

IMPERIAL DEBRIS *On Ruins and Ruination*

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Duke University Press Durham and London 2013

## Detritus in Durban

### *Polluted Environs and the Biopolitics of Refusal*

I'm not worried about the environment. All I want is my piece of oxygen!

—JANE GLOVER, interview by Sharad Chari, Durban, South Africa, 23 August 2003

Every epoch not only dreams the next, but while dreaming impels it towards wakefulness. It bears its end within itself, and reveals it—as Hegel already recognized—by a ruse. With the upheaval of the market economy, we begin to realize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, “Paris”

Jane Glover and I sat at the doorstep of the flat she had recently occupied in the section of the Woodville Road Flats that she calls “the ghetto within the ghetto.” From our vantage, we could not see the oil refinery at the center of the former Coloured township of Wentworth in Durban, South Africa.<sup>1</sup> I had been coming to Wentworth and neighboring Merebank to research changing forms of state racism and struggle in these areas, which are cheek-by-jowl with oil refineries (Engen, owned by Malaysian Petronas, and SAPREF, a joint venture of Shell South Africa and British Petroleum South Africa), a pulp and paper mill (Mondi Paper, formerly of the Anglo-American conglomerate), a former airport, and the industrial areas of Jacobs and Mobeni.<sup>2</sup> Located in a valley that traps pollution, South Durban has witnessed the rise of one of Southern Africa’s most important community-based and internationally networked environmental justice movements. Residents in these areas have been engaged in struggles over housing, services, contract

labor, and health care, as they refuse to be forgotten in the toxic valley of South Durban.

Jane and I sat facing engineering workshops as she spoke of insecure work and familial violence, homeless children living like a band of Artful Dodgers in an abandoned warehouse, rampant theft and resale of stolen objects which makes suspects of friends and lovers, drug and sex trades, and “gangsters” in and out of prison. Against this freighted narrative backdrop, Jane Glover praised God for her survival and looked out wistfully at the neighborhood she calls home. When I suggested a shift of registers to the effects of living next to oil refineries, the focus of media coverage on Wentworth, she laughed and exclaimed, “I’m not worried about the environment. All I want is my piece of oxygen!”

Jane had recently been part of a group of women who occupied flats left vacant by the Provincial Housing Department. This group had challenged the authority of the main community organization, the Wentworth Development Forum (WDF), which they saw as dragging its feet in negotiations over construction tenders, which would not have been much benefit to them. When they could wait no longer, the women held hands and prayed to the Holy Spirit for the strength to act. By the next morning, they had taken over the flats and could not be dislodged. The WDF called a meeting with prominent Durban activists at the Austerville Community Centre, above the public library, and the women of Woodville Road were publicly censured for defying their purported leaders. In an impromptu response, Jane invoked feelings of stigma and frustration widespread in Wentworth: “I woke up one morning and I said to myself, ‘What is it that depresses me so much about living here?’ And when I looked around, I looked at the flat and I said, ‘My god! It looks like the walls are closing in on me!’ So, if we failed somewhere along the way, we are so sorry. You know, when we needed some men around, there were no men available. So we took it upon ourselves to get in there and take on the task.” Through well-worn themes like the difficulties of sexual intimacy in overcrowded flats that had become claustrophobic, Jane performed the betrayal of a proper sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Her appeals to God, population pressure, and family values may have been strategic, but they provided an opportunity for a sharp lambaste against the political inactivity of the men around her, as well as against the idioms of struggle through which politics had been conventionally construed. Ideas of purity and pollution pervade her comments, despite a lack of reference to oil refineries. Pentecostalism, pervasive in Wentworth’s backyard churches, adds emotional intensity to her fight for the fruit of this world.

I have revisited this vignette before; it continues to challenge the research I have been engaged in through multiple revisits since 2002.<sup>4</sup> As I replay her public speech, I imagine Jane Glover amassing all forms of ruination, heaping them in a pile in middle of the Austerville Community Centre. I have puzzled over her rejection of an environmental idiom that would seem to explain the most obvious and politically expedient form of degradation next to an oil refinery. While thinking through popular refusal to become detritus, or political evidence forged in relation to changing forms of racialization, or the remains of a long and discontinuous history of state racism and opposition, I have experimented with concepts that in different ways attend to how people refuse to *be* ruined, while surrounded by processes of ruination.<sup>5</sup> I have come to see Jane's demand for "a piece of oxygen" as a ruse in Walter Benjamin's sense, in that it does not just refuse environmentalism, but also points in its tone and texture to simmering, emergent critique in the imaginations of people living with chronic exposure to toxic pollution.

I went to Wentworth in 2002 to understand how people living in a place saturated by industrial pollution contend with and refuse a variety of forms of detritus, remains, and waste foisted on their corner of South Africa's turbulent present. I soon found that my key concept, detritus, ran the risk of conflating quite different processes.<sup>6</sup> I was not the only one who ran this risk. In the face of corporate and governmental dissimulation about the health effects of air pollution, the most obvious kind of detritus in South Durban, Wentworth's residents reflect on other markers of degraded life and landscape, as in the range of horror stories about sex, drugs, and crime that Jane Glover and several other residents have regaled me with. When the former president Thabo Mbeki visited Wentworth before the elections of 2005, he was met with a similar litany of tales of moral and social decay. Debates circulate in Wentworth about whether environmental critique ought to be primary vis-à-vis multiple forms of suffering and deprivation, and whether to accept "social responsibility" funds from industry or whether this was pollution of another kind.

In contrast to this differentiated and fragmented contagion talk, South Durban had gained a certain kind of visibility on the Left after a highly visible strike in Wentworth opened the possibility of a conjoining of labor and environmental militancy. A primer on post-apartheid activism uses this event to argue for a brewing movement linking struggles across South Africa's townships.<sup>7</sup> However, this work only begins to ask how, between peaks of protest, people actively engage problems and revise their conception of politics.<sup>8</sup> I sought to intervene in these debates by turning precisely to what they

evade: how people live with and refuse the detritus of industrial capital and state-sanctioned racism through critical sensitivities that are contradictory, uncertain, and “not (yet) counter-partisan.”<sup>9</sup> Ann Laura Stoler frames the problem as “what people are left with . . . in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind.”<sup>10</sup>

In unpacking multiple senses of detritus, remain, ruin, ruination, and debris, I draw on several areas of scholarship. The first concerns the transition from apartheid, whether conceived through the lens of capital, livelihoods and social transformation, changing forms of activism, or changing modes of racism.<sup>11</sup> The materiality of racial infrastructure is relatively neglected in this scholarship, despite pioneering work on geographies of segregation, instabilities of labor control, and emergent forms of urban life during and after apartheid.<sup>12</sup>

In asking what does not transform, what is striking is that the industries that surround Wentworth and Merebank have retained the state-sanctioned right to pollute. Seemingly incontrovertible evidence of the effects of atmospheric pollution on children’s health has been flouted by an alliance of local government and corporate power. Moreover, the technocratic approach of city management, which claims to incorporate civic interests as “stakeholders,” denigrates popular determination of urban form and process, or what Henri Lefebvre called “the right to the city.”<sup>13</sup> This demand, I argue, was one aspect of anti-apartheid critique from the recent past of the 1970s and 1980s which has returned with a vengeance in post-apartheid times.

To think of built environments, state–capital alliances, and limits to popular struggle in relation to the material infrastructure of racism extends a line of thinking from Walter Benjamin’s classic essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” In his oft-cited parable of the Angel of History, faced backward against the gale of progress, Benjamin writes, “Where we see a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”<sup>14</sup> Scholars have followed this cue to interrogate the modernity of ruins, from the collection of things in the lives of the Appalachian poor, to the ruins of Fordist industry in the U.S. Midwest, to the ruins of colonialism in Namibia, to legendary ships stranded by a shifting river in Argentina’s Gran Chaco.<sup>15</sup> Stoler’s intervention in this body of work has been to insist on the differential and active nature of imperial debris in people’s lives, and the varied forms of refusal immanent in situations of ruination.<sup>16</sup>

Photography and film have been potent in attempts at arresting narratives of progress, in documenting debris and refusal.<sup>17</sup> Postindustrial dereliction

is such a widely accepted form of debris that, as George Steinmetz wryly observes, the city of Detroit “markets its ruination to Hollywood as a backdrop for dystopian science fiction fantasies and gritty crime films.”<sup>18</sup> What remains less explored is Benjamin’s call to see the monuments of capitalist production and consumption also as piles of waste, productive of profit and of suffering. In this light, the thriving industrial geography of South Durban is also a festering site of pollution and injustice.

If focus on ruination tells us how people live with ruins in dialectical geographies of destructive creation, this lens also points to the evidentiary means through which people critically interrogate their ruination. This takes me to a second key area of debate in South Africa, concerning archives, memory, and testimony after apartheid. Several scholars have approached the profusion of memoir, oral history, museum studies, and forms of narrative that question the awkward temporality of “post-apartheid”; the truth-telling imperative unleashed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and memoir writing that variously confronts the intimate erasures of anti-apartheid narration.<sup>19</sup>

When popular testimony is invoked as counterpoint to statist or nationalist narratives, however, it often reproduces elite fantasies of subaltern autonomy and representation that Gayatri Spivak famously cautioned against.<sup>20</sup> To think with ruins and remains provides a different view of popular critique than that expressed by subalternity as the aporetic moment in representation. Indeed, if subalternity is conceived of in relation to imperial crisis and ruination, the problem of the subaltern is not a choice between redeeming a repressed authentic past or fashioning a different present.<sup>21</sup> To think of subalternity relationally in this way shifts focus from the problem of the subaltern as agentive subject to the differentially ordered material terrain in which past and present are unequally lived.<sup>22</sup> If subalternity and material ruination are seen relationally, the latter is less about restoring the truth about the past or present, than about tracking discontinuities between critique that is recognized and that which is disqualified or deemed inappropriate.<sup>23</sup>

In this light, Jane’s statements can be seen as an argument in ruin in two senses: as speaking from a space saturated by despoliation, and as a compromised articulation that mocks the power to transform reality. Unlike the subaltern presumed by much of postcolonial studies as a site of withholding of otherness, Jane and others in Wentworth speak precisely in the ruinous terms of elite discourse in ways that Stoler argues of subalterns in the Deli plantation belt of Sumatra, who “tapped into the uncertainties, fears, and

fantasies of European hidden scripts by playing them back to planters and officials for their own political purposes.”<sup>24</sup>

While Jane appears contemptuous of environmentalism as a way to resolve the many forms of inequality and suffering she has experienced and witnessed, she also affirms a god-given right to the natural means of life. With the simple demand for “a piece of oxygen,” Jane pulls the emergency break on the notion of inevitable democratization in post-apartheid South Africa, where not even clean air can be assumed to be an inalienable right. Her demand is absolute and visceral, a call to consign inequalities to an actual past.<sup>25</sup>

From exploring the evidentiary means with which residents like Jane formulate critiques of the racialized present, my research began to shift back to the discontinuous and struggled history of racial infrastructure and opposition, to layers of authorized and disqualified critique.<sup>26</sup> Following a materialist interpretation of biopolitics in an imperial frame, I suggest that this momentary mobilization of poor women as an instance of what Jean Comaroff reservedly calls a reimagining of “(bio)politics” in contemporary South Africa, most vividly through the politics of HIV/AIDS.<sup>27</sup> Widespread protests over housing, services, land, health care, and the means of livability and livelihood, deepening under the presidencies of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, attest to something deeper than the critique of neoliberal economic policy and of the technocratic language of “service delivery”; rather, they express a critique of politics itself.<sup>28</sup> “(Bio)politics” is a rhetorically apt term, as South African realities push Foucault’s concept beyond its Euro-American comfort zones, specifically in the tendency to think in epochal and Manichean ways about the fate of biopolitical tools, for instance in the notion of the proliferation of “the camp.”<sup>29</sup>

Drawing on Foucault’s insight that biopolitical techniques have been contingently instrumental to varied forms of state racism, some scholars turn to the ways in which biopolitical tools have been deployed in struggles over unequal means of life, in producing what Didier Fassin calls “bio-inequalities,” and in calling them into question.<sup>30</sup> Fassin argues that concrete attention to the lived experience of inequalities in the means of life elaborates Foucault’s commitments. The same could be said for historical and ethnographic research on struggles over biopolitical expertise in contexts ranging from the compromised “biological citizenship” of Chernobyl survivors, to the suppression of health risks associated with asbestos mining in apartheid South Africa, to various strategies employed in breast cancer activism in the United States.<sup>31</sup> Rather than the proliferation of a genocidal imperative assumed by

some readings of Agamben, these studies prompt questions about how degraded or dishonored subjects seek to critique expert knowledge in the ruins of biopolitical sovereignty. In the latent space of knowledge that is disqualified but never destroyed, and in the face of censure from community activist leadership, Jane questions the efficacy of environmentalism as a liberatory discourse, marking in angry words the bio-inequalities that she refuses.

The following section turns to the broader forces that shape specific forms of detritus and refusal in what Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts call “violent environments.”<sup>32</sup> My argument is that South Durban has been shaped into a kind of biopolitical space that has prepared its Indian and Coloured residents for political engagement, within limits set by capital and the racial state. When the lines have become sharp, the obstacles to change have been sharpened and expert knowledge about pollution and degradation more tightly circumscribed. In the face of official dissimulation, I then turn to critical sentiments fostered in this space, particularly through photography and film. These have been powerful media for drawing sentiment into the realm of critique, to question dominant as well as emergent critical imaginations as they literally occupy space.<sup>33</sup> Photography and film also provide an opportunity to think about how expert and disqualified knowledge are presented alongside each other as spatially subjacent, conserving the means of argument in ruins.

What follows is an exploration of the conditions for refusal of the life-degrading presence of the infrastructure of state racism. The immediate paradox that people living in conditions of multifaceted and protracted degradation face is the evasive character of admissible evidence of their plight. Nothing seems proof enough; not even, in South Durban, incontrovertible scientific evidence of air pollution. When I told an interlocutor in Wentworth who I call Frank that my broader research project is called “Apartheid Remains,” he responded, “True!” My point was not that all that was solid in apartheid South Africa lives on, but Frank’s response is that many remnants continue to frustrate change today. I conclude with this figure, as he cautiously treads the borders between expert and disqualified knowledge each day as a self-taught community health care professional.

### Racial Remains in Violent Environments

Wentworth is not, two decades after the repeal of the Group Areas Act of 1991, a designated “Coloured township.” Yet the effects of racial identification stick to people and their neighborhood despite their best intentions.

When residents speak of their “race” trouble, they follow well-worn tracks, whether in repeating stories about parents unable to help children complete assignments on “Coloured culture” or in statements like “We weren’t white enough then, we’re not black enough now.” Talk about “race trouble” circulates with such facility that it ought to be understood as indexing a more general philosophical problem faced by Indians and Coloureds in the new South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike Indians in neighboring Merebank, who can resignify racial artifacts as markers of “culture” to engage in moral debate about “cultural loss,” as Thomas Blom Hansen notes on the township of Chatsworth, Wentworth’s Coloureds constantly face the charge, and challenge, of racial inauthenticity.<sup>35</sup> As Grant Farred puts it, Coloureds “have no a priori or pre-lapsarian moment; [nor can they] retreat into a mythic precolonial ‘innocence.’ Coloured difference is . . . insufficiently different for them to conceive of themselves as anything but South African.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, if South Africans as a coherent people do not yet exist, as Ivor Chipkin provocatively argues, Colouredness presents a yearning for a postracial nation.<sup>37</sup> In this popular turmoil about “race” and “nation,” what evades consciousness but permeates practice is the visceral materiality of “race” as linguistic and bodily performance and as “infrahumanity” engineered into bodies, hearts, and lived environs, or rather necropolitical landscapes.<sup>38</sup>

Wentworth’s juxtaposition of racialized, polluted life abutting corporate power represents in microcosm what scholars argue about geographies of accumulation and disaccumulation across the continent. James Ferguson perceptively argues that the coexistence of securitized, enclaved, extractive accumulation alongside humanitarian hinterlands that contain *l’Afrique inutile* or “the unusable Africa” revives a colonial spatial imaginary of extractive territoriality alongside structured neglect.<sup>39</sup> Modern South Africa, fundamentally shaped by imperial extractive capital and racialized dispossession, incorporates this dual dynamic in varied ways.<sup>40</sup>

To call the material effects of these processes “imperial formations” is to think beyond functional articulations of racial capital and despoliation, a key objective in radical anti-apartheid writing on relations between capitalism and apartheid.<sup>41</sup> With time, both theory and its political scaffolding have shifted. Protracted imperial effects continue to shape a fissured landscape of securitized territoriality and structured neglect in examples that are legion, from gated communities shielded from shack settlements, to faux-public shopping malls that exclude informal traders.<sup>42</sup>

Specific histories of space matters considerably, if we are to understand

how South Durban's residents have been not entirely excluded but enabled to participate in what Partha Chatterjee calls a "politics of the governed."<sup>43</sup> South Durban was forged as a particular kind of biopolitical space through a set of processes of dispossession, spatial transformation, population movement, and differential investment in the means of life. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, while discourses of contagion were drawn into new projects of exclusion and segregation across white supremacies, South Durban was something of a frontier zone. Here, a sprawling "black belt" of informal peasant-workers, fishermen, and migrant workers settled the urban perimeter, making it habitable, cultivable, and open to new uses.

White residents within the Borough of Durban mobilized the city, particularly through discourses of public health, to incorporate the southern periphery and transform its character.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, and decades before apartheid, the local and provincial state effected mass forced removals of people by "race group" in South Durban in the 1930s and 1940s, for industrial or infrastructural spatial uses.<sup>45</sup> Durban's undulating hills, rivers, and ridges provided useful physical barriers for zoning. The relatively flat topography of South Durban was highly sought after for industrial expansion, and South Durban Basin took its specifically pernicious spatial form by the 1940s, providing residence for intermediate groups of Indians and Coloureds in a deadly toxic sink.

Forced removals of Indian and Coloured populations to segregated housing schemes between the 1940s and the early 1970s paralleled the construction of South Durban's two oil refineries and the Mondi Paper Mill. In 1989, just as the Mobil refinery was being divested under pressure from the Global Anti-Apartheid Movement, the refinery began taking more seriously the authority of environmental discourse. In 1990 the Merebank Ratepayers Association (MRA), the main civic organization in the Indian area neighboring Wentworth, tried to use the moment of the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) to conduct a survey of residents' experience of atmospheric air pollution and respiratory ill-health; the results were striking and the MRA proclaimed a "pollution crisis," but the survey was quickly disqualified by the Health Department and the refineries for its lack of scientific evidence.<sup>46</sup> The refinery attributed problems of ill-health to a generic industrialization and urbanization, in which it had disappeared as a culpable agent. If pollution is a thing that knows no color, the corporations were arguing that it knows no owner either.

Industry signaled the possibility, not the actuality, of industrial jobs for its residential neighbors. While Wentworth surrounds the Engen refinery,

it has never been a company town reliant on local labor, despite the recognized skills of Wentworth men as exemplary industrial artisans who built refineries across the country. By the 1980s, the most fortunate of these artisans in Wentworth had risen from being semiskilled pipe fitters and boiler-makers to being “independent” contractors of artisanal labor. In contrast, most of Wentworth’s residents have watched the refineries turn to contracting out and limiting local employment, particularly after the formation of a militant independent labor union, the Chemical, Engineering and Industrial Workers Union (CEIWU). Wentworth’s artisans face a final insult when they return from limited-duration migrant contracts to witness jobless growth in the transformation of South Durban into a chemical-industries hub in which their skills have not been considered significant.

An opportune moment for public action emerged in 1995, when the newly elected President Nelson Mandela stopped en route to the Engen refinery to listen to the concerns of protesters.<sup>47</sup> This chance encounter initiated a course of events leading to the formation of South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in 1997, linking civic organizations from across South Durban’s racial divides with the mandate of the icon who embodied democratic transition and racial reconciliation. SDCEA is tied through organizers and campaigns to the neighborhood-based Wentworth Development Forum (WDF), and to the environmental justice organization groundWork. Formed in 1999 to focus on oil and air pollution from chemical industries, health care waste and incineration, and hazardous waste groundWork subsequently became a chapter of the international NGO Friends of the Earth. This alliance of organizations links activism across spatial scales, from “fenceline communities” that live cheek-by-jowl with industry, to city, provincial, national, and international advocacy.

There are resonances here with the multiscale Global Anti-Apartheid Movement, but with a new premium on transparency and publicity not always possible in the era of apartheid. Indeed, this activism challenges the valorization of hierarchy and secrecy inherited by the ruling alliance of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) from the exiled and underground liberation movement of the past. The multiscale alliance of WDF, SDCEA, and groundWork has effectively pressured all scales of government, juggling research, campaigning, legal activism, street demonstration, and local pollution monitoring.<sup>48</sup>

Legal struggles highlight concretely how objects from the past persist past their legitimate expiry date in a democratic era. For years, the key legislation regulating air pollution was the Atmospheric Pollution Prevention Act

(APPA) of 1965, which was largely unenforced with respect to black communities.<sup>49</sup> An important means to challenge this legislation came from the environmental clause enshrined in the Constitutional Bill of Rights, which enshrines the right “to an environment that is not harmful to . . . health or well-being; and . . . to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations.”<sup>50</sup> In fighting for a new air pollution act, groundWork used this environmental clause and other constitutional and legal rights to information, protection for whistle-blowers, and representation by parties acting in the public interest.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of the long history of civic engagement, Durban was chosen as the site for the piloting of an air-quality management system under the auspices of the Multi-Point Plan, and the new Air Quality Act of 2004 was signed into law in late 2005, replacing the 1965 act. What this struggle shows is that elements of imperial power can be consigned to the past through the courts, but groundWork has remained vigilant of loopholes and backdoors through which corporate power can continue to hold onto its historic subsidies. In this spirit, groundWork argues for a broader list of hazardous chemicals, ongoing ground-based monitoring, strict enforcement of pollution standards, and popular participation in monitoring of enforcement. The struggle against environmental violence is ongoing.

Local debates in 2004 highlight the importance of naming industrial waste and attending to its disposal. The key issue was the proposed expansion of the Mondi paper mill through what industry called a combustor, but which SDCEA and groundWork insisted was an incinerator. Mondi first made the proposal in 1998 to install a “fluidised boiler,” following thwarted attempts to extend their ash landfill sites in Merebank as well as in the nearby former African township of Umlazi. SDCEA mobilized quickly to prevent both extensions, and effectively closed down the Umlazi toxic dump in February 1997, a high point in the making of an interracial environmental movement in South Durban. Faced with rising transport costs for landfills farther afield, Mondi shifted to re-burn wastes in a boiler on plant. This, SDCEA argued, is what an incinerator does.

The ensuing struggle brought several points into view. First, definitions were key: Was this a combustor to produce steam and power, or an incinerator to burn waste? Second, legal activists who caught Mondi out on a technicality in their exemption from an environmental impact assessment report illuminated the close level of informal ties between local government and capital. Finally, tensions between legal counsel and environmental activists over the possibility of negotiating a settlement brought to the fore the

importance for SDCEA and groundWork in maintaining a strong stance against incineration. Anti-incineration, they found, works as a strong emotive tool for local mobilization, as well as for linking with international anti-incineration activism.

A second legal struggle fought by civic and labor organizations in Wentworth, as across South Africa, concerned the renewal in 2007 of the National Key Points Act of 1980, apartheid legislation to protect places of strategic national interest from sabotage. Oil refineries and other key industries and infrastructure were zoned as strategic sites under this legislation. The Wentworth refinery was in fact subject to a failed attack with rocket-propelled grenades by members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, in May 1984; all the militants were killed in a shoot-out with the police.<sup>52</sup> Had the rockets made their mark, the fireball would have decimated the neighborhood. In contrast to this suicidal impulse to turn the refinery and its neighbors into ash are ongoing efforts to show concrete evidence of unemployed workers, infirm bodies, and unlivable environs on the corporation's doorsteps. For both labor and environmental activists, the space around the refinery has been invaluable for collecting evidence of pollution and for staging confrontation.

After 1994, protest, confrontation, and civic monitoring on the rise around Engen for both environmental and labor concerns could be deemed illegal under the National Key Points Act. This is a clear contradiction of citizens' democratic rights to gatherings, demonstrations, and information. Unlike the Air Quality Act, which replaced its predecessor with a potentially more democratic legal form, the draft National Key Points Act and Strategic Installations Bill of 2007 sought to renew this remnant of apartheid's security apparatus for neoliberal times, criminalizing labor and civic groups employing constitutional rights, while protecting corporate power under the guise of security.<sup>53</sup>

Labor and civic organizations came out strongly against the new bill. In 2002, after a militant strike led by the independent Chemical, Engineering and Industrial Workers Union (CEIWU), supported by a large section of the neighborhood, the Ministry of Defence arbitrarily extended the National Key Point around Engen Refinery to encroach on a local mosque and people's private homes. A subsequent CEIWU workers' strike was pushed out to the grounds next to the swimming pool, and the collection of air samples by SDCEA was disrupted. This seizure of public space around the oil refinery was secured through the language of security in the time of the

United States' War on Terror. Contemporary imperialism breathes new life into corporate power, in a violent environment that further insulates the oil refineries as occupying powers in South Durban.

Scientific evidence of ill-health continues to be dismissed by the city and industry as “unscientific,” clarifying the latent class politics of biopolitical sovereignty. In a highly visible series of newspaper articles, the journalist Tony Carnie called South Durban a “cancer alley”—a term used to fight environmental racism in Louisiana, in the U.S. South—with leukemia rates 24 percent higher than the national average.<sup>54</sup> The corporations ignored altogether a more rigorous joint study conducted by researchers from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Medical School with public health scholars from the University of Michigan. That study found 53.3 percent of students at the Settlers Primary School between the Engen and SAPREF refineries suffering from asthma and other respiratory problems. These results were calculated from a dynamic model, which took into consideration air flows and multiple industries in attributing responsibility for pollution. Neither city government nor industry found this data worthy of significant response. The refineries question the scientific certainty of medical surveys that use statistical probabilities to argue for causal connections between pollution and ill-health. *groundWork* argues that “the struggle is really against official silence and the wilful ignorance that serves to frustrate . . . demands that industry must clean up and compensate those it has harmed.”<sup>55</sup>

SDCEA and WDF continue to use technical language and scientific evidence to attempt to rearticulate biopolitical expertise to “community,” whether in community-led air sampling, or in documenting the long-term damage from exposure to toxic pollutants. Participants in these efforts note in asides that a long history of embodied suffering is rarely accorded the status of fact, but the alternative of resignation to biopolitical sovereignty is actually an investment in premature death. *groundWork* notes the broader problem as one in which the state has devolved regulatory responsibility to civil society, a standard in neoliberal times, with few resources for effective, ongoing regulation. The result is widespread dissimulation about pollution knowledge, countered to some extent in South Durban through monitoring by SDCEA.<sup>56</sup>

Routine ailment and acceptable ill-health in South Africa involve a profound process of official dissimulation. The Health Department does not collect statistics to demonstrate long-term exposure. Scientific evidence is routinely flouted. Population politics in Wentworth is ongoing. SDCEA-

WDF-groundWork continues working on multiple fronts, to fight ruination in fenceline communities as well as in the apparatus of metropolitan spatial planning and national infrastructure policy.<sup>57</sup>

When the municipality has suggested that people relocate, activists and residents have been vocal at public meetings that they do not want to relive the forced removals of the past. The refinery and its quasi-public boundary space continue to be things out of time, cloaked in the security blanket of the apartheid-era National Key Points Act, remade for today's imperial War on Terror. One of the effects of environmental justice discourse has been to powerfully link the violence of the present with the staying power of apartheid's corporate subsidies. In their own admission, environmental groups have not been successful in mass organizing or in popularizing the collection of evidence of pollution-related ill-health. Without an effective counterforce, official dissimulation continues to blunt critique, normalizing South Durban's violent environment, preventing it being apprehended as an imperial formation of another kind.

Since its formation in the early twentieth century as a particular kind of biopolitical space that trapped intermediate racial populations in a polluted industrial valley, South Durban has kept active the politics in biopolitics. While those entitled to biopolitical expertise were initially white, Indian and Coloured residents in South Durban sought to use public health, planning, and environmental knowledge at various points to limit the powerful alliance of capital and racial government. Rather than a Hegelian renovation of biopolitical tools in the service of decolonization, however, the lessons of the latter half of the twentieth century have been that the obstacles to change have been more rigid than many had imagined. After apartheid, environmental groups have sought at various moments to make the lineaments of this violent environment apparent, only to find new forms of official dissimulation frustrating their attempts. Alongside attempt to wrest control of expert knowledge, more prosaic forms of knowledge have continued to critique degraded life and environs in other ways.

### Critical Sentiments

For much of its apartheid history, Wentworth was seen as a conservative area buffering African and white zones of the apartheid city. By the 1970s, the state's security apparatus and mainstream press portrayed Wentworth as preoccupied with gangs, drugs, and violence to such an extent that it was unlikely to house anti-apartheid activists of any significance. The idea was



4.1 “Playing Soccer at Highbury Sports Ground, Wentworth, 1995.” Source: Cedric Nunn file. Courtesy of the Local History Museums’ Collection, Durban.

called into question only after the arrests of members of two anti-apartheid sabotage units operating from Wentworth in the 1980s, as well as the explosion of mass urban revolt across the city of Durban in the 1980s. For various reasons, Wentworth continues to be thought of from without and within as a subaltern Coloured area insulated and confined by specific forms of poverty and suffering. The iconic character of life next to an oil refinery in a particular kind of carceral space, captured perfectly in Cedric Nunn’s photograph from the mid-1990s, draws outsiders to think and feel very quickly that they understand what life here is like (fig. 4.1). This visual ideology is also a ruse that has drawn experts in poverty, development, and social welfare to Wentworth like moths to a flame. They come, they propose, they leave quickly, and residents comment on nothing much changing, despite an inflow of projects and heated debates about tainted money.

When Wentworth’s residents speak of suffering hidden behind the seemingly decent walls of formal housing, they recirculate dominant stereotypes of stigma and depravity that permeate poverty talk. Rather than the content of this circulation, it is the anxious pace with which it circulates that is important. As I replay multiple conversations over periodic revisits between

2002 and 2008, I continue to be struck by the structures of feeling through which people conserve critical sentiments in the wake of official dissimulation. These sentiments provide a different window into the ways in which people contend with the degradation of life in Wentworth as they attempt to articulate critiques of the present. Photography and film have been particularly potent means, for both residents and passing interlocutors, for conserving a kind of critical melancholy, a blues tradition specific to Wentworth.

The interplay of dominant stereotypes and Wentworth blues came to light in an exhibition at the Local History Museum in Durban in 2002 called *The Cycle of Violence*, curated by a resident of Wentworth.<sup>58</sup> The focus was on the rise and decline of gangs in Wentworth, scripted through four movements: building Wentworth as an “unplanned mistake,” migrant labor and social conditions in the apartheid township, “a search for the identity?” through gangs, and “the community takes charge” with the church in the lead. The script followed a well-worn formula, as it portrayed forced removals of people to Wentworth in the apartheid era in turn forcing young men into a dystopian world of gangs, later to meet their redemption through an alliance of church, police, and “community.” The curator’s intentions were to shift focus from dystopian stereotypes about Wentworth, so that when an outspoken Wentworth resident asked why it was necessary to have another presentation of “gangsterism” in Wentworth, the curator responded, “We want to show people how people in Wentworth came out of it, how people survived it.”<sup>59</sup>

While constructing his intervention in this progressive-redemptive mode, a wholeheartedly affirmative dialectics, the curator also displayed private photographs of young men in an area called SANF, for the former homes of the South African Naval Force (figs. 4.2–4.3). In this set of images, quite a different set of relations are set in motion. The micro-neighborhood of SANF is remembered in Wentworth with a particular reverie, as people recall life in semidetached homes separated by little lanes running down a hillside. The lanes are a crucial part of the idyll in these recollections, and they recur in narratives of gangs ducking from each other, of people avoiding danger at night, and of anti-apartheid militants escaping the police. These private photographs taken in the 1970s, largely though not entirely of young men, provides a particular record of being in the lanes.

What is apparent in these and other images in this sequence are a set of gendered poses, displays of style and fashion, and an evident pleasure in being in the lanes. The broader set includes images of girlfriends and families, but the images appear primarily to be of and perhaps for young men.



4.2-4.3 Life in the lanes of SANF, ca. 1970s. Private photographs on display at the *Cycle of Violence* exhibit, KwaMuhle Museum. Courtesy of Local History Museums Collections, Durban.

There are no obvious references to gang turf. The most important visual convention across the images is that people share the photographic frame with the lane, to give the lanes their due. All the photographs either frame people within the lanes or split the frame between people and the lanes. Several men and women recall the lanes while describing an early period of settlement in Wentworth, when recently dispossessed people made a new Coloured township their home. In these narratives, the lanes mark a new common space after the violence of forced removals and before the arrival of drug lords and the departure of jobs. They mark exasperation with the interior, with parental authority, and with the heat of Durban's summer in a neighborhood next to an oil refinery.

What *The Cycle of Violence* exhibition did not say was that one of the mechanisms used in the eradication of gangs was the privatization of the lanes. The lanes are now gone, enclosed by private walls, with narrow gaps to mark a lost geography. The lanes do not appear in anti-apartheid archives. To many, they would appear illegitimate, insular, and possibly dangerous gang turf. This is not to say that the photographs do not provide evidence of territorial gangs. They may provide precisely that which is missing in generic accounts of gangs as an inevitable consequence of forced removals, showing that young men forged what Clive Glaser calls "overlapping personal and territorial familiarity."<sup>60</sup>

What is certain is that these were intimate spaces of masculine affirmation and stigma, injury and pride worth photographing and keeping. The lanes may have provided some young men precisely what Jane Glover demands, release from the claustrophobia of everyday life that Lefebvre calls "lived space": emergent, sensual, and practical space appropriated for as long as is possible, but not codified for easy translation.<sup>61</sup> The photographs demonstrate what Kathleen Stewart calls "the strange agency of fashioning aesthetic effects out of things that are always falling apart or already fallen into decay."<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the mass of objects through which people "remember" in the ruins of Appalachia in Stewart's work, this space of memory in Wentworth has been lost. What remains are photographs from personal albums, now also catalogued at the Local History Museum. People in SANF recollect the lanes through fragmented comments on masculine style, low-level violence, and attachment to neighborhood. While people rarely look at these photographs in their albums, they recall the lanes with a specific nostalgia.

This structure of feeling is more broadly felt in contemporary South Africa in forms of nostalgia that hark back to pre-township residence in

informal and multiracial settlements in early-twentieth-century cities. This is nostalgia that is specifically geared toward a sense of collective loss of a pre-apartheid social context.<sup>63</sup> The dominant tendency within this nostalgia is a desire for a late-twentieth-century South Africa that could have taken a different turn. There are privileged sites of memory where such nostalgia is reassured, as in the District Six Museum in Cape Town and in various commemorations of life in Sofiatown in Johannesburg's Soweto. What is not adequately accounted for in such representations is that there were no Halcyon Days of simple happiness in the poverty of informal settlements. Far less do such memory practices attend to the vibrancy of certain places created as a product of forced removals, like Wentworth.

Walter Benjamin comments on Eugène Atget's photographs of deserted Parisian streets: "He photographed them like scenes of a crime . . . for the purpose of establishing evidence."<sup>64</sup> How might we think about these photographs of young men in Wentworth, which are anything but deserted? In what sense might they be crime scenes other than as evidence of youth descending into gangsterism? In a subsequent essay, Benjamin returns to Atget's photographs to ask: "But is not every square inch of our cities the scene of a crime? Every passer-by a culprit? Is not the task of the photographer—descendant of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures?"<sup>65</sup>

If, as Faisal Devji provocatively suggests, post-apartheid is something like the scene of a crime, naming this landscape an imperial formation is the beginning rather than the end of the forensic process that must follow.<sup>66</sup> One forensic exercise through film was undertaken by a photojournalist, Peter McKenzie, who lived in this part of Wentworth and knew its street scene intimately as a young boy in the early 1970s. McKenzie returned when he became a politicized black photographer documenting township inequalities in the turbulent 1980s. As he puts it, he returned all the way back to his street corner at Pascal Place, to spend time in the space he had to leave as a young man tired of its insularity and lack of critique of the broader, crumbling apartheid order. His film and photography are about capturing the traces of the past, and of the melancholic afterlife of youth affiliation in the lanes and gulleys of SANF. In the interim, several of his friends served time in prison, they say for wrongful arrest. There are multiple layers of ruination in these memories of lost times in lost places, and of remembered frustrations in a differently frustrated present.

Over the few times I have interviewed him, McKenzie has always turned back to his corner or gully in Wentworth. His memory practice, and the way

he commits it to film, are useful to think with in relation to the possibility of a critical melancholy in Wentworth that is quite different from the nostalgia for pre-apartheid settlements.<sup>67</sup>

There was a corner you could go to, always people you could talk to. There was help if you needed, to go and fuck someone up on the other side of town. You learnt about sex on the corner. . . . Everybody walks up and down 'cause it's too hot to stay inside. You got this continuous mobility of people going "Ey, howzit?" The life of those gulleys was also about being in Durban, and the heat of summer. You could not stay in your house. It was too crowded. It was too hot. So life was to be lived on the streets outside.<sup>68</sup>

McKenzie contrasts the openness of the gulleys to the claustrophobia of parental authority, to evoke the visceral quality of young male appropriation of public space. The photographs of the lanes at the Local History Museum could not quite represent this feeling of compression, though they share a similar desire to make an apartheid township their home. McKenzie's work and the narrative he provides about his life are shaped by a profound unease. Frustrated by the insularity of township life, McKenzie left Wentworth, returning years later after embarking on a career as an activist photographer. When given the choice, he says he picked up a camera rather than an AK-47 machine gun. While he has returned periodically to Wentworth, he maintains a dual sense of being an insider-outsider in his "kaside," or township: "I am from Wentworth but not of Wentworth. . . . Ambivalent feelings of frustration, both mine and those of the community, coupled with the apathy of its peoples within a political system they feel has once again marginalized them, portray these Coloured folk as waiting, waiting . . ." <sup>69</sup>

Here, McKenzie echoes Vincent Crapanzano's insightful ethnography of whiteness in a Cape village in the turbulent 1980s as a particular structure of feeling with respect to time and various others, particularly Coloureds. In what would be the last decade of apartheid, whites appeared to sense a narrowing future with no clear object of desire, leaving them "waiting for something, anything to happen."<sup>70</sup> Crapanzano suggests that this banalized fear was shaped by disengagement from "those others with whom they cannot vitally engage."<sup>71</sup> Less convincingly, with some of the presumptions of anti-apartheid politics, Crapanzano suggests that whites wait in fear, while blacks wait in hope, reassured that time will be on the side of justice, and that Indians and Coloureds wait in some combination.<sup>72</sup> Waiting was impor-

tant for focusing on the pathos of domination from one vantage in uncertain times. However, rather than expecting racially distinct modes of waiting today, we might rather follow Crapanzano's cue in thinking relationally about the ways in which critics like Peter McKenzie attempt to spark "vital engagement" by widening their representational focus.

While the amateur photographs of "the lanes" can be read as hopeful and utopian in embracing a local commons in the wake of dispossession and apartheid, McKenzie's work is structured by a profound disenchantment with both past and present. This is not waiting with a ticking time-bomb of revolutionary expectation, nor is it nostalgia for lost possibilities about the past. Rather, McKenzie's lens focuses on fraught attempts at spatial introversion and renewed racialization after apartheid. What is at stake here is a recent sense of suffering, in the 1970s and 1980s, and an ambivalent stance with respect to anti-apartheid politics then, and democratic politics now. This is not the kind of nostalgia that the images of the lanes might provoke, but rather a more ambivalent and charged form of melancholy that disavows the past while demonstrating its active presence.<sup>73</sup>

McKenzie turns to these themes in his documentary film of 2007 with Sylvie Peyre, which links disenchantment with the present with a diffuse sense of waiting for justice that may never come. The film *What Kind?* (a greeting like "What's up?") turns to the theme of waiting for justice through the lives of five of Peter's childhood friends, erstwhile members of the K-1 Trucks gang. In 1983 these five received exemplary sentences for the alleged murder of a young man from the rival Vultures gang territory. To this day, they claim innocence. Peter "Piet" Usher repeats ruefully, his hat covering his eyes, "We paid the time; they did the crime." After having served nine to thirteen years in prison, they began coming out after 1994, and McKenzie uses the coincidence with the first elections to question their perceptions of freedom in the new South Africa. The resulting film is powerful and multi-layered.

One thread is handheld video footage from a moving car, a passerby's montage of daily life, with industrial pipes, smokestacks, and barbed wire as backdrop. Interspersed are black-and-white photographs taken by McKenzie since 1994, the most striking of which are portraits for his project "Vying Posie" (Going Home). Another set of interjections are from recognizable community leaders or experts, two of whom are the key environmental activists from the area, and another who is the author of a published memoir.<sup>74</sup> These experts and McKenzie speak in general terms, with occasional

Coloured township slang, recounting various aspects of Group Areas forced removals, the emergence of gangs, and the frustrations of youth, not unlike the narrative in *The Cycle of Violence*.

What is striking in the visual and documentary evidence is the contrast between these key personalities, including that of the narrator-filmmaker, who speak for the situation in the neighborhood, and McKenzie's often diffident friends. The experts speak in measured tones and standard English, looking directly at the camera, while the former gangsters speak in fragmented slang. The filmmakers approach these men carefully, at their *shebeen* (informal bar). The camera follows Terrence "Terrible T's" Fynn as he laughs, playfully showing the camera the tattoos all over his body, and his language is strikingly different. He jokes, "When I *vyied* in [went to prison] I was a young *laaitie* [youngster], *check* I'm like a drawing board!" There is a pause in the narrative as music and the *shebeen* make room, and set a context that is not meant to be a staged interview. The men do not have the onus of having to explain anything. They just have to present to the camera that they are haunted by their past and that they live in a state of despair.

When they recount details from 1983, of the scene of the crime and of their unheard alibis, they often speak in generalities about the times. "Wentworth was bad, my *bru*. . . They didn't even have doctors and nurses to stitch the holes up. They had to bring soldiers in to stitch the people up that time, for about two-three years, they had to bring the *army-ous* [army men] to stitch them up, that's how *blind* it was, it was bad!" (Terrence Fynn). "Piet" Usher insists that in this context young men didn't have a choice but to associate with gangs. He speaks softly about his innocence, as someone who "made like [pretended to be] a gangster" and was wrongfully arrested: "Wherever you went, they included you. They said you come from that area, you're part of that place, so you're a gangster from that area. . . There wasn't people that were gangsters; they just *made like* gangsters, by the opposition. . . I didn't even see the guy who died on that particular day, but I was put in this case because of the enemy; the enemy. . . I don't know if they feared me or what but they just put me in this case, in fact all of us."

What is profoundly unclear, and perhaps necessarily so given the layers of the accusation he lays, is who exactly "the enemy" is. The gangsters of Wentworth did not become activists, as, for instance, did Soweto's *tsosis*.<sup>75</sup> The lack of a recognizable anti-apartheid idiom brings an anticlimactic character to the way in which these men respond to the film's brief, to reflect on their release in the time of transition. Terrence Fynn says nothing has changed, repeating the stock racialized statements that circulate in Wentworth. "All that

time in jail, nothing's changed. . . . Ey, but even like now, it was still like the same, *nevermind* things is changing and *whatwhat*, it's like the same, my bru. Like me I don't even vote, because the *witous* [white men] were doing things that time, the *darkie-ous* [black men, or Africans] are doing the same thing. I'll tell you *waaruit* [straight out], it's *darkie* for *darkie*, *witou* for *witou*, *charou* [Indian] for *charou*, my bru." What he does not say is *bruinou* [brown men, or Coloureds] for *bruinou*. Despite repeating the same racial common sense as the experts in the film, none of these young men reference Coloured or community figures as their representatives in any way. Neither do they make any attempt at reclamation of the terms of their ruination, as for instance attempted by the curator of *The Cycle of Violence*.

While Fynn speaks about racialization in society at large, Usher, the most discerning figure in the film, expresses the collective feelings of the five men. His words are measured, but heavy with remorse: "We tried to put our past behind us . . . but you can see what's happening to us, the people is bring our past forward. We're marked with our past, for things what we never even do." The film does not adjudicate on the guilt or innocence of the five men. In this sense, it leaves a forensic exercise aside. However, it does give them the space to present themselves as living with the effects of their sentence and with the injustice of not being able to prove their innocence. They never actually name the "enemy," but they do indict apartheid's police and juridical apparatus as much as the rival gang across the street and the forces that drove them be perceived as dangerous gangsters. They display their despair, showing off their prison tattoos, as well as their emotional scars. The she-been they inhabit is saturated with what Frantz Fanon calls a "tincture of decay," protracted suffering that is difficult to identify but that is intensely felt.<sup>76</sup>

There are some things that remain unquestioned in McKenzie's social documentary. The refinery and other industry pokes through the narrative as a backdrop that is always there but not always recognized. Only the experts, who speak with clarity in standard English about Wentworth as a whole, connect gangs, poverty, apartheid, post-apartheid racism, and life next to refineries. The former "gangsters" are left to display their burdens on their persons. Theirs is a visceral, sentimental critique, a subjacent display of knowledge that has been disqualified but which retains its critical presence through McKenzie's powerful film. The order of things in the film *What Kind?* captures a key aspect of life and struggle in Wentworth: the differential production of "community workers" and those who embody ruination, and their divergent modes of critique. These adjacent modes of representation

on film have much to say about the remains of biopolitical struggle in necropolitical times.

### Conclusion: Refusal in the Ruins of Biopolitical Sovereignty

The iconic character of life next to an oil refinery, as well as proximity to the city, has made Wentworth a hub of interest in various kinds of private investments in development and social welfare. This and the mobilization around environmental and labor concerns have led the city and corporations to try to engage community representatives through the technocratic language of stakeholder management. Finance for social projects through the corporate social responsibility sections of the refineries and other major industry has been the topic of fierce debate in community meetings. The environmentalists of SDCEA refuse what they see as tainted money, while other groups and individuals have taken a more pragmatic perspective on making every crumb from corporations count for something meaningful to the lives of residents.

These debates aside, a significant part of Wentworth's population participates in a range of community organizations concerned with social welfare, labor, health, youth, women, domestic violence, and the environment. Some groups are aligned to churches. Most, though not all, are not formally employed. Elsewhere, I suggest that this "political work" is about refusing participation in the sex and drug economies that erode personal and community resources.<sup>77</sup> I argue that this political work mimics the bureaucratic practices of the development industry more generally.<sup>78</sup> What is certainly important in these organizations is the production of an associational life forged through rituals of meetings, committees, site visits, consultations, and, not least, prayer groups. In the wake of multiple forms of degradation, this "connective tissue" is a site of uncertainty and frustration in the wake of corporate occupation.<sup>79</sup>

"Community work," as it is locally called, requires agents and recipients of betterment. While some experts have become known figures, with ties to sources of recognition, funding, and support, the lines between expert and those in need of expertise are often quite blurred. The late "Skido" Joseph was one such figure. With complicated and somewhat murky "struggle credentials," Joseph was never, in his view, properly recognized for his anti-apartheid activism. He bemoaned the trajectories of his former comrades who managed transitions from the struggle to lucrative careers in government or the private sector. As we drove around the neighborhood in his beat-

up car, he blared “struggle music” to display his claim to a past that was never acknowledged.

Joseph repeated the same racialized complaints about the post-apartheid order that circulate locally, and resolutely supported community work. He would circuit between organizations and homes, lending an ear, having a cup of tea, and providing emotional support, particularly to women. It helped that he was a gifted charmer. Joseph’s thoughts were saturated with what I call “Wentworth blues,” the particular kind of melancholy that also permeates the work of Peter McKenzie. People knew that Joseph also suffered from alcoholism and depression, which ultimately took his life. What I witnessed in Joseph was an uncanny ability to play the expert and also to make it known that his commitments lay beyond a demonstration of respectability.

Another figure, J.D., heads a prominent community organization and is an articulate man who spent many years in the trade-union movement and in the private sector before returning to Wentworth to engage with widespread domestic violence.<sup>80</sup> J.D. questions the primacy of environmentalism and the refusal of social-responsibility funds from the corporations, on the grounds that if neither industry nor people move from this landscape, there will have to be a permissible level of pollution. Once this level is reached, residents will not have recourse to exacting resources from the corporation. He also expressed to me a view that social welfare and development can only feasibly reach some people in Wentworth, and that a layer of people at the bottom will have to be written off. This is the view of someone who is no longer at risk of falling into this expendable class.

A third figure, whom I call Frank, came out of the same milieu of youth gangs and drugs as the men in Peter McKenzie’s film. A chronic asthmatic, this wiry and engaging man embodies the challenges of fighting for life in this violent environment. He has worked in various organizations, on environmental issues, public health, domestic violence, and children’s rights, but has steadily built an expertise in sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Frank has had no formal training, but has attended workshops and seminars from the city, and he has a base of clients whom he sees and advises confidentially, in their homes, across the township. He has had to carefully maneuver around the churches in Wentworth as their main response to the spread of HIV/AIDS has been abstinence. Like Skido Joseph, Frank treads the fine line between experts and the poor, but he also manages to do what Joseph could not.

In acquiring the medical knowledge necessary to work as an HIV/AIDS

counselor and caregiver, and as a kind of community nurse, Frank indexes the shifting terrain of politics in the 1970s and early 1980s. Efforts such as the Black Community Programs of the Black Consciousness Movement began to widen the focus of anti-apartheid activism to the biopolitics of racial infrastructure. Experts in public health and medicine, social work, urban planning, and geography subsequently offered their services in clandestine and open ways to activist networks. In Durban, the effect was to root the internal struggle, putatively led by a banned, exiled, and jailed leadership, in the lived fabric of the city. This effervescence of biopolitical struggle, moreover, called into question the long history of articulation between biopolitical expertise and racism, through which South Africa's segregated geographies had been forcibly remade since the early twentieth century.<sup>81</sup>

If imperial biopolitics in the areas of public health, urban planning, the circulation of labor, and the regulation of sexuality remain fraught and subject to constant breakdown, the more important question might be to ask how biopolitical tools are used for a variety of ends.<sup>82</sup> Such an approach departs from abstract and ahistorical conceptions of biopolitical sovereignty, or the use of biopolitical tools in defense of power, as leading inevitably to the gulag.<sup>83</sup> The renewed urban struggles in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s point to a different possibility. The confluence of mobilizations that came together under the United Democratic Front of the 1980s were *also* drawing on biopolitical expertise, subjectivity, and intervention. They were doing so, I suggest, to dismantle rather than to construct racial infrastructure.

In the ruins of this recent past, debates about community work in Wentworth take on a different light. Individuals like Frank stand out as artisans who fashion political tools out of the remains of expert knowledge from a variety of sources and sites. These are ruins of a different sort: fragments of anticolonialism and antiracism that are still potent instruments of refusal of the necropolitical present. In his daily practice as a community HIV/AIDS counselor, Frank engages resolutely in a Brechtian refunctioning of decaying remains of biopolitical struggle.

## Notes

This chapter emerged from the workshop on "Scarred Landscapes, Imperial Debris," Anthropology Department, New School, New York, October 2006, for which I am grateful to Ann Stoler, as well as to comments from Faisal Devji, Nancy Hunt, Hugh Raffles, Genese Sodikoff, and Gary Wilder. Elements of "Critical Sentiments" draw

from my “Post-Apartheid Livelihood Struggles,” for which thanks to the Human Science Research Council of South Africa, and the concluding section draws from part of my “Photographing Dispossession, Forgetting Struggle,” for which thanks to *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. For insight at various points, I remain grateful to Gill Hart, Vishnu Padayachee, Richard Pithouse, Kerry Chance, John and Jean Comaroff, Catherine Alexander, George Steinmetz, and Grant Farred. Last, but not least, I am grateful to many residents of Merebank and Wentworth in South Africa whose thoughts have guided my work.

All names of people interviewed have been changed unless they are figures in the public domain or they have requested that their real names be used. Ethnographic and historical research for this project was conducted over multiple visits between 2002 and 2008, with support from the London School of Economics and the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

1. “Coloured” is a complex and changing category in South Africa’s changing racial formation: in the early twentieth century it marked anxieties about “mixed bloods” and “race mixture”; it was used to distinguish “Africans” divisible into tribes from “nonwhites” who weren’t, with implications for residence, work, and possible franchise; it became a “race group” under the Population Registration Act of 1950, subsequently subdivided in 1959 to include Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, Other Asiatic, and Other Coloured populations, all subject to “race determination” at various stages and through the workings of a racial “common sense.” See Reddy, “The Politics of Naming”; and Posel, “What’s in a Name?” In Natal, Coloured became an affirmative category for some in the 1940s, after “mixed-race” tenants were expropriated and located in residentially segregated areas like Wentworth. On the ways in which the stigma of “race mixture” and inauthenticity haunts people with this classificatory baggage, see Erasmus, “Introduction,” 16. I capitalize *Coloured* as a proper noun, like *Indian* or *African*, while I leave *black* and *white* uncapitalized, realizing that all these are complex racial categories.

2. According to the 2001 census, Wentworth and Merebank areas have roughly similar populations of twenty-seven thousand and twenty-one thousand, respectively. Merebank is one small part of Indian Durban, while Wentworth concentrates Durban’s working-class Coloureds. Comparison with African townships and with former white areas places these areas in the middle of the income spectrum. See Statistics South Africa 2001.

3. Austerville Community Centre, Wentworth, undated recording from early 2003. Recording in the possession of Jane Glover, Wentworth, Durban, South Africa.

4. Chari, “Post-apartheid Livelihood Struggles in Wentworth, South Durban,” 437–38. Many thanks to Ann Stoler for insisting that I think more carefully about what is at work in this simple statement, and also for Stoler’s introductory statement on ruination at the workshop on “Scarred Landscapes, Imperial Debris,” Anthropology Department, New School, New York, October 2006. See Stoler, “Imperial Debris,” and her introductory essay to this volume.

5. Chari, “Post-apartheid Livelihood Struggles in Wentworth, South Durban”;

Chari, "How Do Activists Act?"; Chari, "Silencing the Present"; and Chari, "State Racism and Biopolitical Struggle." For provoking me to rethink the question of "de-ritus" in relation to ruins and ruination, I am grateful to Ann Stoler and the participants at the workshop on "Scarred Landscapes, Imperial Debris," Anthropology Department, New School, New York, October 2006.

6. Thanks to Hugh Raffles on this point, which he noted at the workshop on "Scarred Landscapes, Imperial Debris," Anthropology Department, New School, New York, October 2006.

7. Desai, *We Are the Poors*.

8. Pithouse, "Solidarity, Co-optation and Assimilation"; Comaroff, "Beyond Bare Life"; Chance, "Living Politics"; and Figlan, Mavuso, Ngema, Nsibande, Sibisi, and Zikode, *Living Learning*.

9. Farred, "The Not-Yet Counterpartisan," 589-94.

10. See Stoler's essay in this volume.

11. On the political economy of transition, see Fine and Rustomjee, *The Political Economy of South Africa*; Freund and Padayachee, *(D)urban Vortex*; Hart, *Disabling Globalization*; Marais, *South Africa*; and Padayachee, "Development Discourses." On activism, see Barchiesi, "Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa"; Desai, *We Are the Poors*; Gibson, *Challenging Hegemony*; and Pithouse, "Solidarity, Co-optation and Assimilation." On changing racisms, see Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction"; Farred, "Where Does the Rainbow Nation End?"; Mangcu, "Liberating Race from Apartheid"; and Posel, "What's in a Name?"

12. Key works on the geography of segregation include Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome"; Robinson, *The Power of Apartheid*; and Parnell, "Creating Racial Privilege." Insightful work on the instabilities of labor control include Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau of Proof"; and Macdonald, "Durban-Bound." On innovations in urbanism, see Nuttall and Mbembe, *Johannesburg*; Hansen, "Sounds of Freedom"; and Robinson "(Im)mobilising Space."

13. Lefebvre, *Writing on Cities*.

14. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 259.

15. Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*; Veitch, "Colossus in Ruins"; Steinmetz, "Harrowed Landscapes"; Steinmetz, "Colonial Melancholy and Fordist Nostalgia"; and Gordillo, "Ships Stranded in the Forest."

16. Stoler, "Imperial Debris," and her essay in this volume.

17. See Bernd and Becher, *Typologies of Industrial Buildings*; images of South Asia's ship breaking yards, in Salgado, *Workers*; the degradation of the Niger Delta, in Watts, *The Curse of Black Gold*; and a critique of "ruingazers" in Namibia and Detroit, in Steinmetz, "Harrowed Landscapes."

18. Steinmetz, "Detroit," 762.

19. For a thoughtful take on the temporality of post-apartheid, see Farred, "The Not-Yet Counterpartisan." Among several important works on testimony, archives, and memory in South Africa, see Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*; Hamilton,

Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid, and Saleh, *Refiguring the Archive*; and Saunders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*. There is a much larger genre of post-apartheid memoirs, of which one important feminist critique situated in Durban is Govender, *Love and Courage*.

20. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

21. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 169; Chari, "Subalternities That Matter in Times of Crisis."

22. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

23. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 20.

24. *Ibid.*, 186.

25. Rancière, *Disagreement*; Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*; Williams, *The Country and the City*.

26. Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth"; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Chari, "The Antinomies of Political Evidence in Post-apartheid Durban, South Africa."

27. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended"; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; Breckenridge, "The Biometric Obsession"; Chari, "State Racism and Biopolitical Struggle"; Comaroff, "Beyond Bare Life"; Robins, "From 'Rights' to 'Ritual'"; and Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*.

28. Pithouse, "Solidarity, Co-optation and Assimilation"; Pithouse, "Burning Message to the State in the Fire of Poor's Rebellion"; Hart, "The Provocations of Neoliberalism"; Comaroff and Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism"; and Gibson, "What Happened to the 'Promised Land'?"

29. Chari, "Silencing the Present"; Li, "To Make Live or Let Die." Key to my understanding of biopolitical techniques as part of the broader, spatially differentiated dialectics of state racism and opposition is the distinction Stephen Collier makes between Foucault's early statements on biopower, which are rather epochal and binary, and his unfinished later thoughts. See Collier, "Topologies of Power."

30. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended"; Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*, 49.

31. Petryna, *Life Exposed*; McCulloch, *Asbestos Blues*; and Klawiter, *Biopolitics of Breast Cancer*, respectively.

32. Peluso and Watts, *Violent Environments*.

33. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

34. Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*; Hansen, "Melancholia of Freedom," 297.

35. Hansen, "Melancholia of Freedom"; Hansen, "Sounds of Freedom."

36. Farred, "Where Does the Rainbow Nation End?," 186.

37. Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist?*

38. Saldanha, "Re-ontologising Race"; Gilroy, *Against Race*; Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

39. Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company," 377–82.

40. Legassick, "South Africa"; Hart, *Disabling Globalization*; Breckenridge, "The Biometric Obsession."

41. Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue, *Imperial Formations*. The classic radical works

include Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa"; and Hall, "Race, Articulation and Society Structured in Dominance."

42. Ballard and Jones, "Natural Neighbours."

43. Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

44. Sparks, "Playing at Public Health"; Dianne Scott, "Communal Space Construction."

45. Dianne Scott, "Communal Space Construction," 118.

46. Sparks, "Civic Culture, 'Environmentalism' and Pollution in South Durban,"

12.

47. This section draws from Chari, "Post-apartheid Livelihood Struggles in Wentworth, South Durban."

48. Peek, "Doublespeak in Durban."

49. Butler and Hallows, *The groundWork Report 2002*, 10.

50. Government of South Africa, *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*.

51. Butler and Hallows, *The groundWork Report 2002*, 13.

52. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, AC/2001/128, Amnesty Committee, Application from Special Operations Unit (SOU) of uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), Durban, 2001, <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/decisions/2001/ac21128.htm>.

53. What is more, the new bill used elements from the Labour Relations Act of 1995—limits to strikes and lock-outs in *essential services*—to allow National Key Points to be declared where provision of *essential services* are in question. See "No. 66 of 1995: Labour Relations Act of 1995," Office of the President, National Employment Center, 13 December 1995, [http://www.yourcv.co.za/Documents/Labour\\_Relations\\_Act.htm](http://www.yourcv.co.za/Documents/Labour_Relations_Act.htm).

54. Wright, "Living and Dying in Louisiana's 'Cancer Alley.'"

55. Hallows and Munnik, *The groundWork Report 2006*, 149.

56. Butler and Hallows, *The groundWork Report 2002*, 63.

57. *Ibid.*, 67; Butler and Hallows, *The groundWork Report 2003*, 168.

58. This section draws from Chari, "Photographing Dispossession, Forgetting Solidarity."

59. Curator of *The Cycle of Violence*, interview by Sharad Chari, Durban, South Africa, 15 August 2007.

60. Glaser, "Swines, Hazels and the Dirty Dozen," 726.

61. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*.

62. Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, 44.

63. Steinmetz, "Colonial Melancholy and Fordist Nostalgia," 299.

64. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 228.

65. Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, 256.

66. Faisal Devji's response to my paper at the workshop on "Scarred Landscapes, Imperial Debris," Anthropology Department, New School, New York, October 2006.

67. I am grateful to Ann Stoler for her provocations about whether a critical nostalgia is possible.

68. Peter McKenzie, interview by Sharad Chari, Cape Town, South Africa, 31 July 2008.

69. McKenzie, "Vying Posie."
70. Crapanzano, *Waiting*, 41.
71. *Ibid.*, 21.
72. *Ibid.*, xxii.
73. George Steinmetz's analysis of nostalgia and melancholy in counterpoint is particularly insightful on this point. See Steinmetz, "Colonial Melancholy and Fordist Nostalgia," 299.
74. Lottering, *Winnifred and Agnes*.
75. Glaser, "Swines, Hazels and the Dirty Dozen."
76. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; see Stoler's essay in this volume.
77. Chari, "Post-apartheid Livelihood Struggles in Wentworth, South Durban."
78. Chari, "The Antinomies of Political Evidence in Post-apartheid Durban, South Africa."
79. Comaroff, "Beyond Bare Life," 212; see Stoler's essay in this volume.
80. J.D., interview by Sharad Chari, Durban, South Africa, 20 March 2005.
81. Chari, "State Racism and Biopolitical Struggle."
82. Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau of Proof"; MacDonald, "Durban-Bound."
83. Comaroff, "Beyond Bare Life."