

CHAPTER FIVE

Engineering the Township Home

Domestic Transformations and Urban Revolutionary Consciousness

JASON HICKEL

Change life! Change Society! These ideas lose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space. New social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa. (Henri Lefebvre 1974: 59)

Popular resistance to colonial rule in South Africa had a varied geography. Much of it was mobilised in rural areas: the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, the Sekhukhuneland Revolt of 1958 and the Pondo Revolt of the early 1960s come to mind as clear examples (Carton 2000; Delius 1989, 1996; Kepe and Ntsebeza 2012; Marks 1970; Mbeki 1964; Van Kessel 1993). But the mass movement led by the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies through the 1980s and 1990s, which finally brought the apartheid government to its knees, was based largely – indeed, almost exclusively – in the country’s post-war urban townships. It was guided by a theory known as ‘national democratic revolution’, which, alongside basic Marxist tenets, advanced a *liberal* vision of society that held the autonomous individual as the bearer of rights within an egalitarian order – a vision that had not been at stake in earlier struggles (Chipkin 2004). In the province of Natal this liberal vision took root in the townships, but much of the rural population rejected it: while they embraced the principles of racial equality and universal franchise, many questioned the underlying idea that all individuals are ontologically equal, especially in relation to gender and kinship

hierarchies, giving impetus to Inkatha's resistance against the ANC (Hickel 2012).

What accounts for this particular geography of struggle? Why did the principles of national democratic revolution take hold in Natal's urban townships but not as readily in rural areas? Unfortunately, the existing scholarship on the history of revolutionary consciousness in South Africa does not go very far towards answering this question. Scholars have focused primarily on understanding where liberal and Marxist ideas came from in the first place. Peter Walshe (1971) traces the ideological origins of the movement to the liberalising pressure of missionaries and the influence of unionists, Marxists, Garveyists and nationalists. In a similar vein, Frederick Cooper (1996) shows how Africans strategically appropriated Western discourses of human rights in their bid for universal recognition. While these accounts deal incisively with the role of global ideological flows in the making of the South African revolution, they tend to ignore a prior question. Ideas about liberal democracy, egalitarian rights and class identity, we can hypothesise, will not take root just anywhere, as if human beings were universally predisposed to embracing them and recognising their superiority over 'traditional' ontologies; indeed, they are often vehemently resisted, as Inkatha's long-standing war against the ANC demonstrates. What made it possible, then, for these particular ideological modes to gain mass traction in South Africa in the late twentieth century? And in Natal, why did they take hold in urban townships specifically?

In this chapter I argue that liberal-Marxist political ideology took root in Natal townships because of the specific forms of social organisation and domesticity that characterised township society. I demonstrate that these forms were largely the product of violent exercises in social engineering through modernist urban planning deployed after the first decades of the twentieth century. As a tactic of control, this marked a decisive shift from earlier strategies used by colonial administrators, who initially sought to preclude urbanisation in favour of governing Africans by proxy through patriarchal power in rural homesteads. When urbanisation proceeded nonetheless in response to industrial demand for labour,

administrators worried that ‘detrribalisation’ and the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ African family would engender social indiscipline and political agitation. For them, the figure of the urban African upset categorical distinctions between traditional and modern, and embodied the sort of dangerous anomaly that Mary Douglas (1966) has called ‘matter out of place’. Administrators sought to reassert control over the urban African population by relocating it to planned, modernist townships, and by remaking the African family according to European expectations of kinship and domesticity. This was a violent project, not unlike the villagisation schemes of Maoist China or Julius Nyerere’s Ujamaa campaign in Tanzania.

I trace this shift in colonial policy from indirect rule through rural homesteads in the nineteenth century to social engineering through urban townships in the twentieth century, highlighting the transformations of domestic social form that this entailed. I show that while township planners intended their communities to function as citadels of domestic docility (in the mould of America’s Levittown), they ended up becoming hotbeds for political activism – precisely the outcome that the project was designed to forestall. The new social forms that characterised late-twentieth-century African urbanism engendered new types of subjectivity, fostered new political expectations and facilitated the rise of the revolutionary movement led by the ANC. The logic of revolution, in short, was an ironic by-product of the colonial state’s most draconian technologies of control over the home. As the Introduction to this book lays out, the domestic domain has always been closely related to South Africans’ political aspirations: just as colonialism was a colonialism of the home, so too popular politics can be understood as a politics of the home. Nowhere does this emerge more clearly than in the history of the late-stage liberation struggle.

Indirect rule as anti-civilising mission

It is commonly believed that European colonialism in Africa was organised around a ‘civilising mission’ intended to make ‘traditional’ Africans more like ‘modern’ Europeans. But this does not exactly hold in the case of South Africa. For most of the colonial period,

missionaries were the only ones consistently engaged in a civilising mission; they sought specifically to remake the rural African home and family in the mould of the bourgeois European model as an integral part of the process of salvation (Hansen 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). The colonial administration, by contrast, regarded this civilising mission with suspicion, fearing that ‘detrribalisation’ would lead to social anomie, mass unrest and the rise of a politically conscious class that would eventually undermine minority colonial rule altogether. The Native Affairs Department sought to foreclose this possibility by preventing African urbanisation. The idea was to keep Africans confined to ‘native reserves’ where their ‘traditional’ social structures and beliefs could be maintained. Then, using an intricate network of influx controls, Africans were brought temporarily to the cities for work on fixed-term contracts and then expelled back to the reserves when they were used up. As Meillassoux (1981) has pointed out, the system was designed to allow industrial capitalists to pay rock-bottom wages by displacing the cost of reproducing labour onto peasant households. But it was also designed to forestall the rise of radical consciousness by preventing full proletarianisation (Wolpe 1972).

From 1891, rural areas in colonial Natal were governed under the Natal Code of Native Law – the linchpin of indirect rule. The Code was designed to control Africans by ossifying previously flexible systems of social hierarchy and underwriting the authority of patriarchs and chiefs under the banner of ‘tradition’ (Walshe 1971). At the very centre of this system was the rural homestead (*umuzi*), which became the basic unit of what Mahmood Mamdani (1996) has so aptly termed ‘decentralised despotism’. As Jeff Guy outlines in Chapter One of this book, the Code meticulously organised hierarchy within the homestead, determining the rules for the rank and status of wives and inscribing patterns of inheritance and succession according to a strict system of primogeniture through males. Importantly, this particular form of social organisation was written into the material layout of domestic space. Like the ‘house societies’ famously theorised by scholars like Bourdieu (1977) and Lévi-Strauss (1984), Zulu homesteads embodied a definite correlation between kinship structure and domestic

architecture. As Adam Kuper has observed, the homestead mapped 'the nodes of contemporary social networks', modelled 'ritual values and ideas about the organisation of the world', and reflected principles of gender, hierarchy and authority (Kuper 1993: 472–473). The Natal Code inscribed an orthodox model of the homestead that many Zulu-speaking Africans continue to recognise today. While homesteads vary quite dramatically in form, they all share a basic spatial logic organised concentrically around a cattle byre in what Thomas Huffman (2001) has famously termed the 'Central Cattle Pattern'.

According to the orthodox model, the ancestral hut (or *indlunkulu*) sits at the apex of the homestead, facing downslope and ideally towards the east. The other huts – those of the patriarch's wives and children – are arranged down the sides of the homestead around a central cattle byre. Homesteads are always divided into two distinct 'sides': a right side, which is considered senior, and a left side, which is considered junior. When a man gets married, the first wife builds her hut at the top of the right side and the second wife builds hers at the top of the left side. Then the third wife occupies the space below the first wife, and the fourth wife below the second, and so on. So the status of each hut – and that of the 'uterine family' (comprised of the wife and her progeny) attached to it – is indexed by its location within the homestead landscape according to a set of binary oppositions between right/left and back/front: the right side is senior to the left side, and the huts at the top of each side are senior to those below them (see Figure 5.1). The interior layout of each hut follows a similar logic. The back of the hut – by the shrine – is marked as sacred and reserved for seniors and close kin, while the front, near the door, is considered more public and suitable for juniors, children and visitors. In addition, the right side of the hut is coded male, and the left side is coded female. This order is governed by an elaborate system of taboos that maintain boundaries between genders, generations and statuses through rules about behaviour, speech and – especially – movement through space (cf. Raum 1973).

It is important to note that hierarchy in this context is not organised in the Western sense of hierarchy at all. It is not conceived

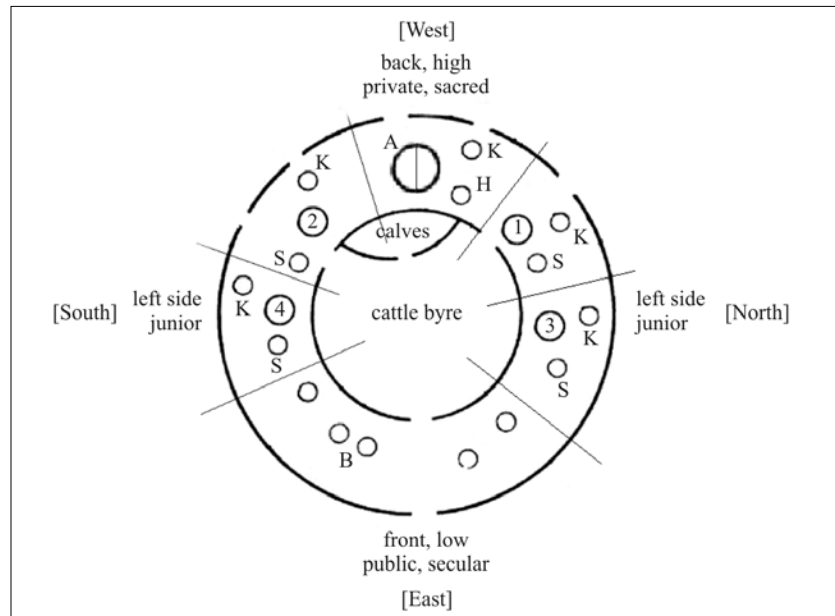


Figure 5.1 Schematic layout of a Zulu homestead with ideal cardinal orientation, following Raum (1973), Kuper (1993) and Huffman (2001). A: Ancestral hut; H: Homestead head's hut; 1-4: Wives in order of seniority; K: Kitchen hut; S: Senior son of each wife; B: Junior sons and other attached subordinates

as a ladder of command, or as a relationship among discrete entities according to a linear chain of authority. Instead, hierarchy operates as the principle by which persons are related to one another as *parts* to an encompassing *whole*, as in the work of Louis Dumont (1980). In the polygynous homestead, the first and second wives act as the heads of their respective sides, each encompassing the wives below them. In the same way, the first wife also encompasses the second, just as the right side encompasses the left. Within this system, synecdoche becomes the primary principle of representation: the encompassing element represents the whole to its constitutive parts. Persons in this context are constituted through encompassment; they are not understood as individuals with discrete interests in the sense that Westerners take for granted (cf. Piot 1999).

The informal settlement: The birth of the African counterpublic

The colonial system of indirect rule that sought to keep Africans confined to rural areas was not watertight, however, and could not prevent the eventual emergence of an African population living in informal settlements on the outskirts of 'white' cities, drawn by colonists' insatiable appetite for cheap labour. The migration of Africans into the Durban area began in the middle of the nineteenth century, and intensified following the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in 1879 – a military feat that was intended to draw rural Zulus into the rapidly expanding labour market (Greaves 2005; Guy 1994). Many Africans who had immigrated to the city for work lived in 'interstitial' spaces such as workplace storerooms or in their employers' backyards, while others constructed 'makeshift' housing in small shack settlements. By 1900 as many as twenty thousand Africans lived in the broader Durban area, where their presence had become such a concern to white residents that the municipality began to monitor African access to the city for the first time (La Hausse 1997). Three years later, the city began to construct the first of a series of single-sex barracks to house African workers near their places of employment (Maasdorp and Humphreys 1975: 11).

But these attempts at housing workers were small-scale and piecemeal; the majority of migrants to the city continued to live on the periphery, undocumented and illegible to the state. The influx of Africans increased after the crushing of the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906 and the further imposition of taxes on Natal Africans, so that by 1921 the African population in the Durban area reached as high as forty-six thousand (Burrows 1959: 24–25). Those unable to secure formal housing ended up overflowing into informal settlements, the largest of which became Cato Manor – known by its residents as Umkhumbane – which sprawled across the valley immediately west of Durban's commercial centre. At its apex in the 1950s, over one hundred thousand Africans lived in Umkhumbane and it had become one of the continent's best-known urban African settlements.

Communities like Umkhumbane that grew on the outskirts of Durban throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century

constituted what we might call an indigenous African urbanism. Architectural records show that the state interfered very little in the spatial organisation of the community – rather, spatial patterns and corresponding forms of sociality developed according to a vernacular geography, through everyday accretions that ignored the modernist convention of domaining residential, commercial and civic zones in separate areas and allowed people to work, trade and recreate through and among their homes (CC, KCF94, PNAB Microfiche). Outside the purview of state power during their formative years, these communities provided a haven for thousands of men and women not legally entitled – according to the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 – to live in Durban proper. Self-employed artisans, mechanics, builders and painters congregated in these precincts, where they could freely pursue independent livelihoods that the state precluded them from practising elsewhere. One must take care not to romanticise informal settlements, of course – after all, they embodied the worst of colonialism’s racist exclusions. But what is interesting about them is that they opened up the possibility of new forms of sociality.

These dense urban African communities differed quite dramatically from Natal’s rural societies. Outside the purview of the chiefs and the Natal Code, hierarchies were not so rigorously policed. For one, the population was comprised largely of ‘stray’ individuals – including widows, runaways or otherwise independent females – who could not legally live in town but no longer had rural homesteads to which they could return. Many of these people (and a majority, after the 1930s) considered themselves dissociated from their rural backgrounds and regarded the city as their permanent home (Hellmann 1935). Given this fragmentation of kinship and owing to restrictions on space, households in urban areas began to depart from the normative structure of rural homesteads. Architectural records indicate that residents of the informal settlements developed a new, more democratic organisation of domestic space that partially subverted the gendered and generational oppositions that underwrote hierarchy and encompassment in the homestead (CC, KCF94, PNAB Microfiche). Furthermore, as Africans were prevented from owning land by the Natives Land Act of 1913,

informal settlements like Umkhumbane were characterised by a contract-based system in which Africans rented plots from Indian landowners whose authority they deeply resented – quite unlike in rural homesteads, where residents were encompassed by patriarchal authorities who allocated land in trust. In the informal settlements, people who occupied multi-room shacks were often renters unrelated to the head of the household. Household structure hinged less on agnatic kinship than on contractual relationships, creating the conditions for people to imagine themselves as individuals – as the ontological equals of their superiors.

The new egalitarian sociality that developed in Umkhumbane was reflected in the trade in sorghum beer (*utshwala*). While the state held a monopoly over the production and sale of beer in the city, the informal settlements sustained a flourishing trade geared towards workers who would frequent local ‘shebeens’, or taverns, during weekends. In contrast to the rural areas, where it was consumed as a gift during ritual rites and only according to strict codes of gender and hierarchical segregation, beer in the informal settlements became a true commodity, consumed in exchange for cash. Thus severed from its ritual moorings and the authority of agnatic elders and chiefs, the beer-drink gradually became an inclusive, egalitarian public event. Umkhumbane in particular became known for its shebeens, which functioned as places of public sociality somewhat analogous to the coffee houses and salons of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Paralleling the developments that Habermas (1998) noted in the latter context, the departure from homestead forms of hierarchy led to a tradition of critical egalitarian discussion akin to what Nancy Fraser (1990) identifies as the ‘subaltern counterpublic’. As new arenas where political matters could be freely debated, shebeens fostered a robust oppositional culture by democratising the ‘domain of common concern’ (La Hausse 1988, 1997). This emergent public sphere replaced a system in which patriarchal authorities represented their subjects by encompassment with one in which authority (the contractual authority of the state, landlords and employers) was publicly monitored through critical discourse by the people. This new tradition of African democratic egalitarianism – first developed

in the crucible of the informal settlements – became a central plank in the platform of the early ANC (Walshe 1971).

The social changes that took place in Umkhumbane had significant implications for women, whose being was no longer strictly constituted within systems of hierarchical encompassment – as in the homestead – and who thus exercised increasing degrees of independence. The market in beer was structured by the persistence of a particular Zulu cultural rule – namely, that only women could brew it. This meant that women controlled the beer trade and through it garnered incomes they could use at their own discretion. Owing to this new commercial autonomy – and given that women typically operated shebeens out of their homes – the ubiquity of the so-called shebeen queen indicated the emergence of a new public sphere that centrally included women. Drawing on these new egalitarian possibilities, women were at the forefront of resistance against the Durban municipality when the 1928 Liquor Act extended the state’s beer monopoly to cover peri-urban settlements. The popular mobilisation that they galvanised, which reflected elements of feminist discourse (Bradford 1987), furnished the momentum behind political organisations such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union and the Communist Party, provided the bedrock for the early ANC, and spawned a rich tradition of urban political activism that registered the peri-urban slums as hotbeds of terrorism in the minds of colonial authorities (see Walker 1991; Wells 1993).

The planned township as reluctant colonialism

The growth of informal settlements during the first half of the twentieth century caused a great deal of anxiety among colonial administrators. One reason for their concern was that African shacks and shanties presented the state with a serious problem of ‘legibility’ (Scott 1998) that made them difficult to manage and control. In addition, however, and perhaps even more significantly, African slums appeared to Europeans as something of a social-evolutionary misfire. In South Africa, as across the colonial world, African urbanisation was viewed as disorderly and dangerous, as much by colonisers as by the social scientists of the time.

'Detribalised' Africans were considered 'matter out of place'; as James Ferguson has put it, 'urban natives . . . confused and confounded the orderly divisions between traditional and modern, native and Western, and rural and urban' (Ferguson 2007: 73).

Reflecting on his visit to the region, Karl Polanyi represented 'detribalised' South Africans in the most pathological terms:

The Kaffir of South Africa, a noble savage, than whom none felt socially more secure in his native kraal, has been transformed into a human variety of half-domesticated animal dressed in the 'unrelated, the filthy, the unsightly rags that not the most degenerated white man would wear', a nondescript being, without self-respect or standards, veritable human refuse. (Cited in Ferguson 2007: 73)

Similarly, after visiting South Africa in the 1930s, Bronislaw Malinowski decried the 'detribalised' natives of the 'urban location' as 'sociologically unsound' monstrosities who had lost the regulated order of 'tribal' society but – given their lack of access to the necessary material resources – had failed to approximate the structure of 'European' society (Malinowski 1945: 159; cited in Ferguson 2007). In these accounts, the very existence of urban black South Africans seems to threaten the basic categories that underpinned both colonialism and social scientific theory, which drew structuralist distinctions between rural/tribal/African and urban/modern/European that mapped onto the Durkheimian bifurcation between mechanical and organic solidarity.

These concerns hinged on ideas about the family. The 'tribal family' was imagined as a domain of extended kinship, clan solidarity, polygyny and hierarchy, while the 'modern family' was imagined as a domain of nuclear kinship, autonomous individuals, monogamy and egalitarianism – precisely the evolutionary schema posited by early social scientists such as Maine (1861), Morgan (1877) and Engels (1884) along the trajectory from savagery to civilisation. Colonial administrators worried that urbanisation was producing Africans who were unhinged from the control of rural chiefs and patriarchs and existed outside the strictures of indirect rule, no

longer bound to their 'tribal' values. For example, James Mathewson (1957), one of South Africa's most influential social engineers, believed that the deterioration of the patriarchal family and the decline of marriage rates demonstrated that urban Africans were falling away from 'traditional' social forms. Mathewson represented detribalisation as a process of decay, as the decomposition of tribal social order into a chaotic tangle of random persons. This discourse about liminality and chaos was further reflected in representations of the slums themselves, which were regarded as makeshift and transient, in between the traditional African homestead and the modern European house.

As structuralist analysis would predict, these concerns about social disorder registered as anxieties about 'danger' and 'pollution' (cf. Douglas 1966) in the minds of Europeans. For instance, Robert Watson, the patron behind the well-known relocation scheme in Tongaat just north of Durban, wrote at great length about his perceptions of the people living in Natal's slums, whom he regarded as 'incurably filthy, diseased, and corrupt, a permanent menace to health and chronic disrupters of the peace' (Watson 1960: 14). It bears pointing out that policymakers perceived a basic correlation between domestic conditions and moral dispositions. As one contemporary commentator put it: 'Disreputable homes have a direct and traceable effect in creating disreputable people . . . slum yards are breweries, selling foul liquor. They are dens of immorality, filled with loose women' (Phillips 1930: 11). Administrators believed that 'broken families' and kinship disorder would inevitably lead to anarchy, immorality, sexual deviance, disease and – their greatest fear – violent political agitation, for violence was considered to be a product of spatial and social irrationality (cf. Weber 1946).

The state undertook to defuse this danger by forcibly relocating slum residents into segregated planned townships where they could be 'civilised' for the purposes of control. This was a reluctant colonialism – an unwilling embrace of the civilising mission – and a considerably more expensive backup plan devised to deal with the leakages of indirect rule. It was the state's perception of urban Africans as 'in-between' and 'polluted' that propelled this new

modernising project. Like the missionaries before them, the architects of public housing sought to reorder the African social milieu, using forced relocations to restructure African families. Drawing on social-scientific theories common at the time, planners believed that placing nuclear families in detached single-family homes would render Africans safe, docile and productive. The idea, in short, was to domesticate urban Africans by shaping them in the mould of mid-century European domesticity.

An epidemic outbreak of Spanish flu in informal settlements along the outskirts of Durban in 1918 provided the first justification that authorities needed to take action. Administrators passed the Public Health Act that very year, which allowed for intervention in urban African communities on the basis of public health concerns. This was followed by a spate of legislation intended to control the rural-urban migration of Africans. The Housing Act of 1920 and the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 provided for the establishment of African townships and required that Africans entering urban areas report immediately to registration officers to be assigned accommodation in either established hostels or a series of planned 'native villages'. Giving teeth to this project, the Slums Act that was passed in 1934 provided legal backing for the destruction of slums and the forced relocation of their inhabitants.

The first planned townships were constructed the same year that the Slums Act was passed, and housed many of the residents displaced under this legislation. Baumannville, built in 1934, was followed by a much larger Lamontville, and both were superseded in scale by the later development of Chesterville in 1945. Still, these efforts could never keep pace with the rush of urbanisation. During the Second World War, industrial employment boomed and Durban's African population leaped from seventy-one thousand in 1936 to an astonishing one hundred sixty-two thousand in 1951 (Maasdorp and Humphreys 1975: 9). Existing municipal housing could accommodate only a mere eleven thousand of these, leaving a massive backlog that caused significant anxiety among white South Africans.

The National Party rose to power in 1948 with these concerns in mind, on a platform that promised to reassert control over urban

Africans by focusing specifically on ‘native housing’. Hendrik Verwoerd – then minister of native affairs – dedicated himself to ramping up slum clearances and developing new African housing projects. The basic assumption behind this program was that the rational ordering of persons in rationally ordered domestic spaces would eliminate violence and engender docility. Not surprisingly, Umkhumbane became the target of the Natal government’s first exercise in large-scale relocation and social engineering through black housing. In the 1950s, purportedly responding to increasing political upheaval and infectious epidemics in the slum, the state built the massive, planned township of KwaMashu and began relocating the residents of Umkhumbane. The project was completed in 1965, at which point a total of 82 826 people had been relocated (Soni 1992: 40).

Township planners sought to reconcile two competing concerns: a fear that the ‘detrribalisation’ of urban Africans would engender immense social dislocation and upheaval, and a belief that ‘civilising’ Africans into an established set of European social norms would facilitate docility. Again, the driving theoretical framework held that residential environments had a direct influence on the mental and social disposition of their inhabitants. Prefiguring Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, planners believed in a definite correlation between structured space, social organisation and cultural disposition. Indeed, most of the planners supported what at the time was the relatively progressive view that differences between racial groups were less ‘natural’ than they were merely the product of environmental conditions. As urban planner P.H. Connell put it in his 1939 policy treatise: ‘We are dealing with a primitive and backwards people [whose] mental makeup is relatively easily changed, for better or worse, simply by altering their environment’ (1939: 50). In other words, planners believed that civilising the built environment was the most effective way to civilise its inhabitants.

Connell’s writings provide interesting insight into the philosophy of social engineering that was operative at the time. Assembling input from a team of psychologists and social scientists, Connell sought to solve the detrribalisation-civilisation tension by housing Africans in blocks of flats, with a single nuclear family per

unit. On the one hand, it was thought that the flats would help avoid too much individualism by maintaining the ‘communal’ ethos of the rural areas:

Because of his natural communal tendencies it would be advisable to house the native in such a way as to enable him to live in close cooperation with his fellows . . . It is in the thrusting of the Native into the turmoil of self-sufficiency and independence (which is the keynote of city life) that we find one of the greatest psychological menaces. The [block flats] scheme must stimulate a revival of that community spirit existing in the kraal, but destroyed or lost in the city. (Connell 1939: 82, 97)

On the other hand, however, the team hoped the block flats system would break up the traditional patriarchal family and facilitate something more ‘modern, liberal, and democratic’, to use their terms. If the flat system *emerged* from a society bearing this structure, Connell reasoned, then certainly imposing the system on a different society could engender the same. In the flat system of the modern family, Connell claimed, ‘the individual has his own friends and activities, and is given a chance to develop his own individuality. There is not so much parental control and there is a greater amount of mutual regard and respect based on real merits’ (1939: 79–80). Connell’s overriding goal, then, was to protect urban Africans from abrupt ‘detrribalisation’ while gradually encouraging them to internalise modern liberal values.

A decade later, another influential planner, A.J. Cutten, worked to promote a quite different model of native housing – namely, a township comprised of free-standing nuclear-family houses. Cutten thought such houses would be more effective at engendering social stability than the block flats. While drawing on the spatial logic used by planners in nineteenth-century Britain, he – like Connell – sought to reproduce aspects of ‘native society’ for the purposes of enhancing social control. He arranged the sections of the township around a central point where communal facilities would be located, such as schools, recreational facilities and administrative buildings. The idea was to facilitate surveillance and control by

authorities, but also to replicate the concentric structure of domestic space in rural areas. As Cutten put it, 'by this means is reborn in the African the sense of social union that previously existed only in his native kraal' (1951: 87). Drawing on a Romantic conception of the noble savage, Cutten assumed that the values of tribal life were intrinsically stable and peaceful, and should be integrated with European mechanisms of panoptic administration as a bastion against urban unrest and immorality.

Adding to the work of urban planners like Connell and Cutten, in 1955 D.M. Calderwood argued that the creation of stable township families was important for maintaining worker productivity and a steady labour supply. 'Among Natives,' he argued, 'the lowest incidence of absenteeism is found in men who live with their wives and families in town, whereas the highest occurs in married men living away from their rural homes in migrant labourers' hostels' (Calderwood 1955: 11). But even more importantly, Calderwood thought that proper township housing was critical for the creation of 'moral' persons and 'responsible' citizens:

Overcrowded slum areas cannot produce responsible persons; it is through good family living that responsible persons will grow, [otherwise] the children will, as they grow older, run away to become vagrants, prostitutes, criminals or shebeen kings or queens . . . The road to crime is being built upon a foundation of bad housing and broken family life . . . If the children are given the chance of a full life now, then tomorrow they will accept their responsibilities and become contented and well-behaved inhabitants of the urban areas. (1955: 12)

As with many of the other social scientists and urban planners who helped design the townships, Connell, Cutten and Calderwood were not nearly as draconian as the apartheid ideologues who drafted their services. Indeed, they considered themselves benevolent liberals who sought to foster welfare through decent public housing and wanted to bring Africans up to speed with European modernity. Pitting themselves against the hyper-rationalism of apartheid bureaucracy and the alienating austerity of existing centralised

planning efforts, they drew up models patterned after the ‘garden city’ (see Figure 5.2) promoted by Ebenezer Howard in Britain and Le Corbusier in France (Evans 1997: 127). Of course, the townships never actually turned out like this: in most of them one would have been lucky to find even a single tree.



Figure 5.2 Artist’s impression of KwaThema neighbourhood
Source: Calderwood (1955: 94)

There were, however, some apartheid administrators that appreciated this liberal discourse, such as Sighart Bourquin, the director of the Department of Bantu Administration and the official in charge of the development and administration of KwaMashu. In line with his missionary background, Bourquin conceived of the forced-relocations project as an act of salvation, replacing the disease, disorder and lawlessness of Umkhumbane with the beauty, cleanliness, rationality and civic pride of KwaMashu. In his widely distributed promotional slide show, he described the ‘sprawling shacklands of Cato Manor’, where

filth not only endangered the health of the people but blunted their senses and caused them to adopt an indifferent attitude. Open drains spread sickness and disease [and] under these conditions children were born and reared, their only playground the sick

soil between the shacks. Many died and those who survived had little to look forward to and were doomed to become loafers and tsotsis [thugs] and drunken wrecks.

He contrasts this scene of moral depravity with a utopian vision of KwaMashu:

[The] city is well planned and gives new hope and joy to thousands. The Bantu becomes intensely house-proud and shows a keen sense for beauty . . . He may have his house plastered and oil painted, he will fit picture rails and venetian blinds. With pick and shovel and assisted by his wife, he sets to work to clear the grass to pave his pathway, and to prepare a little garden so that he can hold his own with his neighbours. Here he can live as a decent self-respecting man. Here he can offer his wife a secure home and bring up his children to become happy and useful members of the community. (CC, KCM 55166-55232)

In this narrative of violent disorder to peaceful order, from depravity to salvation, Bourquin reveals that the KwaMashu project was not just about eliminating public health hazards and providing services to urban Africans, but about remaking urban African subjectivities and instilling a new, bourgeois morality centred on the values attached to the European nuclear family home. However, while some Umkhumbane residents may indeed have been pleased with the prospect of getting new houses, Bourquin's narrative elides the massive and violent social reorganisation that this process entailed. Not only were tens of thousands of people forcibly relocated to KwaMashu; they were also coercively rearranged into new family structures. People that could not fit into this mould were externalised to the reserves, so that KwaMashu would become a place occupied solely by families and persons conforming to a particular ideal.

'Fit and proper persons': Making the ideal urban African

As described earlier, Umkhumbane, like other informal settlements in South Africa, was marked by a spontaneous integration of domestic and commercial spaces such that its architecture failed to

sustain a rigid contrast between private building and public street. As the sites of a bustling trade in sorghum beer, residential houses were not geographically distinguished from routes of circulation, but operated as crucial public nodes along those routes. In other words, the relationship between closed building and open space did not correspond to a rigid private-public code but was imminently reversible, its terms in constant flux. It was this semiotic ambivalence between public and private that registered the settlement not only as 'chaotic', 'diseased' and 'immoral' in the minds of the Durban municipal authorities, but as an incubator for political agitation.

The planned township was designed to redress this dangerous ambivalence by organising a new kind of space. As Foucault (1995: 143) has put it, modernist planning is a disciplinary project that seeks to 'break up collective dispositions', order 'transient pluralities' and prevent 'diffuse circulation' by dividing space in such a way as to locate, measure and supervise each individual. In South Africa, the detached, single-nuclear-family house was at the very centre of this project. The goal was to obliterate public solidarities by relocating each individual within the confines of a nuclear family, binding them to a predictable set of interests, commitments and responsibilities. In addition, as James Holston (1999) points out, the structured differentiation of public from private spaces forms an important component of modernism's doctrine of salvation. Townships like KwaMashu were designed to neatly separate public from private life, and to demolish spaces that could serve as locations for political discontent. This was done on three nesting scales: within the broader cadastral vision of the racially segregated city, within the township itself and within the family house.

First, the Durban area was restructured in accordance with the Group Areas Act after 1950. The new townships were erected a significant distance away from the city's central business district in an attempt to create a rigid opposition between the (European) commercial sector and the (Native) residential sector, which were connected by highway and rail. This arrangement was designed to exorcise any residue of the public street by transforming roads from spaces for pedestrian gatherings and marketplace exchange into purely functional conduits for moving workers between residential

and industrial domains. The effect was to dismantle the urban marketplace that characterised informal settlements by reordering relations of commerce and residence, and by strictly separating capitalist production from domestic reproduction.

Second, within the township itself, planners sought to eliminate the domestic-commercial reversals of the informal settlement in favour of an uncompromising clarity of function written into a spatial order designed for easy policing (see Figure 5.3). The scheme remade the family home as a distinctively domestic domain, precluding it from functioning as a locus of public interaction. Legislation prohibited production and trade outside of specially designated areas, severing the residential street from the place of exchange. Streets within the township were designed not to connect houses to each other, but to connect houses to labour transport facilities and to enable police surveillance. Public life was confined to the church, the social centre and, later, the indoor shopping complex, which could be controlled and policed on the state's terms. Within the township, then, the modernist intervention attempted to eliminate the possibility of robust counterpublics – such as that which thrived in Umkhumbane – by creating an isolated domestic life separate from a public life that could be thoroughly surveilled.



Figure 5.3 Meadowlands; typical of African townships developed after 1948

ENGINEERING THE TOWNSHIP HOME

Third, similar transformations operated at the level of the house. Two architectural models ended up dominating township developments across South Africa: NE 51/6 and 51/9 (see Figure 5.4). The NE 51 (short for Non-European 1951) houses consisted of four rooms: a master bedroom, a children's bedroom, a kitchen and a living room – all designed around the needs of the nuclear family. Ostensibly, the NE 51 model was selected by the National Housing and Planning Commission because it fitted the criteria of 'low cost'. But this selection flouted all the available data, which clearly showed detached single-family houses to be dramatically more expensive in terms of land use and construction materials than row houses or duplexes. In other words, the NE 51 model was selected not on the 'objective' basis of cost and efficiency, but rather because the detached house fit the soteriology of European modernism as a sacred, divinely ordained domestic form thought to instil the values of good citizenship (Perin 1980: 45).

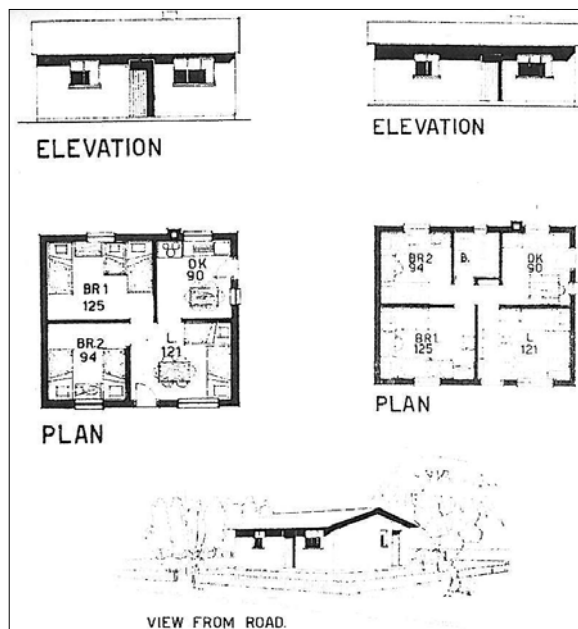


Figure 5.4 House types NE 51/6 and 51/9
Source: Calderwood (1955: 29, 31)

The architect M.V. Pennington was one of the most ardent defenders of the single-family home. In his 1978 book, he worked hard to rationalise and justify this particular domestic form. He regarded the family sitting room as essential for encouraging a sense of love and emotional attachment between parents and children. He saw the kitchen and verandah as spaces that would facilitate women's labour without cutting them off from family activities. He celebrated the master bedroom as the locus of companionate marriage and conjugal privacy, while insisting that the wife should have her own dressing space so as to guard her chastity. These recommendations masqueraded as neutral assessments of housing needs, but I suggest that they are better understood as projections of Eurocentric assumptions about proper gender and family structure – assumptions that were backed by the full power of the state, which reserved the privilege of *forcing* people to fit within these strictures.

The first houses in the KwaMashu development were handed over to residents in March 1958 through a rigorous application process. Displaced residents of Umkhumbane were given first priority, but they had to meet a series of stringent criteria before they could claim their units. Bourquin and the township manager, a man by the name of R.G. Willson, had the final word when it came to the allocation and termination of residential permits – near total power over social engineering. They made their decisions according to the dictates of Provincial Notice No. 383 of 1960, 'Regulations for the Management and Control of Native Locations, Native Villages and Hostels'. This notorious and widely resented document decreed that individuals could only claim a house if they qualified to live in urban areas according to Section 10 of the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1945 and if they were the head of the family with whom they would occupy the site. In addition, the regulations declared that accommodation would only be allocated to people whom Willson proclaimed to be 'fit and proper persons', which meant one who, 'from the point of view of character, behaviour, disposition, health or habits', is 'suitable' for residence in the township, and who 'produces proof that he is married either by Christian rites or civil law or that a customary union subsists

between himself and the woman he describes as his wife' (Provincial Notice No. 383 of 1960). Ironically, within the ostensibly 'private' modern home the state decided how the African family would be constituted.

These residence regulations produced a new kind of family tailored to planners' vision of the ideal modern community. By dictating that a household head (a male, by default) could own no more than a single dwelling and claim no more than a single wife, Notice 383 effectively outlawed polygyny in urban areas. Furthermore, the proof-of-marriage condition rendered ineligible those couples united according to customary law, as acceptable proof of such unions was nearly impossible to procure. The ideal-typical township resident was therefore an employed, monogamous male head of a nuclear family in possession of a four-room, detached, single-family dwelling. Such individuals were permitted to have their dependants living with them, but only as many as could fit within the confines of the house without violating the personal-space code of the Slums Act (forty square feet per person), and only so long as they were unmarried and – in the case of males – under the age of eighteen. Notice 383 prohibited household heads from allowing anyone who did not qualify as 'family' – according to the standards of the township manager – to live with them. Only a single nuclear family was permitted to occupy any one residence, and homeowners were prohibited from erecting additional rooms on their property. Frequent police raids enforced compliance with these regulations, and violators were imprisoned or ejected from the urban areas outright.

Notice 383 imposed a number of other onerous restrictions. It prohibited alterations to housing units that compromised 'the privacy of family life' in any way. Residents were required to keep their units 'clean', 'hygienic' and 'free of vermin' at all times, and to be prepared for random inspection by the township manager to prevent 'contagion' presumed to spread so virulently among non-Europeans. Residents were not allowed to take part in any activities that would 'create a disturbance' or be 'indecent or subversive to good morals', were precluded from keeping any livestock or poultry, and were prohibited from slaughtering animals except at

specially designated places approved by the City Council. The regulations also enforced a new and very rigid division of spatial utility. It was illegal for residents to use their houses for anything other than 'domestic' purposes; hawking within the township was prohibited and persons could ply their trades only in designated commercial precincts. The head of the household was always required to be employed in the urban area. Individuals who found themselves unemployed or absent from their residential premises for over one month were liable to be deported.

Conclusion: The revolutionary by-products of social engineering

The development of informal settlements and the later forced removal of residents into planned townships radically transformed the structure of kinship and gender in the African family. By reorganising domestic space through the NE 51 house, planners subverted the structures of gender and hierarchy that defined rural Zulu homesteads, and eliminated the possibility of key institutions such as the cattle byre, the great house, and ranked 'houses' and 'sides'. In the process, they eradicated the home's capacity to function as the material embodiment of that particular cosmological order.

This had a number of consequences. The taboo system mentioned above fell apart as a result of this new spatial regime, for the layout of township houses made it impossible for people to observe the rigid prohibitions on space and interpersonal interaction that structure social life in rural homesteads along lines of gender and hierarchy. Furthermore, by dismantling the coordinates of encompassment that characterised rural homesteads, the new townships effectively individualised residents; women and youth, for example, were no longer constituted as encompassed (spatially and ontologically) by male elders to the same extent. These changes recall Marshall Sahlins' (1985) theory of 'structural transformation', which he uses to describe how the destruction of the Hawaiian taboo system altered relations between men, women, chiefs and commoners in a sort of cascading domino effect; changing one element of the system altered all of the others as well. Finally, by

separating abstract labour into its own distinct domain, planners created the conditions for workers to become – in Marxist terms – a class in themselves (cf. Lefebvre 1974). Occupying this new structural position, urban workers were easy targets for radical political organisers in the 1980s.

These structural transformations opened the door for new forms of consciousness, rendering the urban African population amenable to ideas about individual rights, gender egalitarianism and class identity in a way that their rural counterparts never were (cf. Mamdani 1996). In other words, the political consciousness of township dwellers developed along the lines of the socio-spatial structure of the township, which reflected the basic logic of modern individualism and encouraged working-class identity. The township youth of the early 1980s were the first generation to have been born and raised in this new cultural context, which helps explain how they ended up at the forefront of a revolutionary movement that had a distinctly liberal, egalitarian and class-oriented character (Chipkin 2004). As Jacob Dlamini put it in his recent memoir, ‘The township was the metaphorical home in whose living room the post-apartheid imaginary was largely conceived by a revolutionary movement that never really moved out of its urban base’ (2009: 160).

Ultimately, then, the apartheid state became the victim of its own strategy for social control, which initially sought to redress the intolerably ‘in-between’ status of slum-dwelling Africans. The state’s attempts to reorder this ‘polluted’, ‘chaotic’ and ‘dangerous’ population through modernist social engineering was almost ritualistic; it recalls Douglas’ (1966) discussion of how ritual reintegrates and reorders chaotic elements in order to neutralise the danger they pose. In a similar manner, social engineers sought to regain control over urban Africans by reordering their domestic milieu. Their basic assumption was that properly ordered, egalitarian, nuclear families situated in a rationally planned environment would be intrinsically stable and docile. In their blind devotion to this model, however, planners planted the seeds of the demise of the colonial project itself. Planners failed to foresee the ironic political consequences of their scheme; they completely

missed the fact that the fully proletarianised, egalitarian society they intended to produce would have new – and incredibly powerful – tools of resistance at its disposal. Instead of rendering Africans more easily controllable, the mass relocations produced new categories of personhood, entitlement and desire, and furnished the logic for new forms of resistance.

This observation recalls Mahmood Mamdani's argument that, in colonial and apartheid South Africa, 'the form of rule shaped the form of revolt against it' (1996: 24) or, to use Foucault's terms, that resistance is always an effect of power. As I have shown, the apartheid state's most draconian technologies of control – namely, the manipulation of African domesticity – ended up creating the conditions for the ANC's national democratic revolution.

Despite the best efforts of the planners, however, the type of social organisation that emerged in the townships never perfectly matched the ideal of the male-headed nuclear family. First, inadequate wages drove women to seek employment outside the home to supplement family income, a trend which intensified after 1986 when influx controls were abolished. Second, the restriction of housing allocation to married couples meant that many people sought quick unions simply for the purpose of acquiring a house and the right to live and work in urban areas, but most of these 'house marriages' proved to be brittle and transient, and frequently dissolved (Posel 2006). Third, a minor provision in Notice 383 allowed women to retain ownership of township houses after the death, desertion or divorce of a household head in the absence of a viable male heir, which happened quite frequently. Finally, generalised poverty made it difficult for aspiring husbands to pay bridewealth (*lobola*) to the families of their lovers – an exchange necessary to secure paternity according to a Zulu cultural rule – and thus left many illegitimate children to affiliate to the families of their maternal grandfathers and live in the natal homes of their mothers.

The result was a rapid rise in female-headed families and households whose kinship narratives included moments of matrifocality and matrilineality. In townships today, households are frequently owned and headed by unmarried women – sometimes as groups of

sisters – and descent and inheritance are frequently traced through women even when legitimate male heirs are present. This trend is particularly evident in older sections of the townships, which initially conformed to the planners' nuclear-family ideals but began to exhibit matrifocal tendencies after two or three generations (Pauw 1973; Marwick 1978). According to one long-time KwaMashu resident: 'This type of matrifocal family is very common. More common than the traditional form. It is now the norm. Things have completely changed from those earlier years.' Demographic data illustrate this quite well. Simkins (1986) shows a sharp rise between 1970 and 1980 in urban Africans' incidence of divorce, cohabitation and premarital reproduction, while the marriage rate declined, precipitously in the case of females.

Ultimately, the state's attempts at producing docile African nuclear families fell prey to a fundamental inconsistency between the racist ideologues of apartheid and the liberal urban planners that they hired. The planners envisioned utopian 'garden cities' centred on the Fordist model of the industrial male breadwinner, but the racist state hobbled this vision by funding only the most perfunctory construction and keeping black wages artificially low – making it impossible for working men to support legitimate social reproduction. In other words, while the state wanted to produce docile, modern nuclear families, it refused to pick up the bill. The matrifocal family within a growing culture of gender egalitarianism was an unintended consequence of incomplete social engineering, and is perhaps one of the reasons that women came to play such a central role in anti-colonial resistance. In addition, this gap between the promises of modernity and the reality of racial exclusions generated a deep sense of betrayal, which resonated most intensely among frustrated young men who could not fulfil the expectations of masculinity that modernist planners laid out (cf. Hunter 2010). This generalised feeling of 'abjection' – to use James Ferguson's (1999) term – fuelled the wave of strikes and protests in the 1980s, culminating in a movement of mass discontent in the townships unlike anything that the planners could have foreseen.

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