

Subsistence Marine Fishing in a Neoliberal City: A Political Ecology Analysis of Securitization and Exclusion in Durban, South Africa

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1. Introduction

A vibrant subsistence fishing community, predominantly descended from former servants and indentured laborers from India, has been living and working within Durban's harbor for generations (Dray 2009; Maharaj 2017). However, since the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African state has faced significant neoliberal pressure to remove barriers to international trade and encourage global capital markets, often at the expense labor and other social groups (Bond and Desai 2011). As part of international regulations put into place since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Transnet National Port Authority (TNPA), the parastatal organization that serves as 'landlord' for Durban's harbor, has had to come into compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS), a United Nations international agreement signed by ports all over the world after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and designed to implement global standards for safety and security (Dray 2009; RSA 2005). Consequently, the TNPA has assumed greater authority to control access to, and navigation within, the harbor, as well as approaches to the port (Meyer, 2007). Finally, new port regulations issued in 2009 strengthened Transnet's grip over the harbor area, creating additional barriers and control points for access to port facilities and introducing a permit system designed to restrict public access to most areas of the harbor (RSA, 2009).

Due to the above agreements, Durban's harbor has become progressively enclosed over the past decade, with access to the water barred by countless fences, gates, and security checkpoints, and as a result, less and less space is available for public use. As the final slogan

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from the protest above indicates, this progressive securitization of the port has barred access for the poor to public spaces within the harbor, forcing fishers to break the law in order to access traditional fishing locations. Nonetheless, Durban's subsistence fishing community has contested this exclusion, and a decade of resistance has revealed conflict within the management of the harbor between international neoliberal influences and a South African developmental state predisposed to be sympathetic to the land (and sea) use claims of its citizens.

2. Research Aims

Building on critical literature which characterizes securitization as a tool for the exclusion of the poor from urban public spaces and the informal economy (Becker and Müller 2013; Belina and Helms 2003; Bodnar 2015; Harvey 2000), this article draws upon extensive qualitative participatory fieldwork in order to examine how securitization operates in practice, through the everyday experiences of Durban's subsistence fishers. Its purpose is to demonstrate how securitization narratives operate as a tool for the neoliberal exclusion of the poor from public space, which, in the case of Durban's fishers, serves to bar the poor from participating in the blue economy.

3. Research Methods

This article draws upon a deep body of empirical data built over the past decade through extensive qualitative research within south Durban's subsistence fishing community. Fieldwork has consisted of formal interviews with stakeholders from the municipality and the port, semi-structured interviews with members of the subsistence fisher community, observations of fishers conducted during numerous site visits, as well as observing meetings and protests planned by the KwaZulu-Natal Subsistence Fisherfolks Forum (KZNSFF). Furthermore, some key respondents have been interviewed at multiple points since 2006, allowing for narratives to evolve and develop as events in the harbor have unfolded.

Altogether, this article is able to draw upon over 40 qualitative semi-structured interviews in addition to extensive participatory observation. The approach was both constructivist and interpretivist, allowing for the co-construction of knowledge between subject and researcher (Mottier 2005). Participants were purposively sampled with the assistance of the KwaZulu-Natal Subsistence Fisherfolks Forum (KZNSFF), as well as through the researchers' past relationships within the fishing community. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, as well as the often illegal actions subsistence fishers take to practice their livelihoods, the confidentiality of participants is absolute, and respondents will be referred to here by

pseudonyms. The exception are key-stakeholders within the public realm, who have agreed to their names appearing within this article. Finally, in regards to dates, unfortunately, memory is perishable, and often different respondents would cite different dates for specific incidents. When possible, we have turned to documentary evidence in order to help support a coherent and definitive timeline of events. However, where such evidence is not available we have evaluated conflicting accounts and made every effort to be as accurate and specific as possible.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to unpack the securitization narrative in order to examine how exclusion through securitization occurs in practice, through the everyday experiences of Durban's subsistence fishers. So how does securitization contribute to exclusion? By enclosing public space under the guise of safety and security; through the construction of fences, boom-gates, and barriers; by leveeing fines and arresting offenders; by employing police and private security to enforce exclusion and protect corporate interests, and finally; by criminalizing a livelihood and community that has existed for generations (Dray 2009; Maharaj 2017; Pillay 2002; Scott 1994). Securitization has excluded Durban's subsistence fishers from public space by appearing to operate as thin guise for the continued neoliberal dispossession and displacement of the poor, in favour of elites and capitalist schemes for accumulation (Harvey 2008; Maharaj 2017).

How has this exclusion affected fishers' ability to participate in South Africa's blue economy? As we have shown, fisher's livelihoods are deeply connected to traditional fishing spots and cannot be easily transferred to other locations. As a result, any dislocation can have significant consequences, in terms of income and food, for the lives of these individuals and their families. The securitization of Durban's harbor, by denying access to subsistence fishers, has taken an immense toll on the livelihoods of entire communities, while jeopardizing a culture that has developed over 150 years. Furthermore, this exclusion has not been felt by a wealthy, predominantly white, minority of commercial fishers, investors, and tourists who have benefitted from the exclusion of poorer citizens. As this example clearly demonstrates, securitization should be looked at critically, if all citizens are meant to share equitable access to public space and the blue economy.