – appears somewhat meaningless. Instead the two positions have to be seen working as a differentiated unity, or in a dialectical relationship. Without the spark of anger resulting from the removal of water supplies, people might have continued paying for a service they felt deeply angry about. However, without some sense of the obligations of the municipality, or without some sense of the capacity of social protest to bring about change, the spontaneity would have been directionless and potentially futile. The spark would have failed to ignite. Much of the apparent spontaneity to the protest was a direct result of the urgency of the situation, something which is acknowledged as accounting for much of the rise and fall of mobilisations in other parts of the city (Desai 2002). As basic necessities become inaccessible to residents, people need to organise rapidly in order to ensure that access is urgently reopened. Once this goal has been achieved, movements seem to dissolve once more. In Inanda, we have seen how this seemed to be the case with the marshals phenomenon and the comrades movement that preceded it. As I stated then, however, the movements had not entirely dissolved, nor had civil society been miraculously crushed. Instead, as Miliband reminds us, the terrain of civil society is sometimes more favourable, sometimes less but is *never entirely barren* (1990: 347). Thus, far from the comrades movement having dissolved or dissipated, much of the effectiveness of the protest of February 2003 seemed to depend on the network of loyalties built up through the comrades. However, without some of the epistemological possibilities prised open by the standpoint of women, as discussed in the previous chapter, none of this might have occurred. We thus see something of a movement between the epistemological possibilities within a feminist standpoint to the emergence of a group consciousness through the “network of tunnels” that might be

considered to be a historically and geographically situated civil society in Amaoti. As Hartsock (2004) argues, Gramsci provides a bridge from the individual consciousness described in the previous chapter to a developing group consciousness described in this chapter.

Whilst the legacy of the comrades remained important, it is through the Amaoti Civic Association that we see its most recent manifestation in the area. To suggest that the Amaoti Civic Association had conducted a concerted campaign to educate the community around rights to water – industriously constructing the underground passageways Hardt and Negri so deride – would be to bend the truth somewhat. The Amaoti Civic Association is run on such an informal basis that it becomes more a space for political debate and argument than a platform for the consolidation of a loyal ANC support basis (Interview Ncwane: 11th February 2003; Interview Ngceshu: 11th February 2003). On most days of the week, a former comrade or younger activist can be found at the Amaoti Civic “headquarters”⁴⁷ discussing politics or playing cards. Although not formally active, this meant that networks were tighter, whilst also more open, than in many other parts of the municipality. At the January workshop we held in the area on water issues, people had a good idea of what the Masakhane campaign was, whilst arguing that it had been almost non-existent locally. Literally at the end of the road, Amaoti seems almost a forgotten part of Inanda and activists are more able to appropriate the discourses of the ANC for their own purposes. As Thulani Ncwane commented on the February protest:

⁴⁷ The building itself was appropriated after a contractor claiming to be supplying RDP homes had built a “show-home” and then pocketed local people’s housing subsidies.

“In some ways, this could only happen in Amaoti. As it sits on the edge of the municipality and so many comrades still know each other well, they’re free of the bureaucracy of other places”

(Interview Newane: 11th February 2003)

Whilst this is no doubt true, as I stressed earlier, a crucial part of the success on the day was a sense of the community’s right to water. In typing up their demands, protestors insisted on the inclusion of the fact that the ANC had constitutionally guaranteed them a right to water; something they were actively being denied. Whilst many of the re-choreographed relationships between state and citizen have become hegemonic within the area, this should be seen as part of a lengthier journey embarked upon together with the ANC. We should not, perhaps, see Amaoti as a forgotten backwater but as a community deeply imbued with a sense of what the Congress tradition has promised through its long history. The situation is now peculiarly double-edged with residents’ relationship to the regime being actively re-scripted (never mind the fact for now that residents will actively rebel against such re-scripting rather than passively accept it) but with residents deeply sensitive to the rights they fought for. Hegemony can only be consolidated around the former through also sharpening the other edge. The sterile alternative between political participation and political abstention is shown to be a falsity in Inanda, as participation implies accepting the current consensus whilst also rebelling against. In Amaoti, the struggle is shown to be that sought-after battle within-against-and-beyond the state (LEWRG 1980).

In actual fact, as the constitutional right to water has been redefined through various court challenges and clarifications, the municipality probably did not have a legal obligation to provide the communities with water. The councillor’s early rebuttal from

the municipality was probably reasonably sound in strict legal terms (Interview Bailey 14th February 2003). But, in many ways, *the conception of the right to water in Amaoti has taken on a life of its own*: it has been internalised, transformed and radicalised by the residents of the area. Earlier, I argued that the “right to free water” and the struggle over this right had, to some extent led to a reification of water as commodity. On the one hand, “free water” has provided the municipality with a moral justification for the disconnection of supplies and on the other it seems to have transformed a struggle for qualitative change into one purely about quantitative and technocratic changes. In Amaoti, however, we see how the notion of a right to free water has become a focus for the radicalisation of a community that goes beyond what the “right to water” might imply. Writing of universal human rights, David Harvey notes that

“on questions of rights the bourgeoisie has created such a maelstrom of contradictions on the world stage that it has unwittingly opened up several paths towards a progressive and universalizing politics at the global scale”

(Harvey 2000: 94)

The same could be said of the South African right to water and the subsequent free water policy. Important as a moral counterweight to the reality of water disconnections, the ideology of free water has been propagated in the same forums as the Business Partners for Development initiative and in the same forums as Masakhane or *Sisondela Kuwe*. Civil society serves as a sphere in which state institutions and private sector bodies have hoped to rescript the relationship between state, citizen and market. But in the very process of doing this, they have laid the seeds for potentially radicalising forces that

threaten this neoliberal project. Gramsci's dual conception of civil society thereby generates new possibilities through its latent tensions. As Ani diFranco's opening line reminds us "Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right".

4. CONCLUSION (Or Towards a Dialectical Understanding of the Prince?)

...it takes a lot of things to change the world:
Anger and tenacity. Science and indignation,
The quick initiative, the long reflection,
The cold patience and the infinite perseverance,
The understanding of the particular case and the understanding of the ensemble:
Only the lessons of reality can teach us to transform reality

- Bertolt Brecht *Einverständnis*, quoted in Harvey 1996: 439

My argument in this chapter is that the potentials for broader, deeper and stronger mobilisations are being sown daily. In no way should this be understood teleologically. Instead, through linking the epistemological possibilities prised open through the struggle for a feminist standpoint in the previous chapter with the analysis of civil society developed in this chapter, it becomes clear how important is the search for latent potentials within what often seems a barren terrain. However, I think this chapter helps our analysis along the way somewhat, by showing that *within* the hegemonic projects being consolidated in Durban's waterscape, new contradictions are emerging that can be exploited to good effect when the chance arises. Here lies some of the potential in a

Gramscian understanding of civil society that views it as such a crucial terrain for the contestation of hegemonic projects.

On the negative side, forums for asserting the importance of atomised and obedient consumers of services are being developed with increasing sophistication throughout the municipality. Here civil society might be seen as a sphere for the consolidation of a new hegemony that restructures the waterscape as an accumulation strategy and posits individuals as fee-paying consumers of services. On the more positive side, this hegemony is criss-crossed with contradictions as it is paradoxically fostered through a limited conception of the right to water. The more limited conception of this right to water contains within it the conception of a society with genuinely free water, something demanded by the protest in Amaoti. The simplistic portrayal of a clash between the ANC regime and insurgent activists is thereby shown to be false. This would be to deny the experience of so many of those still deeply loyal to an African National Congress tradition: a tradition which has transformed into something barely recognisable from the struggle days of the past. Such a simplistic portrait would also miss with its broad brushstrokes the tension between conservatism and rebelliousness that seems to traverse the consciousnesses of so many of us (see Thompson 1968).

Instead, I argue that a critique is immanent within the very hegemonic project being sown by the municipality, the ANC regime, and its new alliance with capital. A dialectical critique emerges from within, as people transform a limited concept of rights and transcend the government's conception of free water. Thus, loyalists to a Congress tradition in peripheral areas such as Amaoti become organic intellectuals for a quite different project from that conceived at national levels. The peripheral parts of the city

become a no-man's land in which these hegemonic projects are both consciously and unwittingly transformed. Within this conception I argue against the search for a fetishised Prince or a new revolutionary subject. Rather, I argue that we need to make connections with the dialectical prince hidden within everyday people. Through this more process-based understanding of an ever-changing Prince, I argue we might be able to triangulate the kind of critical topographies that connect different geographical areas with different historical moments of struggle. I can think of no more beautiful way of summarising these historical and geographical transformations of struggle than through the words of that most poetic of dialecticians, William Morris:

“I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name”

(from *A Dream of John Ball*)

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

“The world does not exist in order to provide illustrations of our theories”
(Gregory 2004: 248)

In the detached comfort of a college office or library, it is all too easy to be carried away by academic posturing and theoretical sophisms. Theories become objects to be refined by the individual rather than ideas to be put to work in a shared experience of making better sense of the world. As the quotation from Derek Gregory implies, there is a danger in this that we begin to see the world as existing merely as a backdrop to our fanciful theories. My hope with this thesis has been to try and avoid this sense of academic detachment: instead I aimed to keep the dialectic of political praxis woven throughout the work. At times though, the need to make sense of complex social processes has necessitated moving into denser theory than I might have wished, so, in beginning to conclude, I would like to return to my initial observations of Durban’s waterscape and the abrupt reality that prompted this analysis – the reality that remains the energy behind the ideas developed. A useful re-entry point here is the conclusion to my fieldwork observations⁴⁸. These notes are written with a freshness and anger that has been difficult to recapture from the distance of Oxford. The key issues that struck me with such force in these conclusions were the enormous paradoxes of water delivery in

⁴⁸ These observations were circulated amongst and discussed with friends and colleagues.

Durban; the inhumanity of many current water policies⁴⁹; the failure of the municipality to understand the everyday concerns of many of its residents; the suppressed anger of Durban's poor communities; and the apparent inability of most of us to value water in any way other than economically. I explained how I had reached such concerns through observations and interviews in the field, highlighting them with a few key vignettes.

1. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

In the first vignette, I wrote of an interview with a resident in the rural area of Mzinyathi. This pensioner had been displaced by the construction of the Inanda dam in the apartheid years. For the last sixteen years, her roundhouse had overlooked the waters of this reservoir. She had received none of the compensation promised following her displacement; this had been passed on to corrupt tribal authorities. Nor had she received any of the piped water that was instead diverted to the wealthier suburbs of the city. Having been crippled, she had paid local children to collect water from the reedy banks of the reservoir. She recalled the problematic years when corpses would surface in the water, close to where the children would fill their water containers – another sign of the apartheid-fuelled violence that had engulfed rural parts of KwaZulu Natal in the late 1980s. For the first time in her life, this woman now had a connection to the water network. All this seemed to be made possible through the municipality's innovative groundtank scheme described in Chapter 4. As we sat on her floor, she spoke of the simple joys of being able to make a cup of tea for visitors and of being able to wash her

⁴⁹ The emotive language is explained later in this chapter

hands or clothes without the fear of a thirsty night ahead. She spoke of the relief of being able to trust her drinking water without fear of disease.

Not all of this woman's neighbours had been able to afford the R279 for such a groundtank and it troubled this woman that they still remained forgotten or neglected by the expanding network. Equally troubling for me, the municipality was, at that time, awaiting delivery of hardware to ensure that the central manifolds supplying this pensioner's groundtank and others in the area would only be able to deliver the most basic volume of water – 200 litres, once a day. The thirsty nights, although seeming a thing of the past, were looming once again, as distant bureaucrats invested their energies into restricting these new connections to the bare minimum. I remembered the sense in which this interview seemed to capture so much about South Africa's post-apartheid paradoxes and I remembered the manner in which the perverse contradictions, of having been displaced by a dam to make way for the consumption of others and of finally bringing water to a household only to restrict its supply, seemed to demand explanation.

In another vignette, I described the situation discussed previously in KwaMashu C, where a resident had approached the municipality to have her own water supply restricted because of the fear of debt. Now, struggling to survive on such a basic volume of water, she found herself and her children facing the worst water shortages of their lives, at a time when the municipality's supplies were greater than ever. In another sketch, I recalled the parting words from one of my most helpful interviewees, the manager of research and development at eThekweni Water Services. He laughed at my early naïveté, my initial shock at the fact that up to a thousand residents were being disconnected from the water supply each day, and then he asked if I had now been in

Durban for long enough to understand why eTWS acted in the way it did. In the field report, I seethed with anger at this comment, arguing that: no, I did not understand the aggressive attitude towards such vulnerable people. Nor did I understand the lack of faith in people, nor the patronising approach adopted towards the poor of the city. Finally, I speculated angrily that the municipality's approach was to privilege cost curves over the lives of people. Surely, I asked, there has to be some other way of valuing water. I concluded the notes by questioning:

“So, in arguing for free basic water, do we not slip into a trap of strengthening the case for recognising above all an economic value in water? Do we not fuel the new technologies being developed to restrict water to poor households rather than get water to all households (and line the pockets of those developing them)? Above all do we not strengthen the power of money in controlling the way people are able to live their lives freely? This certainly runs counter to my understanding of what socialist struggle has meant throughout the years and it runs counter to the desperate needs of those living in KwaMashu, Mzinyathi and Inanda. I think it might just run counter to the understanding of many of the women in KwaMashu also. Who are we to limit their ambitions with our sloping curves?”

Returning to Oxford, some of my anger has been quelled, some of my concerns have shifted, and, whilst some of the issues now seem more obvious than they did in the field, others seem infinitely more complex. However, in concluding this thesis, I would like to return to these observations and see how much light might have been shed upon them through the sometimes abstract discussion of the state, the accumulation process or alienation. Rather than structuring the conclusion identically to the thesis by running through chapter-by-chapter summaries, I have structured it around the initial observations, mobilising the insights of the thesis to make better sense of these observations. In some ways, I do still follow the structure of the thesis, but by structuring

the conclusion in this way, it becomes more focussed on the actual waterscape. At the end of the chapter, having woven these insights together, I attempt to summarise what I feel this thesis offers to our overall understanding of political ecology.

I begin by looking at the first of my observations: the enormous paradoxes of current water delivery in Durban, before going on to look at what I initially described as the inhumanity of current water policies; the municipality's perverse understanding of water issues; and the bubbling anger of Durban's poor communities.

1.1. The Paradoxes of Water Delivery in Durban

Of all my initial concerns, trying to make better sense of the paradoxes of water delivery in Durban is perhaps the most encompassing. This involves trying to understand the manner in which the progress of delivering water to pensioners in Mzinyathi is automatically accompanied by a restriction of residential supplies. It involves trying to make sense of how an immensely innovative South African municipal water provider, which has been praised for its efforts at bringing free water to the poor population of the city, is also one of the most aggressive in disconnecting residents. In many ways it seems to characterise South Africa's post-apartheid transitions and captures the Rainbow Nation, wracked as it is with vast inequalities. In journeying towards some better understanding of these paradoxes, I began by abstracting the state. In some political ecological analyses, the state is taken to be a key agent that lies at the cusp of such paradoxes.

However, in looking at the thing we understand to be the state more closely, it becomes clear that it is neither the autonomous entity many presume it to be, nor is it the agent of change that we often assume. Instead, the state is better understood as the reification of broader political economic and political ecological struggles. Thus, I proposed that the *form* of the South African national state might be seen to emerge from some of the contradictions within the South African Minerals Energy Complex (Holloway and Picciotto 1978, Fine and Rustomjee 1996). Similarly, the local state might be seen to be concretised through struggles over collective consumption and in particular the distribution of basic resources such as water. Understood in political ecological terms, the state is increasingly reified through the tensions between the production of water for use and its production for exchange. Here we begin to uncover some of the processes and relations that appear to be condensed in state policy. The paradoxes of water delivery in Durban are therefore shown to revolve less around the actions of this reified entity and more around the political ecological struggles giving rise to such ‘fetishised forms’ as the state.

Going deeper into the paradoxes of water delivery in Durban therefore involved turning our attention to these broader struggles. I then attempted to situate the production of Durban’s waterscape within a broader system of accumulation. This necessitated a charting of the flow of water from the bulk-water supplier to the taps of local residents. In developing this analysis, it becomes clearer that the municipal water provider is part of a much longer chain of supply. The need to ensure profits at one end of the chain has distinct effects throughout this chain. The profit motive eventually impinges on pensioners in Mzinyathi, single mothers in KwaMashu C and managers in eThekweni

Water Services. Thus, it was shown that Durban's waterscape has become increasingly important as part of a broader accumulation strategy. With its anomalous formation in the apartheid years and its commercialisation in the post-apartheid years, Umgeni Water has become an increasingly parasitic entity in the chain of supply of water to Durban. Many of the current paradoxes in water policy can therefore be traced back to the constraints imposed by this entity. As it has encountered major problems in its ability to guarantee returns to bondholders, it has sought new ways of generating profits. Here, I began to situate some of the paradoxes experienced in Durban in the theories developed by David Harvey on the spatio-temporal dynamics of capital accumulation. Harvey argues that, in response to crises of overaccumulation, capitalists seek to fend off devaluation of capital through long-term investments; through investing in new territorial areas; or through some combination of the two (1982). More recently, he has argued capitalists may seek to prise open new resources, formerly lying within a communal sphere, in order to open up space for new profitable investments (Harvey 2003).

In a haphazard fashion, Umgeni Water would appear to have turned to several of these 'fixes'. First, it has sought new areas in which to mop up some of its surplus capital within South Africa. Thus, over the last decade, it has entered into contracts with the Department for Water Affairs and Forestry and District Municipalities in order to supply water to rural communities. In doing so, Umgeni Water originally made significant losses, and its ability to guarantee profitable returns to investors came increasingly under threat. A response was to prise open new spaces for investment *outside* South Africa, bidding for contracts in Nigeria and setting up service contracts in many other African countries. It linked these expansions explicitly with the South African government's

pursuit of the New Partnership for African Development. Once again, Umgeni Water appeared to fail in generating sufficient profits from such investments. At this point, it returned to the terrain that had been the most lucrative throughout the years – Durban’s waterscape. Here, we begin to see how some of the paradoxes of water delivery in the city are played out most overtly. Thus, in the last years of the 1990s and the first few years of the new millennium, Umgeni Water seriously increased bulk-water tariffs to eThekweni and Msunduzi municipalities. As local textile manufacturers began to rebel and threatened to relocate to a municipality with cheaper water rates, the limits to absorbing these tariff increases through redistributive measures became clear. Instead, increases were passed on to local residents – many of them the poorest in the city – and new techniques began to be developed to ensure all payment for services could be recovered. An aggressive policy of disconnection and restriction was the result. In part to counter some of the more direct effects of these increases, a free basic water policy was developed in the city. On the one hand this mitigated some of the worst consequences of disconnections for the poorest residents. On the other hand, it permitted far greater control over the volumes of water distributed to households than ever before. Again, the ability to ensure that profits could be made through control over domestic supplies was, paradoxically, strengthened.

This summary might seem a little too neat. Clearly there is the potential for people to exert pressure on such a situation from numerous different angles. Indeed much of the thesis was concerned with the search for the most productive channels through which we might be able to effect change within such a framework. However, it must be seen from such an analysis that Durban’s waterscape is actively produced through

relations between people that are decidedly capitalist in nature. Although on the surface it would seem that the profit motive has little to do with the distribution of water in the city, as we span outwards, it becomes clear how the survival of a key entity such as Umgeni Water is only ensured through the accumulation of ever-greater profits from the distribution of water in Durban. Many of the tensions, paradoxes or contradictions that can be observed in Durban's waterscape lie within the capitalist relations that produce the waterscape – the omnipresent tension between use and exchange value in the commodity; the creative destruction of capitalist development; and the struggles between residents and local capitals over a fair distribution of water.

1.2. The Inhumanity of Current Water Policies

When I wrote of the inhumanity of current water policies in Durban, I intended this to be taken in at least two ways. First, I hoped to indicate the heartlessness I saw in bringing a water supply to a household, only to disconnect that supply because of a family's inability to ensure regular payment for services. I hoped to indicate the cruelty in the fact that families were living in fear of debt collectors, bailiffs, and imposed droughts. Secondly, I wished to show the manner in which water policy so frequently seems to be wrested from the control of people, as water meters, flow restrictors and money assume an increasingly dominant position within the waterscape.

In order to better theorise the latter, I looked at the way in which the waterscape is produced. By situating this historically, I argued that we begin to see the production of an alienated waterscape – one that appears removed from human control, as people are

physically separated from their means of existence and only able to ensure the metabolic interaction upon which life itself depends through exchange relations. In short, in order to be able to access food and water, people have to be able to work, earn money and pay for these basics. Here I entered briefly into some of the more recent debates in which theorists have attempted to better understand socio-natural interrelations. Much intellectual energy has been invested in recent years in showing the inseparability of the social and natural and the way in which all entities might be understood as socio-natural hybrids. Cities can neither be understood as social nor natural entities but rather as lived ecosystems (Harvey 1996). Water is best understood as a socio-natural hybrid (Swyngedouw 1999).

The argument I developed in trying to explain the *inhumanity* of current water policies, however, was that we have, perhaps, bent the stick too far in the direction of emphasising a simplistic hybridity. In our eagerness to reject the sociologised marxism of the past, we are in danger of overlooking the fact that socio-natural relations transform historically. We are in danger of losing any nuance in a simplistic assertion that the social and natural are inseparable, always have been, and always will be. Instead, I sought to argue that the processes through which life itself is reproduced in Durban have begun to transform because of the increasing integration of the waterscape into the broader systems of accumulation outlined previously. What this has meant is that the waterscape should be understood as increasingly produced through capitalist relations of production and exchange (Smith 1984). Both water and the technologies through which it is distributed cannot be understood outside of the relationships between people through which they are produced. And in being produced through these relations, they come to

exhibit the alien power expressed in capitalist production. In Marx's terms: "This fact simply means that the object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer" (1974: 324). Not only is this alien power exerted over the person who has produced the object, it is also exerted over others, as relations between capitalist and worker or between Umgeni Water and township resident come to be expressed through objects.

As my argument progressed, I sought to distinguish it from similar arguments that might imply this control or this inhumanity is inherent in technological progress. Rather than arguing that the domination expressed in technology is somehow irreversible, I sought to re-historicise this relationship and to argue for the possibility that a more egalitarian distribution of water could be achieved through transforming the relations through which the waterscape is produced. Yes, technologies seem to define socio-natural interrelations and seem to dictate how people are able to access water; but this is only because of the capitalist relations internal to those technologies. If the inhumanity is to be reversed, it is not through an abandonment of technology, it is through a democratisation of that same technology. It is through everyday people's involvement in, struggles over, and communal ownership of these technologies.

1.3. The Perversity of the Municipality's View of the Waterscape

Very early on in the research, it became clear that managers within the municipality viewed the waterscape and changes within it from a radically different perspective from those interviewed within communities. Whereas disconnections were

viewed as simple accounting procedures by managers, they were seen as an attack on life itself by residents. Whereas for managers, arrears on water bills were amassed because of selfishness on the part of residents, a culture of non-payment, or the overall disorganisation of the township household; for residents, such arrears were an enormous financial burden to be wrestled with, to lose sleep over, and to try and pay off in tiny increments. These differences were not simply of political perspective. Rather there seemed different positions through which the waterscape might be understood, depending, to a large extent, on the relationships formed through one's activity within it. Similarly, within communities, it became clear that many women engaged in the supply of water to households had quite different understandings of water issues from some of the men. It is easy to overdraw these differences. However, in part, both municipal policy and the struggles that shape the waterscape are shaped by these vantage points. Thus, municipal managers would assume that community members would respond appropriately to signals given out by the pricing of commodities and, if water was priced highly, people would use less. The entire logic of the free water policy, cross-subsidisation and the ostensibly progressive block tariff mechanism is built around this assumption of utility-maximising behaviour. However, from community workshops and household interviews, it becomes clear that consumption norms, water needs, and valuations of water are understood profoundly differently. This I argued produced specific situated knowledges (Haraway 1991) and began to open up the possibility of different vantage points that might have qualitatively different insights upon the waterscape.

As I then went on to argue in the thesis, exploring the possibilities within these differing vantage points begins to unlock new political potentials. Much of my understanding of how these different vantage points might arise, and how they could be transformed into tools for radical political change, came from feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock 1983a, 1983b, Harding 2004) and builds on historical materialist foundations found in the work of Lukács (1971) (see Jameson 2004 also). As I considered these standpoints, I sought to show how the struggle for a feminist standpoint could open up new possibilities for the challenging of patriarchy and also for the challenging of mechanistic, utility-maximising understandings of the waterscape. Women's views are not solely dictated by the fact they are responsible for most of the tasks involving the transformation of water into a substance useful for the household. They are also shaped by the fact the bill is predominantly registered in their name and they are responsible for ensuring the bailiff is kept from disconnecting the household for non-payment. Here, I began to explore some of the contradictions within vantage points and how these might generate productive tensions. Thus, I showed the way in which, through the gendered division of labour, women have to negotiate the contradictions between use and exchange value in the commodity form on a daily basis. Similarly, the specific nature of women's tasks in patriarchal society involves a particular mediation of socio-natural relationships that is changing most dramatically through the more recent production of the waterscape as an accumulation strategy. Exploring these contradictions undermines the sense of a unified or essential singular consciousness, re-emphasises my relational understanding of standpoint theory and generates new political possibilities. This is clearly not to imply a better viewpoint or to perform a new "god trick" in Donna Haraway's (1991) terms, as if

a feminist standpoint might somehow achieve greater objectivity. Rather it is to argue for the *conditions of possibility* of new thinking inherent in such a position (Jameson 2004: 145).

1.4. The Suppressed Anger of Durban's Poor Communities

The last of my initial observations is, on the surface, the most obvious. Indeed, in some ways it has already been considered in this conclusion. Residents are angry because four thousand households are having their water supplies disconnected across the municipality each week. Residents are angry because, at the instant they receive clean drinking water, it seems to be taken away from them again. Residents are angry because of the large disjuncture between the way in which they understand the waterscape and the way in which the municipality understands the waterscape. What is less obvious, and in many ways more important, is the fact that this anger is *suppressed* and not overt. There are not the semi-formal and yet underground channels of resistance of the apartheid years and there is frequently confusion and disorientation around the way in which the African National Congress has governed. What is harder, is to figure out where real possibilities lie for communities to voice their dissent, how connections might be made between groups across the municipality (and beyond that nationally and internationally).

Here, I tried to put some of the ideas of Antonio Gramsci to work, in order to look at the operation of hegemony and the latent potentials that might be found within the terrain of civil society. In the apparent reversal of a revolutionary moment, a new hegemony is apparently being consolidated in a restructuring of state-society relations

that places greater emphasis on the individual as an atomised consumer of services. With the apparent statisation of civil society (Mamdani 1996) – understood in the thesis as the reification of the state through the terrain of civil society – resistance appears to be quashed through gaining the active *consent* of individuals, and through transforming this consent into active support for the ANC. However, I argued against understanding this in a closed sense and also pointed to some of the contradictions within the emerging hegemony. Thus, if we are to understand the suppressed anger, it is partly because of such contradictions within this hegemony. Consent is fostered through both the assertion of the importance of payment for services and also through the ostensibly more egalitarian promise of free water. Thus, a contradictory ideology is propagated and a tool for the generation of consent might be transformed into a weapon for the shattering of this consent.

In exploring the apparent lack of closure to this emerging hegemony, I suggested that there might be geographical variations across the city. Thus, in parts of Inanda where some of the capillaries through which such ideologies might be propagated are considerably weaker, local activists read and transform hegemony in different ways from KwaMashu. Here, I touched on the tensions within so many of us between radicalism and conservatism and considered the fact that in many other areas of the city, people will rebel against and transform ideologies in their own particular ways. Hope lies in being able to make connections between the processes of transforming these ideologies, something I speculated might be found through the expanding water network and through the contradictory messages calling for the citizen (with a right to water) to act much more as an atomised and paying consumer. The political ecology of water therefore becomes a

key part of the terrain of civil society. Here, competing visions around water distribution might be and are contested. Through exploring some of these connections, I also attempted to construct what Katz (2004) refers to as countertopographies of power, in seeking to connect some of the situated knowledges of the waterscape with its constitutive global relationships.

2. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Through exploring such concerns, the thesis does not fit so easily within a canon that might be termed political ecology (Blaikie 1985, Blaikie and Brookfield 1987, Peet and Watts 1996, Bryant and Bailey 1997, Robbins 2004). Instead, through a consideration of Durban's waterscape, I have attempted to engage with some of the key debates in political ecology but to revivify these with a flexible and open historical geographical materialist methodology. Through approaching political ecology from such a framework, I suggest the thesis has several key contributions to make.

2.1. On the waterscape as accumulation strategy

Through the example of Durban, I hope to have shown some of the ways in which the waterscape can be produced as an accumulation strategy. Whilst, on the surface, water may appear to be distributed through a public entity (and supplied by a not-for-profit bulk water supplier) I hope to have shown how the provision of water in Durban is increasingly dependent upon water fulfilling two functions – as a useful substance for the

improvement of people's lives and as an exchangeable commodity through which profits might be made for distant shareholders. Increasingly, the waterscape is being produced for the latter reasons, and, it is in this sense that it might be understood to be produced as part of an accumulation strategy. Such insights could be transferred to other cities around the world – perhaps more so in the case where water has been privatised or where a private company is contracted to service the water needs of a people. In the case of Durban, new insights are shed upon the way in which this waterscape is linked to a broader, crisis-prone system of accumulation in South Africa, and how this, in turn, is connected globally. Thus, many of the paradoxes encountered in Durban's ostensibly progressive delivery of water, can be seen to result from these crisis tendencies. In particular, the increases in water tariffs within the municipality can be seen to be related to the inability of the city's bulk supplier to find productive investments and its inability to capitalise on those productive investments it does have. It has thereby turned to a strategy of accumulation by dispossession in response to a broader crisis of overaccumulation both within South Africa and globally.

2.2. On the Production of an Alienated Waterscape

The production of the waterscape as an accumulation strategy relies on the fact that residents do not have free access to potable drinking water. If profits are to be realised, this can only be done through the exchange of money for the commodities produced. This implies, as Marx recognised in his analysis of primitive accumulation, that people must be actively divorced from their means of existence. Capital exists as a

social relation between those with free access to the means of production and reproduction, and those whose only access is through sale of their labour power. This relationship was shown in the case of Durban through the increasing dominance of water meters, flow restrictors and disconnections. Water is necessarily alienated from the majority of the people in order to ensure profits for the few. This point has important implications for recent debates around the constitution of socio-natural relations, as well as for political ecology in general. Whilst not denying the impossibility of separating the natural and the social into discrete units, this argument re-centres our attention on the way in which these interrelations are mediated. In the case of water, it is to argue that this mediation takes place through distinctly capitalist processes and activities. It is to argue that we are merely restating a forgotten truth in noting that the human and non-human worlds are linked through networks of human and non-human agents (for an example of such an analysis see Whatmore 1999).

Another implication of the production of this alienated waterscape is that non-human entities such as water meters, flow limiters and money begin to acquire an alien power over the lives of those that produced and consume them. This takes place as produced nature increasingly comes to internalise these capitalist social relations. I argue that much of the recent enthusiasm within geography and political ecology for non-human agency merely reiterates an argument concerning an external (and binarised) relation between society and nature rather than looking at the fusion of socio-natures and the explosive internal relations that 'things' come to embody as a result of this interaction being mediated through capitalist production and exchange (for important expositions of similar points see Swyngedouw 2005 and Zitouni 2004). Curiously, in the case of

Durban, this alienation has been heightened through the introduction of a free basic water policy. In one of the many curious paradoxes of Durban's waterscape, I argue that free water is being produced as a commodity (Loftus 2004).

2.3. On the Struggle for a Feminist Standpoint

Perhaps surprisingly, feminist ideas are frequently overlooked in political ecological work, and also in much of the work building on a historical geographical materialist approach. In the case of political ecology, much of the development of feminist ideas has been of the 'add-women-and-stir' variety, rather than a methodological tool for the opening up of new epistemological possibilities. In the course of this thesis, I hope to have shown how through the struggle for a feminist standpoint and through integrating some of the insights from Haraway's writings on situated knowledges, new possibilities, new frameworks and new insights on some of the more vexing questions of political ecology might emerge.

In developing a specifically feminist historical materialist position, I looked at different ways of theorising gender relations in Durban's waterscape. Here, I considered whether the work of women might be considered as a form of primitive accumulation (Meillassoux 1981), or whether gender struggles could be understood as transforming both relationships between men and women as well as broader capitalist social relations (Bozzoli 1995). The advantage of developing a feminist standpoint approach, I argue, is its very openness. In the quotation used to introduce this thesis, Holloway asks "Do we know how to make the revolution?" before replying "No, we do not; and only a charlatan

would claim that we do” (2005: 41). In exploring the situated knowledges of different women, engaged in different activities across the city, I argue for what Jameson (2004) refers to as *the conditions of possibility* of new ways of thinking are prised open. The end point of these possibilities is not known. Rather such possibilities are seen as part of a process of developing new insights into the complex politics of an alienated waterscape. Only through further struggle and openness to difference might such insights be unlocked. In the case of Durban, this was developed through the often contradictory positions in which many women find themselves in relation to the production and distribution of water. This involves the everyday negotiation of the use-value/exchange value nexus and an increasingly separated relationship from the means of reproduction.

2.4. On the Struggle Against Fetishisation as Process

In exploring the latter point, I consider Jameson’s suggestion that feminist standpoint theories open up the possibility of exploring a non-reified consciousness (2004). Reification and fetishisation are phenomena lurking in many areas of the waterscape. As the production of an alienated waterscape transforms the product of people’s labour into an alien power over them and imputes mystical powers into the technologies that dominate the waterscape, so we invest those technologies with still greater power. This produces a strangely inverted reality – things control people and not vice-versa. For many theorists, drawing on Marx’s analysis of the commodity, this phenomenon is best understood as fetishism. Whilst fetishism has been understood by some as the cornerstone for a marxist reading of ideology and thereby implies some form

of false consciousness, I sought to show in this thesis how struggles around fetishism are in fact struggles to intervene in processes that generate a perverted reality. The fetishisation of the waterscape is thereby better understood as a process (Holloway 2002b) in itself, something that might be transformed through an active struggle to ensure democratic control of water supplies and democratic control of the technologies through which these supplies are distributed.

Early in the thesis, I sought to show how the state is also fetishised through political economic and political ecological contradictions. As we target our political energies on lobbying this fetishised entity, it acquires an ever greater power over the lives of all of us. Instead, I argued, our struggles might be focussed on transforming the relations between people that produce the state as a reified entity. Again, this suggests we might focus our energies on resisting the production of the waterscape as an accumulation strategy and on the direct, democratic control of water supplies. In short, de-fetishisation implies a struggle to transform social relations and not the puncturing of some ideologically-imposed false consciousness.

2.5. On the Struggle to Transform the Terrain of Civil Society

Finally, I sought to show how such struggles might also involve the transformation of increasingly dominant ideas within the waterscape. Here I sought to integrate some of Gramsci's insights into civil-society: again, this is a body of theory that has been overlooked in most work in political ecology⁵⁰. Thus, I argued that power might be seen to flow through the waterscape in a decentralised manner and that it can work to

⁵⁰ Peet and Watts (1996) touch upon Gramsci's work without really developing this.

generate consensus as well as operating coercively. I attempted to show this through the fostering of the notion of the atomised fee-paying consumer in Durban's waterscape. The municipal water provider has consciously sought to develop a two-pronged approach to what it believes to be a culture of non-payment within poor areas of the city. On the one hand it has sought to increase the coercive pressure of disconnecting residents for non-payment of bills. On the other hand it has sought to work with grassroots organisations in instilling a sense of obligation towards the payment for services.

For Gramsci, as civil society develops its intricate network of tunnels and "earthworks", a war of position – involving cultural transformations – becomes increasingly necessary prior to a war of manoeuvre. In certain areas of the city, there are slim possibilities that such a war of position might be emerging. In Inanda, I looked at the legacy of anti-apartheid struggle and the committed work of certain key activists who might be understood to play a role similar to Gramsci's understanding of the organic intellectual. However, I also sought to show how the terrain of civil society has latent potentials within the contradictory hegemony being consolidated. In its effort to generate consensus around the restructuring of state-society relations, the ANC regime is propagating a profoundly contradictory ideology. At the grassroots, this is being transformed in positive ways, as people demand the right to water and demand to know why their right to water involves restrictions, disconnections and the exchange of money. This immanent critique of hegemony – a critique that lies hidden in the often mundane reproduction of *capitalist* hegemony – opens up greater possibilities for everyday people to transform the situation for themselves, rather than relying on the external influence of either a political party or intellectuals. However, returning to the case of Inanda once

again, I sought to re-embed such struggles in the legacy of activism in the area and to show how the spontaneity implied in this critique is of greater political purchase because of the hard work of local activists and the open political debate that is still taking place in some areas. Finally, I sought to illustrate this critique with the example of a protest in the Amaoti area of Inanda, largely dominated by women. Here, the situated knowledges of these women might be seen to have positioned them in such a way as to be able to unlock the potentials within such a contradictory hegemony.

3. FINAL COMMENTS

In introducing this thesis, I stated that my aim was to uncover who controls the distribution of water and how this might be transformed in positive democratic ways. Through the course of the thesis I hope to have shown that water distribution is not controlled by one single person, group of people or entity. Instead, it is shaped by struggles *between people* that occur in everyday life. The accumulation process itself should be understood as a process of struggle – one in which a minority seek to eke as great a surplus value out of people’s wage-labour as possible and one in which the majority struggle to regain control of their lives in diverse, often contradictory ways. As the waterscape is increasingly produced as an accumulation strategy, so it too is laced with these relations of struggle, these tensions and paradoxes. Currently, the power of capital might be seen to be on the increase, as Durban’s bulk-supplier has been able to push through large tariff increases and eThekweni Water Services has responded by increasing disconnections (and belatedly rebelling against such increases). This is not,

however, to suggest that either entity is able fully to control the supply of water to the city. Instead, I hope to have shown the myriad ways in which social struggles and relationships between people limit, shape and transform the power exerted. I hope also to have shown the fragility in the power that capital appears to exert. The need to increase tariffs is, after all, largely based on the insecure and unstable financial footing of key entities. This, in turn, is related to broader problems of the overaccumulation of capital.

In the course of outlining these processes of struggle in the waterscape, I hope to have shown the manner in which things such as the state, water meters and money appear to exert a power over the waterscape rather than the relations they internalise. Lukács argues that, for Marx, there is a “basic thought underlying his *magnum opus*, the retranslation of economic objects from things back into processes, into the changing relations between men⁵¹” (1971: 183). I hope to have gone some way into performing such a retranslation within Durban’s waterscape. I hope also to have shown the possibilities within differing vantage points for performing such a retranslation through everyday practices.

When thinking through the second of my questions, how the waterscape might be transformed in positive, democratic ways, there are several ways in which eThekweni Water Services could make life better for people and this could be consolidated into some kind of a programme for political change. First eThekweni Water Services could change the tariff mechanism so that a larger volume of water is available for free. Secondly, it could charge a lower tariff for the second block of water so that residents who inadvertently consume more than their daily allowance are not punished unfairly.

⁵¹ Here the translator follows the convention of using “man” for the less gender specific German word “Mensch”.

eThekwini Water Services could also be pushed to struggle harder for control over bulk supplies so that these are not linked quite so directly into the system of accumulation that runs from residents' taps to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Finally, it could be lobbied so that it scraps the policy of restricting domestic supplies and open up a municipal-wide debate about what constitutes an eco-social valuation of water.

All these comprise valuable areas for pressuring the municipality to bring about some change in the waterscape. However, without deeper transformations, I suggest that these policies are likely to fail to achieve the changes hoped for. They address the symptoms of what are actually deeper problems resulting from the current inseparability of water from the system of accumulation: whether water is distributed by a more benevolent municipality or a less benevolent bulk supplier matters little. These problems also revolve around the consolidation of a capitalist hegemony through the everyday practice of accessing and consuming clean drinking water. These points would seem to suggest that the task of addressing political change is at once greater and yet more within the reach of most people, for it relies less on the skilled technocratic arguments of someone else and more on the capacity of ordinary people to puncture and transform that hegemony.

For this reason, I found hope to lie in the situated knowledges of those engaged in living and producing the waterscape. The struggle for a feminist standpoint, I argued, might unlock new possibilities for reading (and transforming) the politics of the waterscape. Secondly, I suggested that this might be connected with a latent critique of the contradictory hegemony being established within the waterscape. My focus on Inanda in Chapter 6, I hope, suggested some of the potential that lies here. The water network

itself and the consolidating influence of civil society networks, might open up the possibility of connecting diverse struggles for change. As the water network expands and as a contradictory citizen-consumer hegemony is consolidated further, so the seeds for change are sown over a wider and wider terrain. The possibilities for rupture are to be found in the quotidian routine of accessing water (Lefebvre 1991a; Katz 2004). In the course of the thesis I hope to have shown several of these ruptures, as well as the possibilities for turning a rupture into a deeper questioning of a capitalist-inspired hegemony. Thus, at the risk of leaving my conclusions too open-ended, I shy away from a programmatic conclusion. Instead, I hope to have emphasised some of the obstacles in our way to effecting change and some of the potentials for making that change possible. I returned from South Africa inspired by the desire for such change and hopeful that the capacity for everyday people to make that change is great. In the words of novelist Arundhati Roy, as she addressed a packed lecture theatre of academics and activists in Durban:

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing”

Appendix 1

Interviews Conducted

eThekwini Water Services

- Reg Bailey – Manager Research and Development (Four interviews)
- Neil Macleod – Executive Director
- Dominic Magubane – Community Liason Officer
- Bhavna Soni – Planning and GIS coordinator

eThekwini Municipality

- Kisa Dlamini – Reconstruction and Transformation Coordinator
- Senzo Dlamini – Senior Project Manager, eThekwini Housing
- Cllr. S. Khuzwayo – Head, Infrastructure Subcommittee
- Dave Renwick – City Engineer’s Department
- Michael Sutcliffe – Municipal Manager

Ward Councillors

- Mncedisi Frans – Ward 3
- Hlengiwe Hlophe – Ward 53
- Mxolise Kaunda – Ward 57
- Phumlani Mbatha – Ward 41
- S’bu Sibiya – Ward 56

NGOs and Civic Groups

- Rob Dyer – The Mvula Trust
- Patrick Hansley – South African Homeless People’s Federation
- Heather Maxwell – Cato Manor Development Association
- Themba Mgogo – Inanda Civic Association
- Thulani Ncwane – Inanda Development Forum (Four formal interviews)
- Thulani Ndlovu – Amatikwe Civic Association
- Sabatha Ngceshu – Inanda Civic Association

Umgeni Water

- Clive Cumming –Area Manager North
- Steve Gilham – Infrastructure Planning Manager
- Eddie Lusignia – Manager of Midmar works (and longest term employee)
- Sunil Maharaj – Maintenance Manager
- Manu Pillay – Water Quality and Education Manager

Others

- Thulani Dladla – Inanda Landowners’ Forum
- David Hemson – Senior researcher, HSRC
- Doug Hindson – Development Consultant
- Karine LeMaux – Vivendi

On top of these key informant interviews, 60 household interviews were conducted between January and May 2003 and roughly 100 further participants were involved in the three community meetings between these dates.

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