

INTRODUCTION

AS SOUTH AFRICA CELEBRATED ITS FIRST DECADE OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY in 2004, a film called *Broken Promises* (Kumaran Naidoo, 2004) became a craze in Durban's formerly Indian townships. A slapstick family comedy about a Hindi-speaking girl who marries into a Tamil family, the film followed a long tradition of local theater in these townships. The acting, story, and dialogue had a semi-amateur style that was instantly recognizable from many plays I had attended in the Indian townships. The film was packed with fast-paced dialogue that was sprinkled with vernacular abuse. It was an instant hit and sold about 150,000 copies within a year, almost exclusively among the 1.3 million South Africans of Indian origin who lived mainly in Durban and Johannesburg. In 2005 this success was followed by the sequel, *Broken Promises 2*; in 2006, *Run for Your Life* debuted, which had a similar cast and story line, and this was followed by *Run for Your Life 2*.

I watched *Broken Promises 2* in Durban in June 2007 when it was featured at the Durban International Film Festival as a local contribution to an impressive list of international quality productions. The venue was small and the audience was limited that evening, with no more than three dozen people in the hall. I chatted briefly with a number of people as we waited outside the hall. An elderly American couple who were film enthusiasts looked forward to this local production and clearly expected something between a quality Bollywood movie and the art house genre that dominated the festival. Behind me sat a group of young, smartly dressed couples who spoke a mixture of Zulu and English, which was characteristic of Durban's new African elite. A few rows down sat a conservatively dressed Indian couple of Gujarati descent with their young son.

Half an hour into the film, the American man leaned over and asked me, "Is this some spoof? Is there something else coming after?" I told him that what appeared to him as a spoof was indeed the film. Somewhat embarrassed, he smiled and said, "I think we are leaving . . . this was not what we expected." The Gujarati man got up fifteen minutes later, cursing through his teeth that "one was supposed to pay for such

2 • Introduction

garbage,” and dragged his disappointed family with him. The young couples behind me were loudly discussing what the film was about and started laughing in disbelief at some of the exaggerated sound effects and the quality of acting. Soon they also left the hall, while making jokes about how this film was indeed a broken promise. I soon found myself in the hall with a handful of local Indians who were laughing heartily while also sending me, the only outsider left, occasional glances and slightly nervous smiles as they watched my reactions.

This slight measure of unease, or mild embarrassment, in my friends and informants was well known to me. When watching a performance, or partaking in this aspect of the cultural life of the Indian townships, I often felt that I was watching something that was not meant for me, as if I represented a gaze that was out of place. This film was clearly neither meant for me nor made for my eyes. The unease was not born of hostility or protectiveness but rather from a sense of embarrassment: now I could see for myself how things really were with them. These films, as most of the popular culture among South African Indians (which I will return to later in this book), revolve around an internal gaze that is making what people often refer to as “the community” (of Indians in the country) visible to itself through jokes and self-deprecating humor. This is where a “we” is generated and reproduced, a sense of who we really are, where we came from, and how foolish we are. This is neither the official story nor any authorized representation of the community. It is the informal inner space that most of my informants in the township, and many who have left the township, know very intimately. It is also a side of the community that appears silly and unrefined to those who have climbed into the middle class or have constituted its historical elite since the nineteenth century. Yet it is also funny because it mocks a past that was shared in the face of systematic discrimination and historical exclusion from institutional and public spaces in the country. What unifies the South African Indians today are the laugh and the self-deprecating joke.

This embarrassment vis-à-vis an outside gaze indicates one of the most difficult problematics across postapartheid South Africa: to redefine identities, communities, and selves within a new economy of recognition; that is, to live under a new and differentiated gaze that feels unfamiliar and never fully intelligible. This differentiated gaze marks new horizons of recognition—some local, some national, and others global. In the cinema hall that evening, we, the audience, represented several forms of gaze—the foreign visitors, the new black middle class, the local Indian elite—all of whom were puzzled or even disappointed at the obvious banality of the film on display. This small event was but

one example of the daily misrecognitions that mark postapartheid South Africa.

UNDER THE GAZE: FREEDOM AND RACE AFTER APARTHEID

To live under the gaze is fundamental to human consciousness. To be seen is a physical and palpable sensation, an ontological ground of being human. The gaze is neither restricted to people one knows nor to recognizable beings. The gaze is constitutive, fundamental to being, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in his reflections on visibility, “As soon as I see it is necessary that the vision be doubled with a complimentary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another world would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot” (1968, 142). Consciousness emerges from the assumption of a preexisting gaze that comes from all sides, a strange, unfathomable force that can never be entirely reduced to the specific social or cultural context in question, and can never be reduced to sets of eyes that can be known: “it is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general . . . being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual and also a dimension and a universal” (ibid., 142). In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2002), Merleau-Ponty reflects at length on the enigma of seeing: “Nothing is more difficult than to understand *what we see*,” as he proposes (2002, 17; italics in the original). What appears as immediately visible to the eye is but one dimension of what we perceive. What we actually see is culturally and socially conditioned by received frames and formats. When we see the front of a house, we also “see” its full form and begin to assume its functions, and even its people. The visible is always supported and supplemented by a range of social conventions and tacit, embodied forms of knowledge of how objects look from other sides, as such, in their totality (ibid., 172).

This is analogous with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of language as a form of embodied convention, a structure that helps a subject speak herself into existence as a person. As the uttering of the sound of a word only acquires meaning within a certain community of embodied speech practices, the physical sensing and seeing of an object is also embedded in a thick context of shared assumptions about how things and people look and act, however historically provisional these may be. In this, the most common and fundamental dimension of being, we always assume and impute a larger and more abstract gaze that beholds objects in their entirety, and for which these objects exist *as such*, regardless of our particular gaze. This imputed gaze is a form of phantasmic regulator that provides an ontological guarantee of the veracity of the world

4 • Introduction

as it appears to us in our social imagination.¹ This labor of the guarantee also includes an embodied experience of one's self that always depends on the constitution of corporeality—the social existence of the body, seen, objectified, and vulnerable to the world, as “flesh constituted by the other.” The relationship between embodiment (a sense of one's body) and corporeality (the body constituted by the gaze) is always asymmetrical, if not discrepant.² Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were undoubtedly inspired by Simmel's reflections on the mutual exchange of gazes in the modern city, where the inability to fathom and read the face and gaze of the other and where the categorization and “de-individualization” of strangers assume critical and foundational importance for production of sociality as such.³

Lacan, more than any other theorist, elaborates the perspective of a split between the (actual/physical) eye and the (phantasmic) gaze into a theory of the barred subject, subjectivity perpetually haunted by constitutive blockages and illegitimate desires and unable to complete itself. What appears as a familiar gaze of actual people looking also stands for what Merleau-Ponty called “vision in general,” a generalized gaze that splits the subject: on the one hand, the regulating assumption of social conventions and injunctions (the symbolic order) that regulates behavior even when no one is looking, and on the other hand, a fuzzy, unfathomable, demanding, yet enticing and durable other gaze that has no language or stable form, just pure presence. The latter, qua its lack of intelligibility, can appear as a radical void of nothingness, even as something nonhuman, uncanny, or perhaps divine. This unfathomable—and sometimes abject—underside of that which is visible and conventional never fails to unsettle and puncture subjectivity as such.

The result is a perpetual economy of misrecognition where subjectivities are formed in anticipation of a regulating and desiring gaze but fail to fully embrace what they are supposed to be or become, because this second unfathomable gaze can never be fully understood or gauged. Lacan's formula for this perpetual misrecognition and “economy of lack” is: “You never look at me from the place from which I see you . . . conversely what I look at is never what I wish to see” (1977, 103). Lacan's fundamental position is that misrecognition is constitutive because the gaze always trumps the eye. The most powerful desires and anxieties are always phantasmic, circling around a more powerful truth that is believed to stand behind any face or appearance. This split gaze constitutes, on the one hand, a (phantasmic) guarantee of an ontological order, and, on the other hand, a field of vision and experience fraught with instability, doubt, and anxieties of incompleteness.

Situations of great social upheaval always undermine the visual regimes of recognition and fantasy that govern social life. That was cer-

tainly true of the transition from apartheid to a new liberal-democratic order. Let me sketch why the relationship between gaze, anticipation, and failed subjectification are so important in postapartheid South Africa.

The nexus between a racialized social order and the privileging of the visible reached a historical climax in Nazism. Films, public spectacles, and body aesthetic were designed to provide a firm ontological ground of unambiguous categories: the true German people and their multiple enemies (Gilroy 2002, 137–77). The privileging of the visible in South Africa was historically more widespread, naturalized, and insidious. While race thinking was embedded in every aspect of the economic order, it also found strong expression in scientific racism, which always privileged physical appearance in the absence of any firm genetic, objective proof of linkages between phenotypical and socio-cultural qualities (Dubow 1995). Race thinking became a hegemonic political common sense (Norval 1996) and acquired a reality of its own, a widespread and deeply embedded popular economy of belief that invariably embedded behavior and social practice in phenotypically marked bodies. Today, no statement, no sentence, and no gesture can acquire its full meaning and significance in South Africa without being linked to, and invariably qualified by, the phenotypical classification of the speaker. An individual's pigmentation is what can be seen by the eye but is also always/already inserted and framed by a larger gaze, a schema of racial ideology that makes bodily pigmentation the very root cause of intrinsic social qualities and cultural propensities.

Fanon begins his *Black Skin, White Masks* by discussing the body: first, the scandal of sexual unions between racially defined groups, and second, the deprivation of people of color of the ability to have authentic embodied selves, culture, and historicity. According to Fanon, the imposition of an all-important “racial epidermal schema” meant that “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race and for my ancestors” (111). He continues by comparing himself to a Jew: “All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant . . . [but] I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am a slave not of the ‘idea’ that others have of me but of my own appearance” (116). Thus a larger racialized gaze always trumps, structures, and gives meaning to that which is actual and visible—an individual being or a singular event. Such a complex gaze prestructures any subjectivity. “In this country we are imprisoned in our bodies; we cannot escape” was how a friend in Durban described racialization in South Africa. This fundamentally corporeal and racial structure of the gaze has durably shaped common-sense perceptions of race among a majority of South Africans.

6 • Introduction

While I cannot disagree with Gilroy's penetrating critique of the utterly senseless and illogical basis of contemporary racism (2002, 11–53), and his description of race as “an impersonal, discursive arrangement, the brutal result of the raciological ordering of the world, not its cause” (2005, 39), I believe that the institutional force of this “discursive arrangement” has produced entire social worlds. Every ethnographer of South Africa will have to reckon with this social fact in order to understand and describe contemporary social and cultural life in the country.

The existence over decades of a repressive state apparatus whose multiple institutions tried to monitor, make visible, and police racial boundaries created an acute consciousness of being watched by the authorities. This gaze was panoptic, disciplining, and regulative by making objects and bodies visible and intelligible in the full sense of biopolitical rationalities that were entirely structured by racial categories. Despite its totalizing intentions, the apartheid state was far from always effective in regulating social practices, yet governmental practices created an acute sense of watching and being watched, albeit with different intensity. A constant second-guessing of the gaze of the state produced fine-grained readings, mostly imaginary in nature, of different degrees of freedom and physical security in different locations. Spatial limits were policed with utmost severity and violence with respect to African populations, while other population groups were regulated less violently but in greater and more intrusive detail. Almost every South African had to viscerally internalize the tacit boundaries of the permissible and conventional with respect to the surveillance by the state whether real or not. Such a life under the gaze of the law and the state did indeed create what Crossley has called an “anxious awareness.”²⁴ It also allowed the carving out of less-visible spaces where furtive enjoyment and unique social rules thrived, often semisecret and rarely shared freely with others. The strictures on social and political life have changed profoundly within the last fifteen years, but the legacy of this gaze of the state and the social attitudes, predilections, and lasting inequalities it shaped (MacDonald 2006) continue to exert enormous influence in the lives of ordinary people.

Because life during apartheid became so rigidly divided along race lines, and yet remained intimate and close in workplaces and homes, every South African had to learn to live according to a complex cultural economy that was structured by several forms of (imputed) gaze. Racialized identities and anxieties were played out at every level of social and intimate life. The result was a set of complex, performative anxieties that are by no means unique to South Africa but became more developed there than in most other societies. No matter who and where one is, one is always being watched and looked at through the eyes of

someone who represents another social and racial category, and thus a different world, maybe even a different ontological horizon: the live-in maid, the employer, the man in a passing car, the neighbor, the walkers on the street, the official, the policeman, and so on. The unique feature of South Africa is that every physical space remains historically marked and defined by a single racial category—rarely two or more. Social spaces are marked by calculations of physical danger, appropriateness, and risk. Every act and individual utterance is always/already doubled as a representation of a racial category that “acts” through the act or utterance. In other words, the eye of any onlooker is also always the gaze of the category. One is always potentially doubled by the category; one’s actions can always be interpreted as a category that is acting through one’s body; one is always potentially reducible to a phenotype, a cultural cipher, or a racialized shadow or *doppelgänger*. The category functions as a constant shadow; every action takes place in the gaze of the other, even when that other is not physically watching. With Merleau-Ponty, one can say that forms of embodiment, understood as the subjective inhabitation of a body, always/already coexisted in an irrevocable tension with the racialized categories of corporeality that were constituted and reproduced from without.

Racialization of every dimension of social life produced a peculiar “flatness of public perception,” by which I mean that the categorical *doppelgänger*, the stereotype, provided the script and the interpretive grid within which individual action—and anxiety—was situated. This de-individualization and anxious flatness of public perception continue to haunt virtually every corner of South African society. The peculiarly commanding and yet ineffective gaze of the apartheid state rendered spaces of private and cultural intimacy somehow pleasurable and safe. The flatness of public representation has perpetuated a structure of social life in which an actual sense of individuality, depth, and completeness only seem possible, comforting, and attractive *within* the intimacy of one’s own racial-cultural world, because only there can one merge with one’s racial shadow and make it less intrusive and obvious.

The seismic shift in the political order of South Africa since 1994 has been experienced first and foremost in a profound transformation of the social imaginary, and a transformation of the order of the gaze. Apartheid tried to structure social practices of all kinds under a unified gaze of the state that purported to stand for and represent Western civilization as a form of universality. For people of color, apartheid institutionalized the idea of the customary and traditional as a form of internal gaze enforced by political-cultural elites and institutions within each racial and ethnic community.

The postapartheid scenario was equally enticing and confusing on both of these dimensions. On the one hand, the events of 1994 created a strong sense of the country becoming readmitted into the larger universal history and into a postcolonial and globalizing present. Now, South Africa was no longer the exception, the anachronistic remainder of colonial violence that for decades made the country and its social order a central object in a universal and global condemnation of racism as an absolute evil. Condemnation of apartheid unified postcolonial governments and progressive forces across the world in a common moral and political front. In the 1990s, the new South Africa was to enjoy the fruits of that global visibility and global moral stature.

However, apart from iconic people like Mandela or Tutu, it was unclear who could represent or embody this imputed global universality. It soon became obvious that the celebrated nonracial doctrine of the African National Congress amounted to nothing more than a poetic vision of a rainbow nation. In his famous inaugural address in 1994, Mandela said, “We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.”

Nonracialism now became an injunction to find authentic expression within the multicultural nation: now that you are free, define yourself as you truly are, define your own culture and your own history. Many South Africans embraced the promises of hope and redemption within the peculiar postauthoritarian “millennial capitalism” that arose in the 1990s across the globe (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Aspirations toward self-making within a global horizon also found strong articulations in the gospel of health, wealth, and self-improvement within the global Pentecostal movement, and in the self-respect, purity, and strength promised by globalized Islam.

On the other hand, it remained unclear who was looking and who was listening. Who was evaluating and appreciating me as I truly am? Who was the community of new South Africans? The indisputable emotional strength of African nationalism notwithstanding, no credible and legitimate formulation of what constitutes the South African nation and people had been produced. South Africans do not exist as “a people” (Chipkin 2007, 1–15), only as discrete groups sharing a territory and a history of deep segmentation and bloody antagonism. Although many discrete struggles against the state had been loosely confederated under the sign of a future freedom from minority rule, no compelling idea of a unified “people” had emerged. The question of who was an entitled citizen was still framed in racial terms. Truly shared public spaces where nonanxious mixing of communities may occur remain scarce and have

been provided mainly by new commercial media and new commercial spaces and shopping malls across the country.

A central proposition in this book is that the legacy of colonial and apartheid regulation and cultural policy has made the embodied imagination of a range of imputed gazes extraordinarily compelling and complex in everyday life. The authority and compulsion of these gazes, the recognition they elicit and demand, and the anxieties they instill have been in rapid flux over the past fifteen to twenty years. The deeper theme of this book—how the meanings and spaces of freedom and democracy are perceived and inhabited by nonprivileged South African Indians—reveal contradictory sentiments that are shared across many other communities in the country.

FREEDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY AFTER APARTHEID

The antiapartheid movement was driven by two not always compatible desires: freedom and sovereignty. On the face of it these two desires are eminently compatible as goals for a modern and autonomous self that is embedded in, and empowered by, a sovereign nation. The equation of personal freedom and national self-realization is perhaps the single most suggestive and influential idea of the past century.⁵ The equation is heavily indebted to a classical Kantian understanding of freedom as the primacy of an inner and autonomous capacity for judgment, the capacity to impose a moral law on oneself, and an inner freedom that enables the release of the free will as the source of true freedom.⁶ Freedom is measured by the ability to realize a true and autonomous self, a self that matures and outgrows its need for tutelage, a self that trusts itself and its own judgments (Kant 1963).

Many critiques of the implicit political theology of the idea of inner emancipation of the human will, with all its Christian baggage, have demonstrated that freedom of the modern self was not a self-evident universality.⁷ The imagining of free selves was always shaped by the specific structure of unfreedom they arose from, and the national and cultural community they claimed as their sovereign vehicle. With this in mind, let us begin with a few reflections on the structure of unfreedom in South Africa and the racially differentiated ideas of personhood and sovereignty it gave rise to.

Although violent and authoritarian, the apartheid state never depended on the regimentation of speech, text, and language, which is so ably analyzed by Alexei Yurchak in the case of the Soviet Union (2005). The power of the apartheid regime depended exactly on the reverse, on a robust body politics that governed, categorized, and separated on the basis of “objective” phenotypical marks that determined everything:

dwelling, types of work, education, income level, range of mobility, and forms of information and styles of speech available to different groups. Apartheid recruited visceral fears and relied on what the regime saw as natural, prelinguistic, and affective ties, which emerged from shared phenotypical marks. Through infrastructure and biopolitical engineering, apartheid made a racialized world appear natural and a given. It was the structure of everyday life and the reproduction of easy entitlement and privilege that kept apartheid going rather than any ritualized public commitment to an idea. De facto acceptance of this structure of life counted for support for apartheid rather than any overt statements or special effort. The perfect white citizen moved among her own kind, consumed, mowed her lawn, and enjoyed life without too much reflection.

Even those critical of this structure of body politics were forced to, and indeed invited to, partake in the easy life of relative privilege and considerable freedom for those classified as whites. In this Athenian democracy there was considerable freedom of movement and speech for the fully entitled white citizen.⁸ The included but less entitled (Indians and colored) had to live with severe restrictions on movement and life opportunities but were relatively secure within the boundaries of their racially defined world. The nonentitled (Africans) were seen as wholly outside, forever destined to live in their traditional life worlds in Bantustans, submitting to the yoke of the *nkosi* (chief), and only visiting the republic as temporary guest workers.⁹

There was indeed censorship and surveillance, but its main target was seditious activity and actual organization among people of color in the country. The enemy was first and foremost the communist organizer, not necessarily the critical intellectual. Physical repression was also carefully calibrated. Routinized categorical brutality was meted out to Africans, while other race groups were disciplined by exemplary incarcerations or occasional eliminations of individual “enemies of the state.” The preferred site of the apartheid planner was the regulation of everyday practices. The target was the predilections and habits of ordinary life that enabled its language games, little comforts, and sense of knowability in racial enclaves and townships. Apartheid’s attempts at ideological persuasion of people of color were generally clumsy and ill-fated.

In this world of authoritarian rule by a highly visible minority, and deep racial-spatial segmentation of everyday life, the idea of freedom and autonomous self-making gradually split into two discrete horizons. On the one hand, there was a strong desire for majority rule and the resurrection of the sovereignty of African people and communities, the horizon presented by the now-exiled ANC, whose position was

strongly supported by large sections of the international community.¹⁰ On the other hand, there was the more mundane desire for further autonomy in everyday life, for enjoying moments of sociality, dignity, and cohesion around community events, in community spaces. Cultural and social autonomy, and a measure of self-governance, were actively promoted by the apartheid state as a way of deflecting political energies away from the question of sovereignty and majority rule. More important, community spaces and townships also became the primary horizons of social life and shaped social identities and political action. Local protests were loosely connected with other political actions elsewhere in the country, particularly under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s, but rarely under the sign of a unified national aspiration.

The fall of apartheid produced a strong sense of an epochal event that turned entire social worlds, languages, and imaginaries into anachronisms. Freedom had been yearned for, and apartheid had been globally represented as an anachronistic settler state that delayed South Africa in emerging as a free and sovereign African nation. Yet no one had fully anticipated how quickly the particular affective ties that had formed meaningful communities during the decades of apartheid—township cultures, the lingo of the comrades, aesthetic production opposed to the state, and so on—lost public validity and ethical coherence after 1994. As ANC rapidly adopted a technocratic language of service delivery and stakeholders, the heroic pathos of the struggle rhetoric was rendered evermore anachronistic.

The new official policy of multiculturalism spurred an unprecedented revival of cultural and religious identities across the country. They were all attempts to embrace a newfound freedom, often by recovering older registers of cultural memory. As we will see in this book, some of these registers were haunted by the perpetual embarrassment caused by the recent past and by the pleasures and memories of community life during apartheid that had so pervasively shaped ordinary life in townships across the country, including during the years of militant struggle. In his reflexive memoir on the moral communities that structured his childhood township in Johannesburg, Jacob Dlamini writes, “there is nothing wrong with native nostalgia, a longing for a lost home set in a politically problematic time and place . . . I attempt to seize hold of memories without which we cannot understand why apartheid suffered the kind of moral defeat that led to its demise” (2009, 152). It was in fact the strength of ordinary township life rather than the rhetoric of its anomic that ultimately broke apartheid, Dlamini suggests. The current popularity of Jacob Zuma and his election to become president of ANC in 2007, and later president of the country in 2008, was based on

a heterogeneous range of affective political registers that had lain dormant in the townships for more than a decade—hypermasculine Zulu identity, labor militancy, struggle rhetoric, and anticapitalist advocacy of nationalization and social redistribution.¹¹

Similar configurations of hope, and the contradictory recollection of a past that cannot be openly yearned for, characterize many other segments of South African society. The injunction to acquire a new kind of past is intrinsic to the moment of new sovereign self-making as free subjects: recast the past as nothing but a gradual yearning and struggle for freedom; critique the recalcitrance of the older social habits and comforts of unfreedom; but celebrate the past in a way that permanently relegates it to anachronistic oblivion and cuddly irrelevance.

In order to understand the continuing emotional attachments to the habits and spaces of unfreedom that I explore in this book, let us turn to the theme of melancholia and loss through Hegel's reflections on the dialectic between the lord and the bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977). Hegel suggests that while the lord is the site of pure desire and consumption of the world and its goods, the bondsman achieves a sense of himself through labor. Labor is a manifestation of negativity, both in its ability to transform objects and in its marking of an irreducible difference vis-à-vis the lord. The bondsman's desire is expressed in the ability to produce and shape things, although the enjoyment of these things remains reserved for the lord. The recognition taking place between the two is actually a perpetual misrecognition: the lord believes himself to be autonomous, but this autonomy depends entirely on the labor of the bondsman whose desire he needs but cannot desire because it has no value for him. The bondsman derives a sense of himself and dignity of labor from being able to leave a mark on the world, a "signature," as Butler puts it (1997, 37–40). Yet his autonomy is illusory inasmuch as he only desires through the lord's desire and thus can be nothing without the lord. The larger point is, of course, that this dialectic marks a single but irrevocably divided consciousness (Hegel 1977, 104–12).

With the *Aufhebung* (elevation/cancellation/overcoming) of this contradiction and the delivery of the bondsman into a state of freedom, something curious, if entirely logical, happens: the consciousness of the former bondsman splits into two as he produces an ethical law of the community that becomes the source of the regulation of his desires, of prohibition, and the injunctions to work and leave signatures on the world. This leads to the birth of what Hegel famously called an "unhappy consciousness"—a consciousness divided within itself and never fully identical with itself (127–28).

The unhappy consciousness is marked by a loss of certainty that was secured by the negativity of the other, and a loss of the (often malevolent) sure-handedness imputed to the lord. As the question “Who am I?” or rather “What am I for you?” is no longer answered by the lord, the free subject has to figure out whose desires it wants to desire, and what in the subject others may want to desire. The question that is opened, and that can never be fully answered, is: On which ontological ground can the subject imagine itself as striving to become a free and reflexive being?

The usefulness of this formal model for historical moments of liberation should be obvious.¹² But it is also insufficient because it does not in itself account for the marking of the bondsmen as racialized bodies bearing bodily marks that demand complex re-signification as marks of freedom and sovereignty. In her analysis of Hegel’s relationship to the victorious slave revolution in Haiti, which was unfolding as *The Phenomenology* was written, Buck-Morss argues that Hegel was most probably a cultural racist. He took inspiration from the events in Haiti but discarded the capacity of black slaves to develop true interiority and true freedom (2009, 21–77). However, as Buck-Morss also acknowledges, this civilizational racism did not diminish the momentous influence of Hegelian notions of struggles for self-realization as authentic history on nationalist, revolutionary, and anticolonial thought and practice for two centuries.¹³

In Arendt’s famous essay on freedom, she engages the limits of Hegelian thought and suggests that the only proper form of freedom lies beyond “the social” (and its unhappy consciousness) as a horizon. Freedom only appears through true political action, by which she means acts that create something new, that enact a beginning as such—not for instrumental gain, securing sovereign rule, or protecting property or other rationalities of “the social,” but for their very opposite: to show fidelity to a principle or to create a new society or new social form. Freedom is nothing but the wages of political courage, and without courage there is no real politics: “It takes courage to leave the protective security of our four walls and enter the public realm, not because of particular dangers which may lie in wait for us but because we have arrived in a realm where concern for life has lost its validity. Courage liberates men from their worry about life for the freedom of the world” (Arendt 2000, 448). This leads Arendt to a conceptualization of true political action as a form of miracle, analogous with the logic of organic and natural processes of birth and gestation that rely on “infinite improbabilities”: “In the realm of human affairs we know the author of ‘miracles.’ It is men who perform them” (460).¹⁴

Such a heroic concept of politics corresponds quite directly with the horizon of revolutionary transformation that was promoted by an exiled ANC for decades. When South African transition eventually did take place, it was widely referred to as a form of miracle strangely removed from the flow of everyday life.¹⁵ A set of fortuitous events emerged from bloody street fights and from courageous opposition in thousands of battles for rights, but the result was nonetheless a negotiated solution of a radically different order than that of daily existence. In popular political imagination, freedom was made possible in large measure by the presence of one man: Mandela. Force and circumstance had removed him from the grit, violence, and meanness of late apartheid, which in turn allowed him to appear as an author of the new society. The script and the excitement of the new possibilities after apartheid were exhilarating and unnerving at the same time. It is telling that this new and still alien order was widely referred to as the “postapartheid dispensation.” Dispensation is a term with theological roots and means an order handed down by supreme authority (e.g., by God, the church, or by law), but it can simultaneously refer to an exemption, a temporal phase bracketed by exceptional circumstances. The “dispensation” was soon given form and body in the new constitution in 1996, a farsighted and progressive document that expresses the spirit and aspiration of postapartheid freedom while also being at odds with many prevailing social norms in the country. The constitution was produced as a small pocket-sized book with the subtitle “one *law* for one *nation*” (emphasis in original), and millions of copies were distributed across the country in an attempt to make it “the property of the people,” as a high-ranking ANC member put it to me in 1998. However, in order to retain its foundational and quasi-magical force as a symbol of sovereign, collective freedom, the constitution and the new Constitutional Court had to remain elevated above the flow of ordinary life and what soon became “ordinary” politics.¹⁶

When “the thrill was gone” and heroic struggle politics gave way to gradual administrative change and a liberal regime of rights,¹⁷ it became clear that the resistance to apartheid in the 1980s had indeed been forged within political and social horizons that were strongly lodged in “the social” produced by apartheid in localities and specific communities.¹⁸

For the majority, freedom had not been imagined as individual self-expression or revolutionary transformation but as collective and constructive acts that secured community and dignity as it was known and lived. Or, as Simmel argues about modern freedom, “Freedom consists in a process of liberation, it rises above a bond, [but] finds its meaning, consciousness and value only as a reaction to it . . . the individual is tied

to others, and ties others” (1950, 121–22). The problem was to acknowledge precisely what freedom entailed. Hegel describes the moment of freedom as one of alienation. It is marked by an inability to fully recognize that its very own essence lies in the mere effort at “desiring and working” in everyday life itself: “Where that ‘other’ is sought, it cannot be found, for it is supposed to be just a *beyond*, something that can *not* be found . . . Consciousness, therefore, can only find as a present reality the *grave* of its life . . . the Unhappy Consciousness merely finds itself *desiring* and *working*; it is not aware that to find itself active in this way implies that it is in fact certain of itself, and that its feeling of the alien existence is this self-feeling” (1977, 131–32; emphasis in original).

To understand work and life, the old categories of unfreedom, as the very sites of a new freedom, turned out to be particularly difficult in South Africa. The apartheid governance through biopolitics, space, and everyday routines meant that when freedom arrived it could barely be recognized as a new horizon but instead appeared as a continuation of the old. For some, freedom signified a redemptive dream of radical change in life circumstances and futures and a complete break with the apartheid past. For most people, however, the idea of freedom revolved around more modest and concrete aspirations: a new house, a secure job, education, and securing of their enclaves of relatively autonomous life. At the level of locality and community, the transition from “revolution to rights” (Robins 2008) turned out to be more seamless than many an ANC functionary had imagined. Now it was ANC cadres turned bureaucrats and ministers that were expected to deliver the daily wages of liberal freedom.

MELANCHOLIA OF FREEDOM

Anxiety, embarrassment, and obsessions with the gaze and visibility may be particularly pronounced among South African Indians. The forging of this category of people from many discrete and disparate parts of the Indian subcontinent into a single racial and cultural category was accompanied by constant charges of being culturally alien people. The position of Indians in the economy and the political structure in South Africa as an intermediate group of “quasi citizens” between white privilege and African disenfranchisement only heightened the sense of perpetual marginality. Yet the story that follows could have been told about many other groups in South Africa, a country whose society is deeply segmented and internally separated. A society of migrants and recent urbanites, the majority of South Africans live far away from anything they can call their proper home in a cultural or historical sense. Just like the people of Chatsworth who appear in this book, most

South Africans struggle to inhabit their urban spaces, their history, and their new political and cultural freedoms.

As I began fieldwork, I was immediately struck by a pervasive sense of loss and displacement. The transformation of the South African economy has resulted in an economic marginalization of the Indian working class. The township has also changed. Today, thousands of Africans live in informal shacks or in newly built government houses in Chatsworth and in other formerly Indian areas. The effect of these changes has been a multilayered sense of loss: loss of economic security, loss of the township as “our place,” loss of perceived existential and physical safety, and a loss of what Hegel called the “loss of the loss,” that is, the disappearance of the blockage—unfreedom and apartheid—that prevented true self-realization and thus explained most problems and shortcomings in everyday life.

The second remarkable feature of life in Chatsworth was the ubiquity of the self-deprecating humor that made *Broken Promises* such a roaring success. Jokes, stories, and everyday mockery of the *charou* (local slang for nonrespectable Indians) way of life constituted an important medium for reflection on a very uncertain future. I realized that self-deprecating humor and stinging satire had been central to Indian life in South Africa for many decades (Hansen 2000). In his well-known essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud argues that while mourning expresses the feeling of loss of a loved object, melancholia may be “a reaction to the loss of a loved object” (1969, 245) when one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost. The patient knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost as a result. The symptoms of this condition are often difficult to gauge and understand, for both the melancholic and those around him. Yet one symptom is clear: self-reproach and self-reviling. Freud continues, “The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale” (246). In mourning, it is the world that has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.¹⁹ Freud argues that the melancholic incorporates the unrecognizable loss into her own self, where it reemerges as a peculiar enjoyment in reviling the self as flawed and imperfect.

This formulation of melancholia resonates with the multilayered sense of loss and the representations of everyday life in this particular community. Much public debate, many performances, and much informal conversation are organized around an oscillation between intense self-reproach regarding the past, conservatism, tradition, of introversion, and loving self-absorption and idealization of family life, culture, and sociality. This oscillation is marked by melancholia rather than nostalgia.²⁰ Melancholia arises from a deep anxiety regarding how the iden-

tity and history can be represented and enunciated. The attachment to the recent past during apartheid, where community life flourished in the racial enclave, cannot be publicly enunciated at this point except as narratives of struggles to defy the state. The emotional attachments to this period and its forms of life must remain repressed and can only be referred to in intimate and informal settings. Like in other sections of South African society, the loss of this deeply problematic past, its pleasures, and its forms of life cannot be acknowledged. The past is tense, and the experience of freedom becomes melancholic.

BETWEEN IRRELEVANCE AND IRREVERENCE: "OUR CULTURE" AFTER APARTHEID

The end of apartheid entailed a challenge to everyday life and revisions of many social practices and forms of everyday speech. Many ordinary people retained their attachments to the community life of the township, imperfect but intimate, known and comforting. Others reached out and beyond the township in search of larger global and diasporic identities or universal religious communities. Immersing myself in the township, I found myself confronted with two analytical rubrics. The first was the concept of "diaspora." Most of my initial assumptions were shaped by a tacit understanding that South African Indians were attached to a deep and affective sense of cultural practices that tied them to South Asia. Many local organizations, much local scholarship, and a good chunk of public discourse, including a resurgent interest in Bollywood aesthetics and stars, seemed to confirm the existence of such a durable link.

I soon realized that such a perspective locked me into an interpretive frame that elided the deep entanglements and profound shaping of social life in the city and the township. Chatsworth must be seen as a moment in the history of a "permanent minority" that is embedded in a colonial and postcolonial territory where every claim to belonging, land, and livelihood has been contested for a century. The anti-immigrant violence in May 2008, which affected migrants from Africa and also people of Asian origin,²¹ instantly reactualized the deep sense of alienation and questioned the status of Indians as true citizens, as had been the case during anti-Indian riots in 1949 and 1985. Diaspora is, in other words, not a condition that applies permanently to cultural minorities anywhere but is a particular framing of a "call of history" and a particular framework for cultural self-making that people respond to according to class position, alienating political events, and their local political imagination. I will explore this problem and the cultural attachments to South Asia, be they virtual or concrete, toward the end of his book.

The second analytical rubric was that of everyday life. Many progressive and left-leaning intellectuals in South Africa assume that “the only good Indian is a poor Indian”—the still powerful idea that ordinary and poor Indians in the township harbor genuinely nonracial ideas of solidarity and justice as opposed to the culturally conservative and race-conscious Indian middle class.²² There is a deep romantic nexus between everyday life and the supposed authenticity of the poor and marginalized that has exerted considerable influence in political practice here, as in many other parts of the world, and indeed in the theory and practice of anthropology.

Everyday life, understood as the institutionalized and highly structured routines of movement, work, leisure, and dwelling characteristic of modern societies,²³ was the preferred site of apartheid’s robust biopolitical interventions. For generations of Africans and other people of color, the dull disciplinary routines of work, township, and trains were sites of violent subjection and occasional heroic bursts of defiance. These were key institutions in what Will Glover in his work on urban planning has called a “materialist pedagogy”; that is, “the ordinary material fabric of a modern city would continuously irrigate its residents with a flow of salutary effects” (2008, xxi). These effects were imagined to instill in the natives what they were lacking: an interiorized self-discipline, capacity for work, and practical appreciation of the ordered aesthetics of modern life. This form of material government relied on daily material routines and diminished the reliance on ideological persuasion. This had important precedents in the mission stations and the early colonial state in South Africa. In a set of incisive reflections on the analogous interests in the everyday by Christian missionaries and social theorists, Jean and John Comaroff note, “a crucial goal of the Protestant outreach was to implant the methodical habits that produced civil, self-disciplined Christian subjects . . . [both missionaries and social theorists of practice] evince a distrust of contemplative truths, opting instead for a vision of *homo faber*, of human life as the product of instrumental action” (1997, 30). This identification of everyday life as a site of virtue has roots in a wider Protestant celebration of the lay, of ordinary speech, of work, and of thrift and modesty (Taylor 1989, 211–303). It also marks a fundamental acceptance of the leveling and objectifying effects of modernity on the modern self: “its double life as subject and object. This being was, at once, unique and faceless, a self-conscious individual and an impersonal noun . . . at once ‘somebody,’ a named mortal, and ‘anybody,’ the generic man in the street” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 32).

As we will see later, everyday and ordinary life as a set of material disciplines—erasing the old while shaping the recalcitrant or unwilling

native mind—assumed a central place in twentieth-century governmentality in South Africa and elsewhere in the (post)colonial world. This obvious fact has had surprisingly little impact on how anthropology constructs the everyday and the ordinary as its new privileged place of investigation. Anthropology abounds with submerged assumptions about the autonomy, discrete ontologies, and moral force assumed to be intrinsic to this realm of life. De Certeau, Deleuze, Foucault, James Scott, and even the notion of “subalternity,” understood as a relatively uncolonized form of life, serve as standard references. But neither colonial governmentality nor Protestant ideology make regular appearances in this work, not even in work that critically assesses and questions the force of the everyday as an analytical optic.²⁴

In Veena Das’s recent foregrounding of the “ordinary” as the privileged site of anthropological intervention and knowledge, this blind spot is particularly obvious (2007). Das’s main inspiration is the late Wittgenstein’s (and Stanley Cavell’s) view of the world as constituted through series of provisional, inadequate, but nonetheless functioning language games that in their turn produce both selves and sociality (neither of these being whole or complete) as “forms of life” (*Lebensformen*) (Wittgenstein 1953, 19–23). Cavell accepts the assertion that there are indeed ordinary language games that can provide proper “homes” for words, places where words and their referents actually mean something—that is, have a certain stability and real meaning within certain communities—as forms of life. These are the spaces where “acknowledgment” is found—of oneself and of others. By acknowledgment, Cavell means not just to recognize the other in the Hegelian sense but to make an attempt to see the other person as she/he actually dwells in the world. I understand this to be a more intense, if not intimate, striving than that of neighborliness. It is, in fact, a desire to understand the very subjectivity of the other.²⁵

The ordinary plays a double role in Das’s work, and both of them are redemptive: first, as the limit of language understood as a set of nondiscursive and mundane practices, mostly illustrated as forms of life among slum-dwellers and victims of violence in India who are capable of overcoming pain and of “pick[ing] up the pieces . . . to find out whether and how to go on” (2007, 6); and second, as the very opposite; namely, the true origin and referent of language in a more authentic or original sense, as when she writes on the very last page of the book that the role of anthropologists is “witnessing the descent into the everyday through which victims and survivors affirm the possibility of life by removing it from circulation of words gone wild— leading words home, so to speak” (221). I take this to mean that words come home to those who properly own them but are unable to utter them without

the aid of anthropologists or other interlocutors. In this move, actual speech, public statements, and ritualized conduct by those who claim social or cultural authority in the communities studied, or those who may just speak and banter, may be relegated to a realm of the mediated, even not-so-ordinary. Only those properly equipped (with Cavell, or anthropology?) seem able to decipher the whispers and murmurs of the ordinary.

Against such an obliquely moralizing perspective, this book focuses on the everyday as a site of open conflict and moral debate. The everyday culture I document and analyze in detail is not merely the somehow inexplicable preserve of those who are poor, marginal, silent, or without the capacity to express themselves in public speech. The everyday practices of ordinary people, youth, newcomers, women, and religious people are indeed the manifest object of much worry, reflection, and joking in homes and cars, in markets and newspaper columns, and in taxis and talk shows. The local terms for this shared object vary from generalized notions of kinship, the idea of the “Indian family,” or to the colloquial notion of being *charou*. Much of this *charou* culture is regarded as embarrassing, inappropriate, and outright ridiculous—and even a blockage to the full embrace of freedom. The status of the everyday is, in other words, not a semivisible ontology waiting to be divined. The status of everyday life as a space of meaning and “our culture” is a problem right at the heart of life as it is lived in Chatsworth—a life that is irrevocably split between an external and an internal view of oneself, strung between several gazes and marked by highly flexible modes of self-presentation. It is a life that is reflexive and worldly but also suffused by intimate and intensely self-absorbed forms of enjoyment. Prior to 1994, much political rhetoric posited the “inner” community life as the source of moral cohesion and even as containing the seeds of a future redemption and renewal.²⁶ This powerful political fiction of cultural unity, pride, and even purity was shared from parts of the ANC to the conservative right, but soon splintered into many discrete parts in the 1990s. In its stead emerged an anxious life in freedom and a split gaze that was very pronounced among the people I studied, but also paradigmatic of many other segments of South African society.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I have structured the book around three major themes: (1) the vexed and morally complex question of the constitution and practices of life in unfreedom and of ordinary life in the apartheid township; (2) the hopes, pleasures, anxieties, and alienations that erupted in the 1990s as a new postapartheid society invited everybody to embrace freedom and

reinvent themselves; and (3) the process of reimagining oneself, claiming identities, and recasting historical narratives and collective memories in a present torn between a commitment to a contested and feeble South African nationalism and a variety of global and diasporic desires.

These three broad themes do not suggest any inevitable flow from unfreedom into self-invention. The problem of rewriting the past became more urgent as the new society and its freedoms emerged. Everything became illuminated and inflected but never redeemed by history, and each chapter incorporates the echoes of this celebrated and also disavowed past that is so omnipresent in the lives of the people I am describing.

Chapter 1, “Ethnicity by Fiat: The Remaking of Indian Life in South Africa,” forms the foundation for subsequent chapters by telling the story of how the Asiatic question was configured in South Africa from the 1860s to the present as a question of necessary containment of culturally alien people. I tell the story of how the township of Chatsworth was set up, imagined, and framed as a purely Indian space over decades of tense and often antagonistic tussle between policy makers and social activists. I look at how specific methods of policing contributed to the current mythology of the Indian township during apartheid as fundamentally safe, as a place where “we never locked our doors.” This chapter draws on official documents, newspapers, and governmental publications, as well as a range of narratives by older residents of Chatsworth.

Chapter 2, “Domesticity and Cultural Intimacy,” explores how the space of the township gradually became marked and coded as a space that was interior to Indian life. I chart the emergence of the figure of the *charou* in the township as the constant other of the emergent, respectable Indian community in Chatsworth. Mainly based on archival material, narratives, and ethnographic material, this chapter shows how the older figure of the “coolie”—the stereotyped, lower-caste plantation worker—gives way to a new and deracinated menace and irritant within the township that is equated with “backwardness” and stubborn, traditional conservatism, which needs to be reformed in order for the community to fully evolve. I trace various genres of joking and argue that older forms of joking have been recalibrated to address the radical sense of discontinuity and also loss of a relevant past, or even present, which has become so prominent not only in Durban but across South Africa.

I tackle the difficult and controversial theme of racism and fear of Africans among people of Indian origin in chapter 3, “Charous and Ravens: A Story of Mutual Nonrecognition.” The relationship between indentured Indians and Zulu speakers in the province of Natal was tense and contentious throughout the twentieth century. The large riots in

1949 in Durban when Indian homes were attacked by African workers, as well as subsequent conflicts in 1985 and after apartheid, left a legacy of apprehension and suspicion between the two communities that periodically erupt in racist allegations from both sides. I explore this history and the mythologies of Cato Manor, the Indian-African neighborhood that was the epicenter of the 1949 riots. I draw on narratives I collected, as well as the representation of this area and the relationship with Africans in plays and fiction. The last part of the chapter explores the tension between what I call “racism’s two bodies”—notions of surface and substance—in racial practices among Indians. Finally, I explore the circulation of racialized fear among young people in schools and on street corners, and argue that the influx of large numbers of Africans in Chatsworth has fundamentally transformed the cherished idea of the area as a knowable site of cultural intimacy.

Chapter 4, “Autonomy, Freedom, and Political Speech,” explores the development of political institutions of autonomy that were designed for Indians during the apartheid years. I try to flesh out the pervasive sense of unreality and absurdity that accompanied the heavily circumscribed functions of these bodies and how this consolidated an already pervasive disengagement from the world of politics in the township. I argue that from the 1980s, representative politics became subsumed under a larger imperative of enjoyment and self-deprecating humor. Political figures and their speech are still not read literally but are transposed into a form of entertainment and performance that is enjoyed at a distance. This apprehension vis-à-vis the world of politics is clearly more pronounced among non-African communities in South Africa but still defines an important and ill-understood dimension of the postapartheid “unhappy consciousness.”

In chapter 5, “Movement, Sound, and Body in the Postapartheid City,” I investigate the rise of new forms of physical, social, and cultural mobility in the postapartheid city, in particular, the rise of the kombi taxi and its massive sound system as the most striking innovation in the urban landscape. While the private taxi industry has been at the center of much violence and criminal networks, it has also been important in providing new forms of agile physical mobility across the erstwhile fixed boundaries in the city. More important, the taxis have also been the vehicles and symbols of a new type of music and youth culture that begins to cut across boundaries of class and race. I explore the particular form of taxi industry in Chatsworth and look at the wider phenomenon of the new sonic taste alliances forged by *kwaito* (a form of South African pop music) and other forms of urban music after apartheid.

Chapter 6, “The Unwieldy Fetish: Desi Fantasies, Roots Tourism, and Diasporic Desires,” looks at the new economy of diasporic imagi-

nation that hit South Africa after 1994. I begin by exploring a range of narratives of roots tourism whereby thousands of South African Indians each year travel to India in search of the village of their ancestors and for shopping and/or spiritual purification. These journeys are often complex discoveries of both the real and the imaginary India, and are almost invariably linked to desires for purification and “proper” Indianness and “culture,” which, in their turn, are spawned by social mobility and ambition. The other side of this new fascination with India’s past and its emerging power as a nation is an intense interest in Bollywood films and their songs, stars, and aesthetics. The revival of the interest in Indian films dates to the arrival of a new type of teenage flick that catered to a diasporic market and sensibility. I explore this moment in 1998 and the discussion of Indianness and the global standing of Indian culture it gave rise to.

Chapter 7, “Global Hindus and Pure Muslims: Universalist Aspirations and Territorialized Lives,” explores the quest for religious purification that has arisen from the Indian middle class in South Africa since the 1980s. I look at the power and attractiveness of neo-Hindu movements in South Africa and how new and more standardized Brahmanical forms of Hinduism today clash with the popular customs and traditions that still inform weddings and ideas of belief and rituals in the Indian townships. A strikingly similar logic of purification is at work among the Muslims of Indian origin, only even more so. Apartheid forced forms of social and ritual sharing upon communities that despite their common religious orientation have little desire or inclination to share social spaces or mosques. The postapartheid society has made it possible for the traditional Muslim elite, the merchant communities of Gujarati origin, to embrace global piety movements and to re-imagine their own genealogies as somehow “Arab” and thus not South Asian. The theological schism between scripturally oriented purists and the proponents of traditional Sunni Islam of a more Sufi-oriented popular South Asian variety has been mapped onto long-standing class differences between Gujarati-speaking elites and predominantly Urdu-speaking working-class Muslims. In both cases, South Africa has become yet another field wherein global conflicts play out in complex local configurations.

In chapter 8, “The Saved and the Backsliders: The Charou Soul and the Instability of Belief,” I explore how the process of reevaluating one’s past and reaching for a future beyond a clear ethnoracial definition is played out among the thousands of ordinary working-class Indians in Chatsworth and elsewhere who convert to Pentecostal Christianity. I argue that these conversions, which have gathered significant force since 1994, reflect a desire for respectability and purity, but even more

so a powerful attempt to find a religious identity that seems both intelligible and in tune with the culture of the larger South Africa society. I look at how these church communities, among many other things, negotiate new forms of inclusion and embody a promise of being both included in the new nation and global yet decidedly and conspicuously nonpolitical. Like governmental interventions and most political and cultural activism, the multiple churches identify the charou home and the charou soul as the main targets of reform and purification.

In the postscript, I reflect on how much of the situation I describe in this book may have wider applicability across community, location, and class in South Africa. I also speculate briefly on how Zuma's presidency is altering predominant styles of politics and public culture toward a more ordinary, imperfect, but also culturally intimate style of political performance that may lead to naked majoritarianism but that also may prove hospitable to the country's many minorities.

METHODS AND MATERIAL

The deep segmentation of South African society has resulted in a certain insidious segmentation of scholarship and ethnographic work along racial lines that carries on to this day. Writing the new South Africa across these lines, and understanding the complex links across and between racially defined groups, is one of the biggest challenges facing anyone writing about contemporary South Africa. I cannot claim that I have overcome this problem in this book, which draws the main bulk of its material from areas and people that were classified as Indian. Many of my interlocutors and informants over the years have assumed that I was writing an Indian community history, as this is indeed the common formula of the vast majority of local studies and local perceptions of history and heritage. I do, however, pay as much attention as I can throughout the text to the many entanglements, encounters, tensions, and confrontations with other worlds, and other people, that shaped the social world of my informants.

The material I draw on in the following has been collected over nearly a decade and spans extensive ethnographic field notes, hundreds of interviews, cultural and media products, archives of government institutions, and multiple local, cultural, religious, and civic institutions. The magnitude of my material and the limitations of what one can do in a single book means that I do not do full justice to many details or events that I touch on. Fieldwork was conducted for a year in 1998–99, for six months in 2001, three months in 2002, annual or biannual visits in the following years, and then another three months in 2007. In keeping with standard anthropological practice, most of my informants

appear under pseudonyms, while those holding public office have been mentioned by their proper names. I hope that my friends will forgive this adherence to a convention that still serves the discipline as a whole quite well. This is an academic book, not written for a lay audience but hopefully not inaccessible to students and interested readers outside the academy. To my many friends and informants in Durban and Johannesburg, you may find much of what I am arguing somewhat outdated already, you will surely find much to disagree with, some recognizable figures and events, but hopefully also a thing or two to appreciate. I hope you will read this work as one that opens the world of the charous to a wider world of discussion within South Africa and in the world of global scholarship. It is also an invitation to continue our enjoyable banter and debate that we began more than a decade ago about charous, South Africa, and the world.