

## Prologue

I confess to feeling ambivalent about Cape Town. It is a breathtaking city, framed by Table Mountain—the 1-kilometer-high peak with its signature tabletop summit—and overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the “Mother City” became a first port of call for European seafaring traders and in due course home to colonial settlers. I recall looking out from the Rhodes Memorial, which offers panoramic views of the metropolitan area. This was back in 1999, three years after the start of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I was with friends and fellow researchers as well as former members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK)—the disbanded armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC). As we looked out from the Table Mountain Nature Reserve in a spot just above the University of Cape Town campus, I noted how the N2 motorway headed southeast, toward the Cape Flats, while the M3 wended its way southwestward, toward the so-called leafy southern suburbs. This physical split in the road said so much about the success of apartheid’s spatial planning strategy to confine blacks and Indians and coloreds to the sandy, barren flatlands leading to the ocean, while white Capetonians enjoyed the lush, green landscape of those suburbs close to the mountain toward Tokai,<sup>1</sup> a particularly beautiful suburb situated in the foothills of the Constantiaberg range, surrounded by small wineries and pine plantations. It struck me how explicit the “mapping” of race and entitlement was, and I joked that upon landing on the shores of the Cape those very first seafarers in 1652 must

have imagined they had come ashore on God's land as they looked out on the physical beauty of Table Mountain, Helderberg, the Hottentots-Holland mountain range, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans' convergence at Cape Point, and the indigenous *fynbos* and other exotic vegetation. And yet, as I suggested to our friends, those settlers in God's land appeared to have committed the most ungodly of acts. At first, they stole land, conquered by power of firearms, sold human beings into slavery, and then later, much later, they perpetuated a deeply hierarchical system, in part by splitting and separating space and inevitably forcing the N2 and M3 motorways to diverge.

Many others have noted the deep social rifts and inequalities in South African society generally and their acute expression in the context of Cape Town, which is known to most outside South Africa as a playground for the affluent (McDonald 2008; McDonald and Smith 2004; Samara 2011; Seekings and Nattrass 2005; Thorn and Oldfield 2011; Watson 2002; cf. Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2002). Tourists come to tee off on some of the best golf courses the country has to offer, dine at some of its finest restaurants, rent or buy luxurious holiday homes along the coastline, get cheap tummy tucks and then recover in the Mount Nelson Hotel, and sunbathe for hours on some of the world's most glorious beaches. Many white Capetonians (not all of course) enjoy the city's natural beauty, too, and although beaches and other public amenities are no longer legally segregated, they are de facto for the most part. To some extent this has to do with the city's limited public transport system, which makes getting to the coast or the mountains difficult for those without cars. But the problem is not simply whether certain kinds of people, specifically people from the townships and squatter areas, can physically make the trip to Camps Bay or Clifton Beach no. 4, but whether they see any purpose in it and whether they feel comfortable when they do. One needs money in many of these places to feel accepted, and the subtle and not so subtle policing of who is recognizably a consumer and who is not often enough dictates who has access and who doesn't. The Victoria and Albert Waterfront is a good example. Though strictly speaking open to the public, its combination of shops, galleries, restaurants, and condominium complexes, which gleam with glass and steel in the South African sky, privileges a purchasing power beyond the reach of the average black Capetonian. And while waterfront supermarkets like Pick n Pay and Woolworths suggest that just about anyone might come to do their food shopping, in reality the combination of road access by car and the sprawling shopping complex's security staff makes this retail space more private than public.

Chatting with friends in Lower Crossroads informal settlement—only a few weeks after my trip to the Table Mountain Nature Reserve—about their weekend plans and whether people would be “going to town,” I met with a perplexed silence. On further prodding I was reminded that everything took money: the long taxi ride into town from the Flats, the restaurants and shops that most would not even dare to enter, never mind the museums and galleries. What exactly was it that I thought people would “do” in town; what purpose was to be served by going on a Saturday afternoon; whom would one be visiting? “That’s for white people to go to town like that,” someone in the group observed. This perhaps distinguishes Cape Town from other cities and, in particular, Johannesburg, where a growing black middle-class works and plays. But Johannesburg is also, cliché though it may be, genuinely an “African” city in a way that Cape Town isn’t. Whatever people’s income brackets and employment status, one rarely has the sense that black residents of Johannesburg feel somehow unwelcome downtown or even in the swank Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton City Shopping Center. Johannesburg is abuzz with hip young black people of every class and income bracket. There’s a vibe about “Jozi” that Cape Town lacks (Bremner 2004a; Nuttall 2004). As Sarah Nuttall and others have noted, young African residents of Johannesburg have taken up a *loxion kulca* (location or township culture) that enables an imagining of possibilities, of cultural expression, of upward mobility.

This isn’t to say that the same isn’t true of Cape Town’s townships—there is a distinct location or township culture there, too—but Johannesburg does offer the possibility for a kind of continuity between the culture of the location and the culture of the city as a whole that seems continually foreclosed in Cape Town, where the distinctions between black and white modes of life remain stark. It surely helps that Johannesburg has a long and gritty history of mining and migrant work, of polyglossia, and cosmopolitanism. Further, as Lindsey Bremner has argued, “to be black and living on the edge is not necessarily to be poor” (2004b, 42) in Johannesburg, because the city’s edge can very often serve as the link between opportunities and mobility. I’m not convinced the same can be said of Cape Town’s periphery.

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In 1979, my father moved our family to Botswana, where he served as bishop for the Anglican diocese.<sup>2</sup> Though a man of the cloth, my father was no stranger to the ins and outs of global refugee politics. Serving on the Africa

Desk at the World Council of Churches in Geneva during the mid-1970s, he worked closely with displaced persons from all across the continent but also took an interest in the growing southern African refugee crisis, especially those fleeing the system of apartheid. These were largely young men and women who had never been afforded educational opportunities at home under the oppressive system of Bantu education, which was designed to “de-skill” black South Africans en masse.

At the time, I was only vaguely aware of my father’s involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle—specifically his involvement in a variety of initiatives to funnel assets into South Africa, predominantly from the Norwegian government, and to assist in the escape of dissidents and their resettlement in foreign countries, where many young exiles sought training in military strategy or in higher education. Nor was I fully aware of the intricate details of the refugee networks, their source of funding, or the practicalities of relocating activists, never mind the efforts to support them. Still, I was, in some limited sense, conscious of the enormity of the situation across the border in South Africa and in the adjoining Frontline States. I read newspapers avidly and precociously, including the now defunct *Rand Daily Mail*, listened to South African radio in all its complicated and not so very complicated censorship and bias, sometimes ending an evening with *Our Boys on the Border*. A program mostly directed toward whites, *Our Boys on the Border* covered the correspondence and news from young men in combat in Namibia (then South West Africa), Angola, and Mozambique and was both a testament to Cold War anti-Communist sentiments and a little old-fashioned. There were late night visits from “friends” and “relatives” seeking refuge on the Botswana side. Some came from Lusaka (headquarters to the African National Congress in exile), and these were generally very serious encounters that occasioned discussion in the garden, since my father was never sure if the phone or the house was secure. All this sounds like cloak-and-dagger subterfuge, and in part it was. But really, the frequent reception of people coming across at Tlokweng, just to the southwest of Gaborone, or organizing for someone to carry cash back into South Africa was mostly done in an effort to attend to the most basic needs of those fighting the good fight on the other side of the border (see, e.g., Schaap 2010).

My father always opined that revolutionaries had to be fed, clothed, and sheltered and their children cared for; at times, they also needed their bills paid. To the degree that formal organizations and collective action were effective, their success was rooted in the most fundamental requisites of

the household. Rather than work against the grain of the funders and supporters of “the struggle,” who mostly gave to formal bodies, my father tried to get money to members of many different groups, as well as individual families, churches, and social services programs. With the aid of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, money went to various radical Left and African nationalist organizations, among them the African National Congress, to pay their phone and electricity bills; the Pan Africanist Congress in Dar es Salaam; members of the Black Consciousness movement still operating within South Africa’s borders; and families whose primary breadwinner was in detention and no longer able to put food on the table. This ideological agnosticism would ultimately earn my father the label of an anti-ANC man, but for what it was worth, he held to this position “religiously,” if I may say, and in a sense it became an article of faith.

This is where I believe my own interest in the politics of the everyday, both in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, probably finds its original inspiration. I have often described my research on squatters and the phenomenon of urban informal settlement as a kind of theology of the poor, albeit a secular one, a theology in its turn inspired by the writings of that great secular theologian Karl Marx—certainly the so-called early humanist Marx—who aspired to make *material* a philosophy of pure contemplation and yet at the same time remained a thinker of great philosophical and thus contemplative depth. I have been equally inspired by other social theorists who either followed or diverged from Marx’s dialectical materialism (as will become apparent in the pages that follow) and who sought to understand the causes of systemic and emergent inequality and were concerned with the forms of consciousness that made the world appear either as it should be or in great need of transformation. That being said, Marxian analysis cannot, by any measure, account for the kinds of politics of life and forms of life to which this book addresses itself. And as will become quite apparent in the course of *Making Freedom*, class analysis, specifically, cannot explain most thoroughly or completely the politics of land grab, illegal settlement, and everyday struggles to survive that together make up what I would like to call a “politics of presence” on the margins of the city of Cape Town.



Apartheid was a constitutionally ordained and legally enforced system of racial discrimination, and those who fought against it became its heroes

and martyrs, while the most defiant among them were spectacularly victimized, as the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would later reveal. Beginning in 1996 and concluding in 1999–2000, evidence of the state’s hand in detentions, torture, disappearances, and murders built, day after day, week after week. At the same time, apartheid generated conditions in which blacks, coloreds, and Indians (so-called non-whites) suffered materially the consequences of a system that functioned by a logic of racial discrimination to create distinct *classes* of people.

Still, despite the many assertions I make about the politics of squatting as having its basis in an urgent “materialism,” *Making Freedom* is not primarily concerned with conditions of abjection. On the contrary, I argue that notwithstanding the meagerness of life on the periphery of Cape Town (both during apartheid and in the new democratic era), squatters mobilized and continue to mobilize a whole array of everyday strategies in making lives of tremendous meaning. Such practices, in the past at least, presumed the future possibility of emancipation from the strictures of the system of influx controls (those statutes that restricted individual movement). That the horizon along which such cultural practices have been engaged has changed so dramatically since the end of the apartheid era is also the focus of much of what follows. How is it, with democratization and the transition to a constitutional system in which rights and entitlements in citizenship became so critical, that grinding poverty on Cape Town’s periphery not only persisted but also deepened? In part, I propose that South Africa’s turn to democracy in 1994 coincided with the adoption of free market reforms that were anti-poor and that neoliberalization in the Mother City (to be distinguished from the neoliberal policies of other cities) followed a very particular course—a point cogently argued by David McDonald in *World City Syndrome: Neoliberalism and Inequality in Cape Town* (2008; also see Brenner and Theodore 2002).

Historically deemed a “liberal” city owing to the prominence of so-called English-speaking South Africans in economic and political life, white Cape-tonians were nevertheless guilty of the worst forms of racial paternalism (Bickford-Smith 1995). As *Making Freedom* tries to show, it was in the Cape that influx controls were most stringently enforced, in part owing to a series of preexisting circumstances: long distances between the Cape and the Transkei and Ciskei homelands, which facilitated the exclusion of Africans, as well as job reservation policies that favored colored labor. It surely didn’t

hurt the city's reputation that it was distant from the seat of administrative power, Pretoria; nestled between mountain and ocean, Cape Town was a place of great natural beauty and somehow remote enough to give it the appearance of operating above the fray. But Cape Town was no less an apartheid city, whatever its liberal claims.

The racial politics of Cape Town don't begin and end with black-white relations, of course. What makes the Cape unique, at least one of the things that makes it unique, is the presence of a large colored population. So whatever the parochialisms of the English-speaking community, Cape Town is actually incredibly diverse. Coloreds have lived almost everywhere in the city and just beyond its limits: in the now rather diminished Bo-Kaap (formerly the exclusive home of Cape Muslims) bordering the central business district—much of it sold off to wealthy whites and re-delimited as the Cape Quarter—on the Flats, long home to colored farmers and, beginning in the mid-1960s, communities displaced from the City Bowl, and finally, beyond the city proper, out in the Winelands toward Stellenbosch. From Cape Malay cuisine to the muezzins' call to prayer, reaching from the Flats to the center of town, to the old colored fishing families based in Simon's Town to the very particular timbre of Cape Afrikaans, Cape Town's colored population in a sense defines the city. Demographically, coloreds are in a majority given former job reservation (the Coloured Labour Preference Policy), segregation (Group Areas), and pass laws (Natives Urban Areas Act). Language most tellingly indicates something of the force of colored influence: of the province's population of approximately 4.5 million, 49.7 percent speak Afrikaans,<sup>3</sup> 20.2 percent speak English, and 24.7 percent speak isiXhosa.<sup>4</sup>

Quite apart from their cultural impact, coloreds have often perversely influenced the outcome at the ballot box. Since 1994, the province has been led first by the New National Party and, since 2009, the Democratic Alliance against a general tide of ANC support across the other provinces. Historically, coloreds were molded as a constituency, a community, and a type of citizen through a set of welfare interventions in housing, education, and institutions addressing social "deviance." In his book about the colored Cape Flats, Steffen Jensen argues that coloreds, beginning in the 1930s, were the focus of a series of commissions of inquiry, consistent with a broadly biopolitical project in which coloreds were "managed" at the level of population. Jensen goes on to propose that such efforts produced a "colored citizen" well integrated into the institutions of welfare, punishment,

and labor and that this “management” was quite distinct from the forms of extreme violence and coercion meted out to Africans (Jensen 2008, 21–22, 39; also see Ashforth 1990).

Without a doubt black, colored, and white Capetonians experience the city very differently in view of their uneven access to public amenities, institutions, and jobs. In the townships, the commute between home and work is both long and costly. Most making the daily trip to jobs in the suburbs and central business district use the system of kombi taxis, which are expensive and not always roadworthy. The train and bus, while less expensive, are also unsafe, either because they have not been serviced or because of limited security; many commuters try to avoid the state-owned train company (formerly Spoornet and now Transnet Freight Rail), particularly after dark, for fear of being mugged or worse.

A great deal has been written about the politics of service delivery and *denial* (Bond and McInnes 2007; Desai and Pithouse 2004; Gibson 2012; Pithouse 2008), specifically the frequent suspension of electricity and water by local authorities in the face of nonpayment by ratepayers on the Flats. The resort by service providers to prepaid meters has inevitably shut off vital services to those who cannot afford them. And while nationwide protests against the corporatization of local state functions stem from conditions of poverty that make it virtually impossible for the poor to pay for services, the general view in official circles is *not* that market-orientated reforms may be unsuited to the complex post-apartheid economic climate but rather that the failure to pay rates is consistent with a “culture of non-payment,” dating back to the rent and consumer boycotts of the 1980s. This is an astonishing position in the face of the country’s unemployment rate of about 25.6 percent,<sup>5</sup> Cape Town’s 30 percent poverty rate, the highest rate of any city in the country, and a poverty rate of 77 percent in the Eastern Cape, the predominant geographic origin of in-migration to Cape Town and the second poorest province in the country (Bähre 2011, 373).

The broader picture is equally uneven. At the national level there remains much evidence of the post-apartheid state’s efforts to redistribute wealth, if not in the form of actual reparations, certainly through the development of infrastructure. The state has delivered housing, social grants, and welfare to its citizens, yet at the same time the adoption of market reforms has had, as McDonald and Smith have proposed, “far-reaching implications for South African cities” (2004, 1461)—and rarely positive ones



at that (cf. Ferguson 2007). Housing, for instance, has often been slow on delivery and almost always poor in quality, even though a robust housing policy, a cornerstone of the post-1994 government's efforts to make restitution for the past, is something on which the ANC has long campaigned. This is due partly to the decrease in capital transfers from national to local states and partly to the outsourcing of construction to private companies, whose primary concern is not equity but the bottom line.

Cape Town's winters are cold and damp, and the flood-prone Flats only add to the constellation of public health challenges, including chest infections, which are widespread and in the most serious cases tubercular, both as a consequence of poor baseline health and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (see, e.g., Natrass 2004; also see Fassin 2007).<sup>6</sup> Access to decent schools and hospitals remains uneven across the city, and in the townships these tend to be overcrowded and poorly equipped, with teachers and nurses being inadequately trained. During my first stint in the field, 1998–99, and then again in the early 2000s, I was frequently told that to be hospitalized was a death sentence. The logic was faulty, of course, but in practice to seek medical care was to submit to long waits in casualty, to the possibility of having to sleep out in the corridors, and finally to be sent home with little more than a Panado (acetaminophen). Only the very sick ventured to hospital—so, yes, in a sense, to go was to never return home.

Early attempts to redistribute assets and reprioritize budgets, a “peace dividend” of sorts, never really came to pass, and the Cape metropolitan area remains “remarkably skewed along race and class lines” (McDonald and Smith 2004, 1477). Relatedly, the city has remained a deeply violent place. The Western Cape's murder rate, for example, was 48.3 per 100,000 for 2013–14 (the last year for which statistics are available), far outpacing Gauteng Province at 26.2 per 100,000, which is perceived, at least, as more dangerous. It also far exceeds the national average of 32.2 murders per 100,000 for the same period.<sup>7</sup> South Africa has enjoyed a long and varied relationship with violence, though its codes and meanings have changed over time and as the country transitioned from a colonial to a postcolonial order. If political violence was most common during the 1980s, intermittent taxi wars, gang violence, and more intimate aggressions like domestic violence, murder, and rape have come more recently to characterize the South African scene (Steinberg 2000; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006).<sup>8</sup> The debate over whether there has been an escalation in violent crime since the end of

the old order has never really been resolved. Some note that South African society has always been shot through with cruelty and aggression—on the shop floor, at the missionary school, prison, mental hospital, and home, in the confrontations between a gun-wielding state and its stone-throwing insurgents. The role of municipal breweries in raising revenue in the townships, the use of alcohol in the mines to dull fear and encourage labor compliance (see Van Onselen 2001), and the *shebeen* (tavern) brawls that seem to be such a part of daily life in the townships suggest a historically specific relationship between violence and high levels of alcohol consumption. But it is the intimacy of so-called contact crimes that makes one wonder about the relationship of violence, racism, and poverty.

Leslie Bank has cogently argued that family relationships were systematically reordered in the 1980s with the rise of the culture of the comrades, or *amaqabane*. While the migrant labor system, single-sex hostels, and the feminization of poverty in the reserves all played their part, it was the intensity of protest politics and how they were taken up by young people (especially men) that informed the changing role of parents and children in relation to one another. Leslie Bank notes that so-called traditional forms of marriage were steadily eclipsed by live-in arrangements (*ukuhlalisana*), which had a direct bearing not only on the spatial arrangement of domestic space—the expansion of shack settlements and backyard tenancies where young people sought to live independently—but on the relationships between parents and their teen and young adult children (2011, 130–31). Further, the mobilization of communities via block committees and other civic organs often created continuity between the comrades, the domestic sphere, and township central committees. To the degree that such youth politics were ascendant, the role of the comrades in consumer and rent boycotts had a direct impact on matters of home and young male authority. “At each level, disciplinary structures were set in place, which dealt with cases ranging from political dissent to domestic disputes as these spheres interpenetrated each other” (93).

Bank also proposes that young men were dictating not only to parents what they could or could not do but also to wives and partners. They were likely to stipulate where relatives and spouses could shop in the context of the consumer boycotts, for example. For some of my interlocutors these questions resonated, and in one instance, a former comrade admitted that he had once forced a woman who defied the boycott to ingest the contents

of her shopping bag while he watched, including a bottle of cooking oil! Those forms of masculinity that emerged in struggle, what Clive Glaser has identified as “struggle masculinity” (2000), were at times threatening and could lead to physical violence, while such excesses of highly sexualized conduct became critical to the very essence of protest politics.

Bank and I carried out research in different parts of South Africa—he worked in Duncan Village, just outside East London in the Eastern Cape, while I worked on the periphery of Cape Town—and to the degree that these were shaped by distinct local histories, the dynamics of the domestic sphere were also rather distinct. Bank reasons that the growth of shack areas might be connected quite practicably to *ukuhlalisana* arrangements in which women, in a sense, risked “shacking up” with male partners—this without guarantees of social respectability afforded by marriage. Beginning in the mid-1970s and early 1980s such arrangements were also predominant in Crossroads and Brown’s Farm and other shack areas in Cape Town, but given the stringencies of the system of influx controls in the Western Cape, shack areas became a space of emancipation and possibility for a slightly older generation of migrant workers and hostel dwellers, too many of whom desperately hoped to reconstitute preexisting family arrangements with wives and children.

I mention such transformations in domestic arrangements because I think these are critical to any understanding of the ways in which violence comes to be expressed in contemporary South Africa. That so much criminal violence is personal, intimate, and physical surely bears some continuity with shifting relations of domesticity and sexuality dating back to at least the 1980s, if not significantly earlier. Whether such shifting relations of intimacy can account for the prevalence of violence in the home in South Africa is unclear, though I would venture to say there is surely a connection between the two. Apartheid was terrifyingly destructive at the level of the everyday; it permeated the social and the intimate. Tellingly, rates of sexual offense, specifically, are extremely high in South Africa. At the same time, qualification is called for: one, the fact that sexual offenses are reported and recorded already speaks volumes of the state of policing and criminal statistics gathering in contrast to other countries, certainly across the continent; two, the expansion of the definition of “sexual offense” in the Sexual Offenses Act of 2003 and 2007 has opened up the possibility for recognizing “that men, women, and children are potential victims” (Salo 2010, 36; also

see Salo 2007).<sup>9</sup> Still, the question of how to reckon with the fact that rates of sexual violence in the Western Cape, for example, have reached as high as 229.9 per 100,000 (the highest rate across the provinces in 2004–5) remains, whatever the gender of the victims involved.<sup>10</sup>

Such considerations had significant bearing on my research—the places I was able to go (accompanied or alone), how I got to those places (mostly with private transport), and the fact of deeply fractured social relations, such that where I lived and where I worked might as well have been separate worlds. Despite my best efforts to convince friends on the Flats that I should live with them, specifically in Philippi East, and despite offers of rent that most desperately needed to supplement very small or absent household incomes, no one seemed to want the additional responsibility—that and the fact that space was certainly at a premium because of the average size of RDP core homes.

I would eventually move to Observatory, a formerly white working-class suburb, close to the city center. From my host, Patti, someone who cares very deeply about South Africa, I learned invaluable lessons about both white and black. Her experience during the anti-apartheid struggle, mostly within the student movement in the 1970s and then in radical theater, taught me other kinds of things about opposition politics, as distinct from the radical street protests of the townships.

In any case, whatever the degrees of separation between South Africans of different complexions, I gleaned from living on Arnold Street many things about “white lefties,” about the challenges of living in post-apartheid South Africa where, in fact, it was becoming harder and harder to reach across the divide separating black, white, colored, and Indian. If in the past “politics” was a reason for gathering, organizing, and conjoining lives across the racial divide, the urgency that had attended such activities had dissipated, and in Cape Town post-1994 there was a palpable sense of a reimposed separation as people retreated into mostly private spaces (Morphet 1995). This was a subject of many late-night dinner conversations at home and with other researchers and colleagues, including my very good friends Steffen and Birthe; Elaine and her husband, Colin; Madeleine, through whom I gained entrée to the Truth Commission; and many others besides. Truthfully, at the end of long days in the field in Brown’s Farm, Philippi East, and Crossroads, as well as some of the older nearby townships, including Nyanga and Gugulethu, it was a relief to clamber into my little car and head home along the N2 motorway. At the same time, every single night I felt a

pang of conscience for leaving and for what felt, at least at the time, to be the utter impossibility of bringing together the two worlds—of research and postresearch friendship and hospitality.

That, of course, changed over time as I met and made fast and furious friendships, shared stories and research findings, and grew to love this magnificent city despite all its injustice and fragmentation. My fieldwork necessarily jumped from site to site and institution to institution, again reflecting how disconnected the city really is: from the planning department of the City of Cape Town to the offices of Ikapa to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, most critically, to those settlements bordering the southern side of Lansdowne Road between Duinefontein Road and the R300. Whether such a “method” constitutes a method as such is unclear. What I very quickly intuited, however, was that there had to be a way of drawing lines of connection between otherwise starkly separate spheres of urban life: between the kinds of rhetorical and ideological work of planning and policy; between claims to a participatory process in urban transformation even as plans continued to be mostly imposed from above; between a past that was defined, in part, by efforts to control populations through removal and displacement and a present in which the terms of human settlement were being radically renegotiated. If that meant chatting with civil engineers, councillors, local residents, and self-appointed “community” representatives, then so be it. If it meant delving into the murky past of insurgency and counterinsurgency efforts on the Flats and I had to hightail it to the archives and finagle my way into the TRC, then so be it, too.

In the end, this patchwork of “sites,” negotiated by moving up and down the N2 (for that matter the M3 as well), made for the richest of ethnographic experiences, if on occasion a jolting sense of the disjuncture in perceptions held by such different kinds of people. Ultimately, however, it was the significance of those stories of a long and enduring struggle to a “right to the city” (see Harvey 2008; Lefebvre 1968) and through this a right to family that seemed most compelling. Over the course of time I spent longer and longer days on the Flats than more or less anywhere else. And as I did, the significance of the politics of life and the forms of life that define everyday experience in Cape Town’s informal settlements became the centerpiece of my research efforts. It is equally the central ambition of *Making Freedom* to understand their political significance in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.