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## THE REACH OF CITIZENSHIP

Locating the politics of industrial air pollution in Durban and beyond

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## ABSTRACT

This paper develops a relational understanding of the geographies of citizenship action, using the example of environmental activism in Durban as an empirical reference point. We argue that citizenship involves an interactive dynamic shaped by different actors' capacities to project authority and influence over distance by enacting different modalities of spatial reach. Post-apartheid environmental politics illustrates the processes through which relationships between the subjects of environmental rights and agents of obligations is both de-territorialized and re-territorialized by the activities of environmental activists. We examine the politics of attributing responsibility for urban industrial pollution in Durban, and identify two modalities of spatial reach through which environmental rights have been given weight. We conclude by emphasising that forms of transnational activism, while indicative in some respects of emergent styles of cosmopolitan citizenship, remain oriented by the goals of realizing national citizenship rights.

**Keywords:** Citizenship, Environmental Activism, Pollution, Political Responsibility, Rights, Spatial Reach

## THE REACH OF CITIZENSHIP

### Locating the Politics of Industrial Air Pollution in Durban and Beyond

#### 1). Thinking Relationally about Citizenship

We want to explore the geographies of citizenship practice in South Africa since 1994. In doing so, we take as our starting point an example of the contested urban politics of air pollution in south Durban, South Africa. While highly localised in certain respects, this example illustrates well Cox's (1998) argument that the location of local politics cannot be taken for granted. This is the case of the emergence of a contentious politics of environmental justice in the Southern Industrial Basin (SIB) in Durban over the last decade and a half. The politicization of pollution in south Durban involves the spatial conjuncture of a *scalar* politics of accumulation and social reproduction, a *place*-based history of activism, and the emergence of national and transnational *networks* of advocacy focused on issues of industrial pollution, waste, and public health. We want in particular to explore the implications of this complex spatiality for understandings of citizenship (cf. Staeheli 1999). We argue that this is a politics played out in the register of responsibility (cf. Young 2004). It involves contested attributions of responsibility that seeks to define different actors as the causes of pollution; as bearing responsibility for enforcing environmental regulations and rights; and as beneficiaries of past injustices who should thereby take responsibility for improving ordinary citizens living conditions.

Focussing on the intersection of discourses of responsibility and practices of spatial reach opens up an alternative view of the possibilities of cosmopolitan citizenship in a globalized world. It is often argued that neoliberal globalization has reduced states ability to manage the national economy in the interests of growth, efficiency, and redistribution. On this view, the

ability of the state to project its power inside its territory in order to sustain and promote economic growth and investment has been reduced by the emergence of internationalised and flexible systems of production and capital investment, leading to a problem of “territorial non-correspondence”, which refers to the claim that “the events over which the state needs to exercise control in order to achieve its objectives are increasingly outside of its control” (Cox 2003, 329). This apparent hollowing-out of the nation-state seems to lead to an attenuation of the powers of the state just at the time that globalization brings the consequences of distant events that much closer. This is particularly relevant to analysis of the South African context. The end of apartheid and institutionalisation of a broadly liberal regime of democratic citizenship rights has coincided with the reinsertion of the South African economy into global circuits of production, investment and consumption. Newly enfranchised citizens have been developing widened expectations as to what their government should be able to do for them – regulating economic contingencies, providing health care, housing or pensions, or improving education or environmental quality – just at the time when the South African state appears less able to intervene in the ways in which citizens might now expect.

There are two related objections to this pessimistic interpretation of the possibilities of effective national citizenship under globalization. Firstly, this picture sees citizens as disempowered by reconfigurations of nation-state capacities because it continues to conceptualise states as the primary agents of democratic justice (O’Neill 2001). It seems to imply that global citizenship must require a system of global governance and constitution of a genuinely global polity. But rather than thinking of rights simply as abstract entitlements formally granted by state to citizens, it might be analytically more useful to start by thinking of rights as *claims*. In turn, this leads to a focus on which agents and agencies are practically

obliged to act to secure given rights. This leads onto to the second objection, which is that the pessimistic view of the possibilities of citizenship tends to rely on an idealised, overly territorialized view of the normative relationship between states and citizens. It tends to ignore the extent to which this relationship has always been maintained through the management of networks, relays, and flows (Agnew 2005). Taking both points together, we might be better to think not so much of the weakening the capacity of the state, and more in terms of an adjustment in the scope of activities over which states exercise authority and control within their territories. Amongst other things, states remain important actors in attributing citizenship and in coordinating governance systems. And it is useful to distinguish between two aspects of citizenship: citizenship refers to the *status* attributed by the state to particular people as bearers of rights and duties, and distinguishes between people on the basis of whether or not they are deemed to belong to a particular territory as citizens; but citizen also refers to the various *practices* associated with this status. The practices of citizenship, while subject in part to state regulation, are not necessarily naturally territorialized at the national level at all, in so far as they may include various practices of international or transnational cooperation enacted by citizens themselves. At the same time, though, states remain important objects of citizenship practice precisely because they do retain significant regulatory and governance functions.

In short, in approaching issues of how citizenship, rights, and justice are played out in environmental politics in South Africa, we need to avoid thinking of these terms gross concepts with a fixed and determinant meaning. We should think of these political concepts as embedded in “relational claims involving agents, actions, legitimacy, and end” (Shapiro 2005, 153). A relational understanding of citizenship focuses on the interactions between people and institutions that shape what it means to be a citizen. According to this

understanding, citizenship can be understood as a kind of social tie that involves a “continuing series of transactions between persons and agents of a given state in which each one has enforceable rights and obligations” (Tilly 1999, 413). The precise dimensions of citizenship at any one time and place are the outcome of contention over the demands made by states and citizens on one another. Citizenship develops through a conflict between the demands made by states on citizens and the concessions made by states to citizens in return. This contested relationship involves a set of spatial and temporal practices: the demands made by states on their citizens depend on the ability of state agencies to project their authority over distance; and the demands that citizens make on the state depend on the ability of ordinary people to engage with the institutions of the state so as to bring the state and its representatives into the orbit of citizens influence.

This relational understanding implies that rather than thinking of one single model of citizenship that serves as the norm in all contexts, the content of the enforceable rights and obligations that tie together states and citizens are historically and geographically variable (Marston and Mitchell 2004). In this paper, we want to develop this understanding by examining how the variability that emerges out of this interactive dynamic is shaped by different actors’ capacities to project authority and influence over distance by enacting different modalities of *reach*. In the next section, we discuss different interpretations of the form of power through which states reach out over territory and into the contexts of everyday life, in order to establish the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the type of environmental politics to be discussed in the rest of the paper. Section 3 introduces the context for post-apartheid environmental politics, and looks at the ways in which the relationship between the subjects of rights and agents of obligations is effectively de-territorialized from the nation-state through the activities of environmental activists. Section

4 focuses on the ways in which attributions of responsibility are spatially articulated in this activist network, and Section 5 then distinguishes between two modalities of reach through which environmental rights have been given weight. We conclude by emphasising that forms of transnational activism, while indicative in some respects of emergent styles of cosmopolitan citizenship, remain oriented by the goals of realizing national citizenship rights.

## **2). The Reach of States**

The normative Western ideal of equal citizens bound together in relationships of obligation within territorial nation-states continues to weigh heavily on the ways in which changing relationships between postcolonial states and citizens, rights and obligations, are conceptualised. However, territorialized nation-states were never static, nor straightforwardly contained within closed boundaries. State territoriality was and is, rather, an achievement of ongoing flows, circulations, and translations across time and space. Understood as “a set of central and radical institutions penetrating its territories” (Mann 1993, 59) and as a “polymorphous power network (ibid, 75), the modern state can be understood to exercise various forms of *infrastructural* power. The spatial integration of consolidated territories into nation-states is a process that involves the projection of state power over distance, through which the state becomes embedded as a felt presence into the routine contexts of everyday social life. The mediums for this reaching out of the state include the establishment of regular systems of taxation; of the establishment of extensive postal systems; the establishment of systems for the registration of births and deaths; or less frequent, but still regular events like censuses or national elections. This process involves a simultaneous *centralisation* of information and *decentralisation* of authority (Giddens 1981), whereby agents of



the state, such as police officers, judges, doctors, or schoolteachers are able to conduct the ordinary business of the management that make up modern government. The projection of centralised state authority over distance therefore depends on making the state a presence in everyday life (Painter 2006).

We want to emphasize the degree to which, historically, the consolidation of state authority over large expanses of territory has involved the development of forms of administration that depended upon the collection, analysis, and application of large amounts of information, as well as the development of new forms for communicating with citizens. Exercising power over distance in this way involves the construction of extensive networks and flows of information, materials, and people:

To put together a network that will enable power to be exercised over events and processes distant from oneself, it is necessary to turn these into traces that can be mobilised and accumulated. Events must be inscribed in standardised forms, the inscriptions must be transported from far and wide and accumulated in a central locale, where they can be aggregated, compared, compiled and the subject of calculation. Through the development of such complex relays of inscription and accumulation, new conduits of power are brought into being between those who wish to exercise power and those over whom they wish to exercise it (Rose 1999, 211).

This emphasis on the mediating practices that link up distanced activities indicates that the reach of the state over distance is a practical achievement involving the development of various infrastructures and organisational procedures through which the state is made real and proximate to people's lives. Moreover, this underscores the reasons why states are not necessarily best thought of as naturally unified within integrated territories at all: mediating

practices of infrastructural power can be deployed to divide territories and populations hierarchically in all sorts of ways, as both the history of colonial state formation (Herbst 2000, Mamdani 1996) and contemporary post-developmental states suggests (Ong 2004).

This sort of descriptive approach to theorising the spatiality of state power is open to different normative interpretations. On the one hand, it can support a vision of the steady extension of states capacities to exercise *power-over* citizens. This is the view of James Scott in *Seeing Like a State* (1999), for example, who sees various statistical and visual technologies of surveillance as the mechanisms through which modern states have acquired an almost omnipotent power to dictate the pattern of everyday life. The implication is that people only ever experience the state as a source of physical violence, coercion or domination. The only recourse they have is to what Scott (1987) once called the weapons of the weak – various subterranean routes of resistance, rebellion and subversion aimed at avoiding the reach of the state. Timothy Mitchells (2002) genealogy of colonial administration also presents the monitoring capacities of modern states as enabling information about dispersed activities to be concentrated in centralised locations, thereby disempowering the subjects of that knowledge and transforming them into objects of rule. The rise of statistical calculation as an arm of state authority is seen as heralding a form of control that subsumes individuality and particularity within artificial and imposed classificatory categories. In relocating authority over knowledge to new centres of calculation, these practices of monitoring, enumerating, and calculating actually transform all sorts of activities into objects of policy at the cost of people acting as subjects of knowledge in their own right. For Mitchell, the relocation of authority to a centralised node of expertise is dispossesses ordinary people of the means of defining their own identities. In this type of analysis, power only ever works in zero-sum terms.

These views do not give enough conceptual weight to the difference that exercising power over distance makes to the form of power that can be so exercised (Barnett 1999). The achievement and maintenance of a spatial relationship actually helps constitute what sort of power relation it is. This understanding is meant to counter an “overblown sense of what centralized institutions are capable of bringing about at a distance” (Allen 2004, 22). Thinking of power as “relational effect of interaction” (ibid., 31) leads to a more variegated interpretation of forms of power exercised at a distance. Rather than seeing the mediating practices involved in exercising power over distance as effective means of enforcing despotic relations of domination, we might instead see these sorts of processes as depending upon the capacity of state actors to innovate forms of cooperative rule based on mutual relations of give and take (Giddens 1981, Mann 1993). On this view, the variable forms that citizenship takes in different contexts will have their roots in the dynamic of extending centralised authority over distance by innovating various forms of cooperate, collaborative, and concerted power that combine directions, rules, and sanctions with participation, representation, and influence. This is consistent with the emphasis made above on thinking of the relationships between the state and citizens as being structured around a set of interactions in which each attempts to make enforceable demands on the other. These interactions are determined by the imperatives of the state to reach out and administer aspects of economic or social life, but, crucially, also by efforts of ordinary people to pull in the state, to ensure the delivery of services or material entitlements.

Because so many state-citizen interactions are structured around flows of economic resources (extraction of taxation, payment of entitlements), states in turn interact with citizens through flows of information and people, both by extracting information from citizens, and also informing citizens about state policies. All of these practices involve the

extension of the reach of the state into the contexts of everyday life, so that states come into close proximity with citizens (cf. Ferguson 2006). However, citizens in turn come to see the state in distinctive, differentiated ways. Depending on just how their opportunities to see the state are structured, they are able to interact more or less directly and proactively with the agents of the state to exercise their rights as citizens (Corbridge et al 2005).

All of this suggests that rather than thinking of a shift to a hollowed-out state under neoliberalism, it might be better to think in terms of the reconfiguration of state capacities. In South Africa, as elsewhere, this has involved the dispersal rather than diminution of state capacities, thereby empowering new subjects as agents of state projects. This understanding is better suited to capturing the distinctive dynamics of state-formation since the end of apartheid, in which state capacities have been expanded within a neoliberal macro-economic programme. This has included a process of moving the state (Heller 2001), through the establishment of new tiers of provincial and local government. Local government has in the process, been identified as the key agent the delivery of basic services, promotion of economic growth, and of democratic participation. This process has been associated with the emergence of new patterns of collective action focussed on issues of service delivery. The political goal of delivering basic needs to all citizens has been devolved downwards to the local state, restructured according to principles of developmental local government (see Parnell *et al* 2002), but operating under nationally imposed fiscal constraints. It is at this scale, then, that the contradictions between the costs of delivery and constrictions on revenue plays itself out, expressed in controversial cost recovery programmes (Hart 2003, MacDonald and Pape 2002). Following the line of analysis developed above, this restructuring of the state involves a dual process of establishing new ways for the state to be

made present in everyday contexts, in turn creating new opportunities for citizens to address demands to the agents of the state they catch a glimpse of.

The example of urban politics we discuss below is, however, somewhat distinct from the contentious politics that has emerged around service delivery issues. South Durban is a distinctive site of contention because of the conjunction here of a set of national and international circuits of accumulation. The national imperative to promote economic growth leads to certain localities being identified as strategically important sites of investment. In turn, this means that highly localized mobilizations are peculiarly empowered to contest national economic plans by virtue of both their physical proximity to these sites of accumulation and their capacity to access broader spaces of engagement (Cox 1998, Staeheli 1999). In the Southern Industrial Basin in Durban, the proximity of residential communities with long histories of activism to sites of key national economic importance has enabled social movement organisations to generate highly visible expressions of the tensions between dirty growth and social justice. One implication of the uneven development of industrialisation and urbanisation in South Africa is that the politics of enforcing the obligations attendant on environmental citizenship rights has focussed not just on state actors at the local, provincial and national scale, but has also reached out to address non-state actors, primarily multinational corporations, based in other national territories.

### **3). Decoupling Rights and Obligations**

The restructuring of states and economies under globalisation, far from necessarily attenuating citizenship, might provide under certain circumstances opportunities for people to enact their citizenship rights in distinctively new, flexible ways (Ong 1999). Being able to act as a flexible citizen is related to the capacity to act transnationally. This means being able

to engage not only with a state of which one is a resident, but also with states that are far away. However, this capacity to act transnationally in order to make demands as a citizen is not only available to a relatively privileged global class of professionals, business people, and entrepreneurs. We take environmental activism in Durban as an example of transnational citizen action on behalf of poor and marginalised groups of people; it involves the adoption of flexible strategies in order to enforce and secure the rights attributed by virtue of their status as citizens of particular nation-states. But in putting these rights into practice, it involves addressing demands to a number of actors beyond citizens own state, and not just other states, but multinational corporations and international governmental organisations as well.

In order to develop further the relational understanding outlined in Sections 1 and 2, we start with the legal and symbolic foundation of equal citizenship in the new South Africa, the post-apartheid Constitution. This enshrines basic rights of civil liberty and political liberty, of course. The South African Constitution also recognises various rights of social and economic citizenship. Amongst these are included a right to a clean and healthy environment:

Everyone has the right

- a) To an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and
- b) To have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that
  - i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
  - ii) promote conservation; and

- iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

(Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Chapter 2, No. 24).

The activist networks that have grown up around environmental justice issues in the last decade or so have not, in the main, directed their attention at litigation strategies aimed at enforcing this clause in the courts. Nonetheless, this clause functions as a basic framing device in all political debate about environmental rights. Following the argument already made, that in understanding the significance of rights it is best to start by asking questions about the agents that are obligated to secure them, the first question we want to raise about this environmental clause is this: just who is obligated by this ascription of rights to a clean and healthy environment? Formally, of course, it is the South African state. The analysis of territorial non-correspondence discussed in Section 1 might suggest that in the face of powerful domestic imperatives and global forces that encourage further development of dirty industries, the South African state is severely constrained in its capacity to give substance to this clause. The constitutional clause therefore raises interesting questions about whether multinational companies and foreign investors, who might be considered to be ultimately responsible for some of the environmental problems that this clause is meant to address, can be bound by the South African constitution as well. Our argument is that putting these environmental citizenship rights into practice has involved a transnational politics of responsibility through which the identity of the actors potentially obligated by this clause has been extended to include multinational corporations and social movements networks located far beyond the national boundaries of South Africa.

The constitutional clause on environmental rights is embedded in a broader system of environmental governance established in South Africa during the 1990s, culminating in the

National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) in 1998. NEMA included commitments to sustainable development principles, the entrenchment of environmental rights and social justice, and procedural mechanisms for stakeholder engagement (Scott *et al* 2001). The system of environmental governance established by NEMA broadly conforms to the model of ecological modernization, importing principles and mechanisms from the North, which assume conditions such as steady economic growth, functioning markets, technical advances, a pluralist polity, and an enabling state (Oelofse and Scott 2002, Scott and Oelofse 2005). However, in a highly unequal society such as South Africa, the contradictions between ecological modernization imperatives and economic growth are not easily resolved. In post-apartheid South Africa, the predominant economic development policy focuses on further developing those sectors of the economy that operate internationally. These include dirty industries such as petro-chemicals, and paper and pulp processing (Bond 2002). The history of urban and industrial development, in which non-white communities were often forcibly relocated to locations in close proximity to heavily polluting industries (Scott 2003), means that the burden of environmental risks from continued industrial development in this dependent ecological modernization paradigm (Sonnenfeld 2002) fall disproportionately on historically disadvantaged black communities.

In the South Africa context, the dynamic interaction of different state imperatives of accumulation and legitimation (Dryzek *et al* 2003) is geographically articulated in such a way as to make certain places particular sites of contention. This means that the operation of participatory environmental governance, which is predicated on the assumption that civil society actors will be able to substantially influence development policy outcomes, is likely to provoke oppositional mobilisations in particular places where communities find their own concerns overridden in the name of nationally significant economic growth objectives. This



follows from the distinctively localized quality of the legitimation imperative embedded in the discourse of delivery, which promises that people will see substantive improvements in the everyday living spaces in which they live and work. The lifeworlds of local communities are inscribed within particular spaces of dependence (Cox 1998): for economic and political reasons, these communities are neither likely, able, nor willing to relocate away from what is, nonetheless, a highly polluted living environment (Scott *et al* 2002). In short, given that environmental risks from industrial development are differentially distributed across the South African space economy, characterised as it is by clusters of industrial development in close proximity to living spaces of historically disadvantaged groups, this means that in certain places the contradictions between imperatives to sustain a particular model of economic growth and to demonstrate improvements in ordinary peoples quality of life become particularly acute.

One such site of contention is in south Durban. The Southern Industrial Basin is the country's second largest concentration of industrial activity. It is also one of the country's worst pollution hotspots. Pollution has been a pressing concern for local communities in south Durban for decades (Sparks 2004, Diab and Motha). Local residents, who are predominantly poor black people, live in very close proximity to a host of dirty industries. The residential areas of south Durban suffer very high levels of air, ground, and water pollution, not least because of their contiguity to two oil refineries, a paper and pulp factory, and myriad petro-chemical plants. Amongst the worst polluters in the area are the two oil refineries. One of these, the SAPREF refinery, is jointly owned by two multi-national oil companies, Shell and BP. The other one, the Engen Refinery, is owned by Petronas. Petronas is Malaysia's state-owned oil and gas company, which has expanded its operations beyond Malaysia's borders in recent years. This means that people living very close to

polluting industries – and experiencing high levels of asthma, cancer, and other health problems as result – are faced with the problem of engaging with corporations whose headquarters are a very long way away. In this multi-layered place the inherited geography of the national space economy, which implies focussing industrial investment in particular locations such as the South Durban basin, articulates with the uneven geography of apartheid urbanization in such a way that the accumulation imperative visibly contradicts the social justice legitimization imperative.

We might expect that this conjuncture would provoke highly contentious forms of popular mobilisation. However, while residential proximity to industry has created a shared experience of living in a polluted space, cross-community mobilisation around pollution has had to negotiate histories of racial and class division and inherited traditions of activism and community mobilisation (Chari 2004, 2006, Sparks 2006). Since 1994, new forms of mobilisation have emerged around poorly regulated industrial development in south Durban. In particular, these have focussed on the health impacts of air and ground pollution. Activists in south Durban have mobilised local people in support of their campaign to reduce pollution in the area. Their primary aim has been to draw attention to the health problems that local communities face by virtue of living so close to polluting industries. Therefore, they have organised demonstrations, protests, and public meetings. These are all forms of collective activism that are aimed at publicising pollution issues, demonstrating the extent of local concern about them, as well as establishing the degree of support for the activists organising around these issues. Although activism around pollution had been growing from the late 1980s, the crucial step in the projection of community grievances around pollution into the public realm came in 1996, with the formation of an umbrella organization to focus on environmental concerns, the South Durban Community

Environmental Alliance (SDCEA). SDCEA's political roots lie in a network of civic and community-based organisations whose origins go back to mobilisations against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to these civic organisations from historically black areas, SDCEA includes a number of conservation organisations and ratepayers associations from formerly white areas and individual church and women's groups (see Peek 2002, Reid and D'Sa 2005). SDCEA is, in turn, one important node in a network of organisations that constitute a nascent environmental justice movement in South Africa (Cock 2006), and which includes the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), Earthlife Africa, and the Pietermaritzburg-based NGO groundWork, which works closely with SDCEA. The emergence of an environmental movement in the post-apartheid period has involved connecting a long-standing conservation movement, traditionally the preserve of privileged white communities, with the distinctive concerns about health and everyday living space that characterise poor communities suffering from a long history of systematic environmental racism (see Cock 2006, McDonald 2002). In the next section, we examine the ways in which this network of activism and mobilisation has engaged in a spatially extensive politics of responsibility aimed at enforcing obligations for addressing industrial pollution on a variety of state and non-state actors dispersed across different scalar and networked geographies.

#### **4). The Politics of Responsibility**

SDCEA's campaigning over the last decade has focussed on a series of demands. These have included demands for further scientific research into the causes of health problems in the area, as well as for better monitoring of pollution from industry. They also include the demand that industries do more to conform to international standards of pollution emission. These demands have, in turn, been addressed to various actors. Responsibility for meeting

these demands is, then, dispersed across various scales and networks. One set of demands is that corporations who own the worst polluting industries should do more to clean up these operations. But they also demand that the South African government should do more to enforce existing pollution standards on these corporations. SDCEA and groundWork have consistently opposed voluntary regulation by industry as permitted by NEMA, and insist on the importance of the newly democratic state acting on behalf of its citizens to regulate pollution legislatively. We want to call attention to the strategies used by activist networks to enforce these demands in order to make them into binding obligations on both the state and on foreign corporations. A basic aim has been to generate publicity, to make pollution into a visible issue in the public realm, by mobilising and maintaining media attention. This in turn has involved local activists seeking partners in national and international networks, not least to mobilise and deploy scientific expertise, which is a critical medium of both publicity and policy participation.

The centrality of scientific expertise to this form of activism is dictated by the system of environmental governance instituted in South Africa since the early 1990s. In the period of brokered transition from apartheid to democracy in the early and mid-1990s, the international framework of Local Agenda 21 provided a politically neutral umbrella, in the form of the discourse of sustainable development, through which local state actors in South African were able to construct new systems of environmental management (Roberts and Diederichs 2002). However, formal procedures for participatory environmental governance have continued to marginalise poor communities, reflecting the absence of broader institutional and professional transformation amongst environmental management actors (Patel 2006). In no small part, SDCEA's legitimacy as a representative of local communities has depended on its ability to successfully broker between local lay knowledge and more

formalised, science-led forms of policy participation. This has also involved establishing source relationships with local, national and international news media. In activist's interactions with news organizations, the types of experiential and anecdotal knowledge that is problematic in formal, science-led policy making is of significant value (Barnett 2003).

The pivotal event in establishing SDCEA's standing in the public realm as the voice of community concerns over pollution, and in securing a new frame through which south Durban is problematized in policy and public debate, was a week-long set of stories in Durban's main daily paper, *The Mercury*, in September 2000, written by Tony Carnie, and entitled Poison in Our Air. The series started with a list of cancer cases in south Durban, area by area. Community organisations had been instrumental in locating cancer victims for the stories. The credibility of community narratives was established in these reports, despite protests by industry against sensationalism and subjective anecdotal accounts. The detailed case-by-case record, accompanied by a picture gallery of the victims, many of whom were children, elicited a huge response from other residents, linking their own experiences to the working hypothesis in Carnie's reports, that cancer was higher in south Durban than elsewhere. The *Mercury* reports posed the possibility of a link between pollution and cancer but made no scientific claims. It did conclude that all parties to this contentious issue agreed that more scientific research was required on this issue. Science has, in this way, been framed as a crucial device in establishing causal responsibility for pollution and its imputed health impacts. The *Mercury* stories quickly generated tangible results. Both provincial and national environmental departments quickly committed to further investigation of health impacts in the area. Coverage in local newspapers extended to television, radio, and national papers as well. This carefully crafted media campaign consolidated SDCEA's status as the legitimate voice of community concerns, and succeeded in establishing the interpretative frame of

environmental activists as the dominant one in public discourse (Barnett and Svendsen 2002).

The *Poison in Our Air* series illustrates how, by brokering between local, experiential knowledge and formal scientific expertise, and drawing on spatially extensive networks of environmental advocacy, SDCEA and groundWork have been highly effective in using media coverage to pursue an oppositional politics of shame (cf. Young 2000, 174-7). They have publicly exposed the inadequate responses of state and capital in a context in which these powerful actors operate according to a legitimacy imperative to foster delivery, participation and transformation. The success of this media-oriented strategy in reshaping public discourse as well as provoking substantive policy responses is indicative of an important shift in the dimensions of how power is exercised and held accountable in South Africa's new democracy (Barnett 2003, 64-65).

The *Mercury* stories in 2000 marked an important watershed in the history of SDCEA, establishing its Air Pollution Causes Cancer story-line as the basic frame for news coverage of south Durban, and setting in train a series of institutional responses which have required a series of organizational transformations in the alliance. SDCEA's consolidation has drawn it into wider networks at national and international level, most often mediated by groundWork. In the process, SDCEA has had to negotiate changing dynamics of community participation, including transformation in the way in which previously highly active local ANC branches are organized, in its core support areas of Merebank and Wentworth, at the same time as it tries to reach out and sustain support in contiguous, predominantly African areas communities characterized by distinctive socio-economic and political histories of their own. SDCEA's activities have been enabled by the relationships of trust and legitimacy forged with other organizations more strongly embedded in local communities. Despite internal tensions, it has

relative success in establishing itself as the legitimate voice of community concerns over industrial pollution. The SDCEA model of *mediated legitimacy*, resting on the claim that its legitimacy lies with residents through the support of representative organizations, has been translated to other pollution hotspots in South Africa through the active efforts of GroundWork's national campaigning for enhanced clean air legislation. GroundWork was formed in 1999 as a specialist organization focusing on pollution issues and hazardous waste. Its roots lie in the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, but its leading personnel have strong personal linkages with South Durban environmental activism stretching back to the late 1980s and 1990s. GroundWork is the South African chapter of Friends of the Earth International, and has established a dense network of international relationships to raise funds, choreograph protest events, and organize workshops.

SDCEA's organisational structure has been successfully modelled elsewhere by GroundWork to mobilise otherwise diverse groups and interests into a national campaign (Tarrow 2001). The SDCEA model has been translated to areas including Sasolburg, Secunda, Vanderbijlpark, Richards Bay, Boipatong, and Cape Town. Inherited divisions of race and class characterize each of these places, but they have been discursively re-framed as "fenceline communities" living and working in "hotspots" and sharing a set of grievances around the health impacts of unrestricted dirty growth (Air Quality Management in Industrial Hotspots in South Africa. Groundwork Memo to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 3rd April 2003). GroundWork has explicitly pursued a strategy of movement building by linking communities in place and across space, and assisting with the establishment of environmental and monitoring groups based on the alliance model pioneered in south Durban. It is under this united umbrella that GroundWork represented these communities in parliamentary hearings established national

standards for air quality during 2004 and 2005. This process of networking, and the involvement in national environmental management procedures, is indicative of the shift from the period of the late 1990s, when the focus of activism was primarily upon making pollution into a visible issue, to greater involvement in establishing new institutional structures of accountability.

If the shift in news frames since 2000 is the clearest example of the oppositional activism of SDCEA, groundWork and the broader network of environmental organisations successfully making a non-issue into a public issue, then their activism has also been instrumental in the development of new structures of accountability. The clearest example of this is the establishment by national government of the Multi-Point Plan (MPP) for south Durban by national government in 2001, in the wake of the previous year's media coverage. The MPP was a national government response to one of the demands noted at the start of this section, by implementing a programme of pollution monitoring and research into health problems in the south Durban area. The MPP put in place provisions for the development of a systematic environmental monitoring system; for an objective health study; and for an integrated air quality management plan, which has led to the promulgation of the Air Quality Act (39 of 2004). It also empowered local government as the authority for environmental regulation, thereby shifting the institutional location of environmental conflict once again, opening new opportunities for further bureaucratized forms of activist engagement. It was an inclusive, deliberative apparatus aimed at establishing consensus. Its establishment represented both a success for environmental activism, broadly acknowledged as an institutional response to community protests. It also presented new opportunities and threats, which can follow from incorporation in such a technocratic, consensual deliberative forum. Activist organisations have had to seek further resources, financial and scientific, in



order to both engage in new participatory procedures as well as to maintain the public media profile necessary to maintain community mobilisation.

One example of this dynamic of activist mobilisation, inclusion, and networking is SDCEA's collaboration with the Danish environmental organisation *Danmarks Naturfredningsforening* (The Society for the Protection of Nature in Denmark), or DN, which has been crucial to SDCEA's engagement with the MPP process. DN is the largest citizen-based organisation in Denmark, and mobilised both its technical expertise and its popular membership base in support of SDCEA's activism. DN's resources have been crucial in enabling SDCEA to use the data generated by the MPP for further advocacy and mobilization. The initial collaboration, from 2001-2003, had three aspects: a comparative study of oil refineries in South Durban and Denmark, enabling South African activists to demonstrate how refineries in their country failed to live up to standards elsewhere in the world; the development of a GIS-based pollution map to be used by SDCEA with the comparative report in their advocacy and education work; and an Organization Development review of SDCEA (SDCEA & DN, 2003).

The comparative refinery study and GIS pollution maps have been widely deployed as advocacy tools to persuade a range of audiences of SDCEA's position regarding the reduction of air pollution in South Durban. The GIS study was presented as the WSSD session on Corporate Accountability in September 2002, has been used to train SDCEA members locally, and has been presented to local schools and communities. This international collaboration is part of a wider programme of civic science through which mobilization of local communities around air pollution has been sustained. Another example of this civic science is a participatory monitoring project involving teachers and students at Settlers School in Merebank. This school is situated immediately adjacent to the ENGEN

refinery and has experienced high levels of asthma and respiratory problems among pupils and staff. A committed staff member undertook detailed collection of data of these impacts and levels of absenteeism in the school related to the relevant illnesses. These data were fed to SDCEA as part of an ongoing programme to collect and record community experiences of pollution events. These community-based projects of data collection serve as one route for the mobilization of local people. They are complemented by innovative strategies for the dissemination of formal scientific knowledge to communities, developed by SDCEA in collaboration with groundWork and DN. For example, the development of the GIS pollution map included the collection of individual experiences of air pollution, and local community members were invited to log their spatial locations along with their local knowledge. The graphic and detailed maps produced on air pollution events have been widely used at many different meetings to advance the cause of SDCEA in local communities. Another initiative in producing and disseminating science for the local community has involved the production of a school textbook for secondary level science and geography on meteorology and climatology (DN & SDCEA 2004). The textbook focuses on applied meteorology and climatology of South Durban, demonstrating how the local topographic conditions give rise to severe air pollution problems with the entrapment of polluted air in the valleys of South Durban in winter. This book has been included in the school curriculum in co-operation with the Department of Education for the province.

In this section, we have seen that the contentious politics of industrial pollution in south Durban involves a process of locating responsibility in a double sense. Firstly, it has revolved around the mobilisation of scientific expertise on chemical pollutants and epidemiology, to establish causal relationships between industrial pollutants and public health in south Durban. Secondly, it has involved a process whereby activists networks have sought to make

certain obligations stick, including the obligations of government to regulate pollution, of corporations to clean up their operations, or citizens of other national polities to assist in campaigning. In seeking to give substance to abstract environmental rights, local activists have been drawn into a productive dynamic of spatially expansive networking. In the next section, we look more at the forms of spatial reach that are involved in this complex politics of responsibility in order to elaborate on the modalities of power that it mobilises and deploys.

### **5). The Reach of Environmental Rights**

By the concept of reach, we mean to draw attention to the variable relationship between spatial scope and intensity of force that characterises different modalities of power (Barnett 1999). Exercising power through mediated relays of information, material transfers, and the like is not simply a process of projecting power unchanged over distance. Rather, if we think of the reach of power as conditional on “the series of mediated relationships through which power is successively composed and recomposed” (Allen 2004, 27), then this also requires to consider the distinctive forms of normativity that distinctive modalities of reach instantiate, that is, the types of force that can be brought to bear by deploying them. Allen (2005, 539) suggests a distinction between two modes of reach: reaching out across networks; and drawing others within close reach. In both cases, the relationship between near and far, distance and proximity is not pre-given, but is reordered through the ongoing reconfiguration of relationships of interaction. We can see both these forms of reach at work in the politics of locating responsibility for air pollution in south Durban. We see activists *reaching out to pull-in* resources that enable citizens to enforce demands close to home, on the state or local businesses; and we see them *reaching out to influence or enrol* other actors or events

who are located a long way away. While in practice these modes of reach are entangled up in the same practices, for analytic purposes we will look a little more closely at each one in turn.

Firstly then, reaching-out to pull resources in. We see this process most clearly in the strategies adopted by SDCEA and groundWork to use the resources of transnational activist and scientific networks to put pressure on the state (national, provincial and local levels) to act to enforce pollution regulations and enact new legislative standards. We saw in the previous section the importance of translating lay knowledge about pollution into the frames of news media and policy making. Much of SDCEA's transnational activity, brokered by groundWork, has involved the mobilisation of scientific expertise to support the local communities claims about the unacceptably high levels of air and ground pollution in the area and their adverse impacts on health.. Producing their own scientific knowledge is one way in which an organization such as SDCEA can establish its value as a source to news organizations. An example is the so-called Bucket Brigade. The Bucket Brigade is a procedure enabling local residents to take their own air samples, using a simple bucket device that they can use in and around their own homes and neighbourhoods. It was developed by US-based environmental justice activists, and through the NGO Global Community Monitoring (GCM), has been translated to locations through the USA and internationally. In 2000, SDCEA, groundWork and GCM choreographed a Bucket Brigade visit to South Durban, in order to provide evidence of the exact levels of pollution through staging. The Bucket Brigade was a means of performing the production of contentious scientific knowledge. The results enabled activists in South Africa to confront both government and businesses with facts about levels of toxins in the air. The initial Bucket Brigade event in 2000 revealed benzene levels around the ENGEN refinery of 4 to 15 times higher than WHO guidelines, and were used to generate media coverage that focussed on

the ability of community organisations to produce scientific evidence about pollution when the government had pointedly failed to do. The benzene story underscored the news frame linking air pollution to cancer established in 2000. The collaboration between groundWork and GCM has continued, and Bucket Brigades have been undertaken in other hotspots in South Africa since the initial visit to south Durban.

The collaborations with DN and GCM are examples of South African activists cooperating with geographically distant actors to draw in resources in order to engage with the South African state, and also to engage directly with the companies (SAPREF, Engen, and Mondi primarily) located in the SIB. Both the cooperation with Danish environmentalists and with the GCM's Bucket Brigade network are also means by which south Durban has been drawn into a web of environmental campaigning that links up discrete locations which share common experiences of proximity to refinery pollution for example. It is through this sort of network that South African activists have also been enabled to make demands on the multinational corporations who own and control these local enterprises. This has involved the mobilisation of various strategies of reaching out to influence, the second mode of reach identified at the start of this section. SDCEA and groundWork have also established links with the Dutch environmental organisation, *Milieudefensie*, the Dutch arm of Friends of the Earth. *Milieudefensie* has a long-standing involvement in the politics of industrial pollution in the Netherlands, not least in relation to the national and international impacts of Shell, a joint Anglo-Dutch owned company, and the owners of the SAPREF refinery. *Milieudefensie* has been enrolled into the network of activism and science passing through south Durban. Their 2003 report for SDCEA on leaking pipelines, spills and explosions at the SAPREF refinery, explicitly deploys the discourse of responsibility to translate a local pollution problem into a transnational frame:

SAPREF has a history of corporate irresponsibility and SAPREFs behaviour in these cases would be unacceptable in the Netherlands. The local community and environmental organisations have tried for years to force SAPREF to be more mindful of the local environment in which they operate. These organisations have also demanded that the refinery be more forthcoming with vital data. How many spills along the pipelines and storage terminals can be accounted to the refinery? And precisely what sorts of substances were released into the environment? What has been, and what continues to be, spilled and leaked into the environment on a daily basis? And what kind of guarantee can SAPREF offer when it comes to the safety of the surrounding residential areas and the health of the local population? (Verweij, 2003, 4)

Milieudefensie reframes this emphasis on SAPREF's *causal responsibility* into a question of Shells *moral responsibility* to take action to address this record of pollution:

The Shell Group must take its responsibility, especially if it wants to live up to the reputation it is trying to portray as a responsible, open, and concerned enterprise.

Having advertised this promise, Shell cannot now renounce it. (ibid., 5).

This discursive reframing of causal responsibility into moral responsibility is consistent with a general policy amongst activists to name the owners of two south Durban refineries as Shell, BP, or Petronas, to emphasise the foreign-ownership and control of these plants. In this move, responsibility for enacting and enforcing environmental governance is in turn relocated to the international arena:

The history of this refinery reveals the urgent need for international binding regulations for companies, including on environmental issues. South African legislation (and the understaffing of local authorities who must enforce the

regulations), in combination with voluntary guidelines such as those produced by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), do not appear to be enough to motivate SAPREF to become a more responsible enterprise. (ibid., 5).

The pipeline study is just one facet of South African cooperation with the international campaign focussed on Shells multi-sited operations. Activists from Durban are part of an ongoing international campaign coordinated by Friends of the Earth that aims to force Shell to be more accountable to the local communities impacted by its activities. Since 2002, the campaign has produced an Annual Report, *The Other Shell Report*, to coincide with Shells annual shareholder meetings, to publicize Shells record on environmental, labour and human rights issues. By 2007, as the Shell Accountability Campaign, activist organisations from countries the Philippines, Nigeria, Brazil, USA, Russia, and South Africa were involved. The campaign also brings activists from all of these locations together to lobby and protest in person at these AGMs in London and The Hague. SDCEA and groundWork jointly own one single share in Shell, which enables them to attend the shareholders meetings and raise embarrassing questions about the companies operations around the world.

Involvement in this activist network centred on issues of corporate accountability in relation to Shell illustrates further aspects of the modes of reach enacted by South African environmental activists. It involves the establishment of connections over distance between similar campaigns located in different places around the world, but joined by common experiences and shared grievances against the same corporation. Bringing together representatives from these campaigns to lobby directly, up close and in person, the companies who are responsible for the polluting industries in those different places creates new forms of political proximity.

We have seen, then, that strategies of spatial reach enable placed-based activists to mobilise the resources required to mount and maintain campaigns aimed primarily at generating publicity. These resources include vocabularies of environmental racism and corporate accountability, as well as funding and personnel to sustain an evidence base of scientific expertise. In both respects, these spatially extensive forms of mobilisation and campaigning seek to enforce obligations on national governments and multinational corporations by deploying a rhetoric of shame and responsibility.

#### **6). Transnational Activism and Cosmopolitan Citizenship**

We have elaborated on the different modes of reach through which a complex and dynamic network of environmental activism weaves its way in and through south Durban. We have seen three ways in which the reach of citizenly action can be extended transnationally by establishing all sorts of linkages, relays, and interactions over distance: through the circulation of various *communicative forms*, such as scientific reports, books, newspaper coverage, emails, and web-sites; through the movement of *materials*, for example, sending air samples overseas to get them analysed; and through the movement of *people*, such as activists travelling to corporate AGMs or visiting other communities with similar concerns. These modes are the means by which different actors are assembled into communities of responsibility bound not by shared status as national citizens nor even membership of the same territory, but by their position with spatially dispersed networks of accumulation and governance (see Barnett and Scott 2007). We have emphasised the ways in which transnational environmental activism works by generating new forms of proximity between actors located in different parts of the world. It does so by extending reach as a means of making demands and enforcing obligations on states, as well as against corporate and



regulatory actors beyond the nation-state. Our argument has aimed to demonstrate that just as an important aspect of a states ability to extend its reach involves finding ways to see distant and dispersed phenomena, so too this sort of activism by citizens involves various efforts at making pollution visible in the public realm. This includes publicising pollution problems in the media, by producing statistical and diagrammatic representations of pollution emissions, as well as more dramaturgical forms of protest in particular arenas, from the locality of south Durban itself, through to more choreographed stages of international conferences and corporate AGMs. In short, the ability of citizens to draw states and corporations into their reach, to engage them in dialogue, to lobby them, or to protest about their actions, depends on the being able to mobilise the same modalities of reach that states employ to draw citizens into relationships of enforceable rights and obligations.

South African activists have drawn on the support and resources of actors in other places. This transnational networking has also involved South African, Dutch, American and other activists pooling their citizenship resources to lend their support to broader transnational campaigns for globally enforceable policies on environmental issues. In both respects, these networks are indicative of forms of cosmopolitan citizenship practice, in which actors see themselves as members of both localized polities and at the same time as members of more global communities of interest and responsibility. Our analysis of environmental activism in and beyond Durban has, then, been oriented to understanding the degree to which national rights of citizenship are dependent on the capacity to enforce transnational forms of obligation. This does not mean that national rights of citizenship have ceased to be important, far from it. The campaigns in south Durban remain crucially shaped, rhetorically and materially, by histories of nation-building and national transformation. However, just as the capacities of states are being reconfigured rather than eroded by globalisation, so the sort

of flexible, cosmopolitan citizenship we have looked at in this section combines both national and transnational activities. It remains the case that the strategies used to reach out beyond national boundaries by South African activists have been adopted in order to try to enforce nationally prescribed rights to a clean and healthy environment. The example of transnational environmental activism discussed here certainly spills over the borders of contained nation-states, but it does so to try to enforce the obligations of non-state actors such as multinational corporations to deliver rights guaranteed in principle by a national constitution.

Rather than thinking of citizenship rights being secured within a national setting, framed in a universal register of reciprocal rights and obligations between states and citizens, we have seen here an example of new modes of transnational solidarity premised on shared interests in issue-specific grievances against geographically dispersed objects of contention, and mobilising affective registers of identity other than the national, such as race and indigeneity. The geography of citizenship that develops from this sort of activity is a contingent one of relationships made and re-made in the processes through which spatially separate actors are woven together in varied relations of cooperation and obligation that deploy modes of soft power such as shame, blame, and responsibility, as well as juridical modes such as accountability, liability, entitlement, and right.

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