

Photographing dispossession, forgetting solidarity: waiting for social justice in Wentworth, South Africa

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South Africans today inhabit a fragmented and discontinuous landscape, often despite their most cosmopolitan intentions. Grounded in the Coloured neighbourhood of Wentworth in Durban, this paper asks how remains of the past appear as differently temporalised artefacts, some buried in the archaic past and others more readily used to critique the present. In particular, I explore photographs of inmates of a concentration camp from 1902, township youth appropriating a specific commons in the early 1980s, black political photography from the late 1980s, and film wrestling with the ambiguities of post-apartheid political life in a Coloured neighbourhood next to an oil refinery. What unites these moments is not just a meta-theoretical concern with photography as both documentary and aesthetic, but the specific political uses of images, exemplified by the work of two black political photographers. Their practice provides cues for situating these other photographs in a long century of multiple dispossessions. The paper explores when and how photographs might shock the viewer into recognising resemblances, connections and potential solidarities, not just with the past, but with subaltern critique of racial space and subjectivity in the present. I suggest how we might view photographs from various moments relationally, to understand how, in one corner of contemporary South Africa, people continue to wait for justice despite uncertainty and official dissimulation, in a state of anticipatory frustration.

key words South Africa photography visual historical geography subalternity sentiment social justice

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Introduction

In April 2008, members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban put down their tools and refused to unload the Chinese freighter *An Yue Jiang* with weapons bound for Robert Mugabe's stolen election in Zimbabwe. These workers were in clear defiance of former President Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' with respect to Zimbabwe's political crisis. Contrasting this moment of political bravery, subaltern violence against foreign Africans flared across South African cities since May 2008 with tacit support from municipalities, followed by

widespread deportation to contexts of severe deprivation and violence, not least in Zimbabwe. These quite different forms of popular agency have been too easily portrayed in overarching terms as evidence of pan-Africanism or xenophobia, rather than as articulations of subaltern critique in a divided landscape.

Durban's diverse residents have long jostled for rights to the city, in moments of conflict and conviviality (Breckenridge 2004). After apartheid, municipal employees, dockworkers, traders, fishermen and a variety of commuters continue to move through what remains of apartheid's geographies (Patman and Khan 2007). Durban continues to be

transformed by office and white flight to the north, industrial blight to the south, black township sprawl in the urban hinterland, and shack settlements in interstices like the buffer zones of former racial Group Areas (Figure 1). While racial segregation persists after a decade of democracy, alternative possibilities periodically threaten to break through an obstinate landscape. This paper centres on uses of photography in subaltern critique of the racialisation of populations and lived environs, even while both seem intractable.

My concerns are grounded in the neighbourhood of Wentworth, in the residential-industrial patchwork geography of the South Durban Industrial Basin (Figure 2). Close to the centre, South Durban is dominated by the Engen and SAPREF oil refineries (Engen is owned by Malaysian Petronas, SAPREF is a joint venture of Shell-SA and British Petroleum-SA), a pulp and paper mill (Mondi

Paper, unbundled from the Anglo-American mining and natural resource conglomerate), Durban Airport, and the industrial areas of Jacobs and Mobeni. Within this industrial valley lies the formerly racially designated Coloured¹ township of Wentworth, with a population of 27 000 (Statistics South Africa 2001).

Surrounding the Engen oil refinery, Wentworth's residents have witnessed industrial expansion in a time of job loss and deepened insecurity, and some have organised for limited-duration works and for environmental justice. While this activism in South Durban has been relatively well explored (Scott 1994; Peek 2002; Wiley *et al.* 2002; Desai 2002; Sparks 2005; Chari 2006; Barnett and Scott 2007) and can be related to broader social justice struggles after apartheid (Marais 1998; Desai 2002; Farred 2004a; Gibson 2006; Hart 2006; Pithouse 2006), we know far less about how living in this

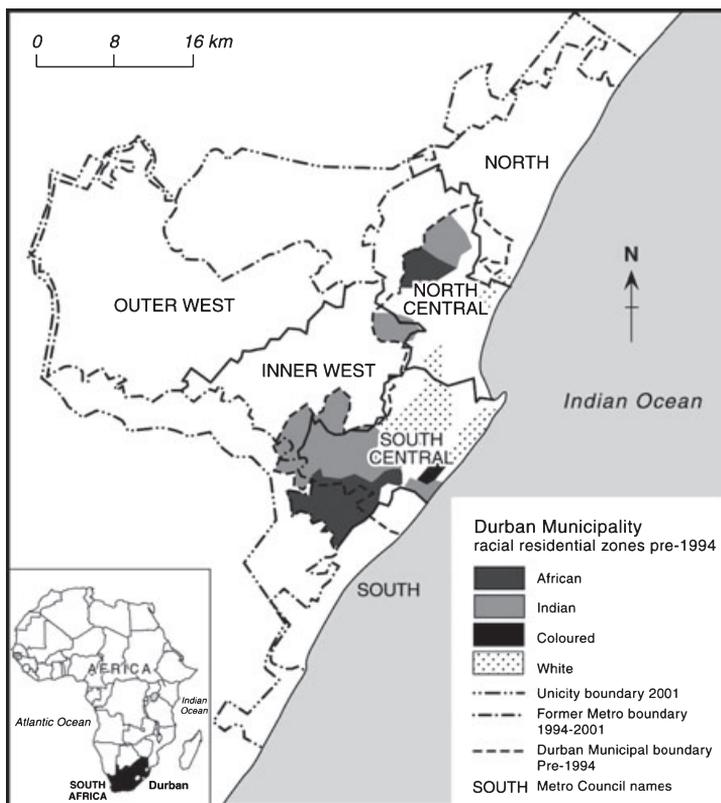


Figure 1 Durban Municipality with former residential zones and political boundary changes, 1994–2001

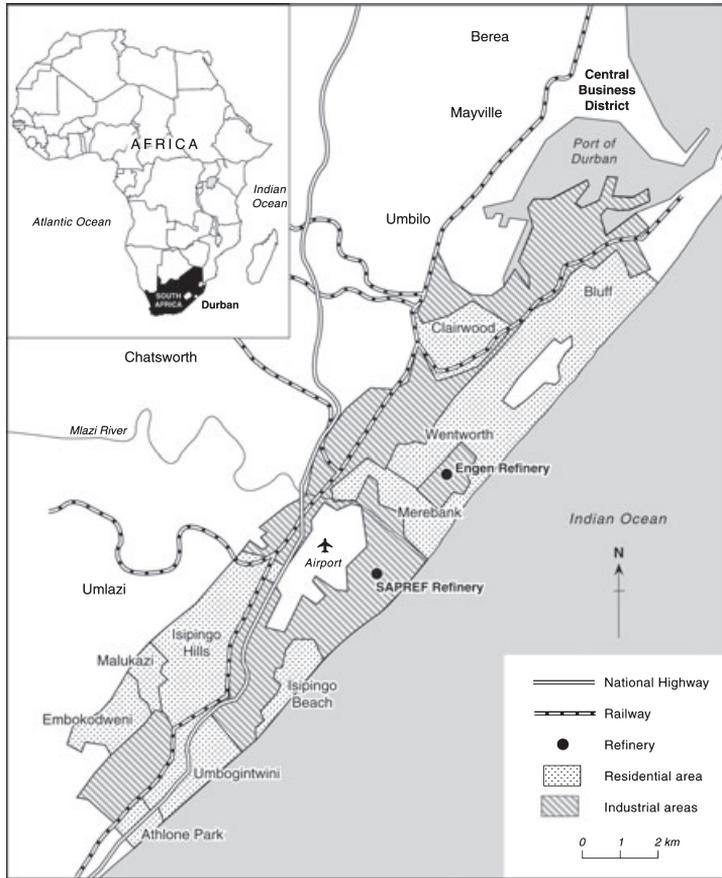


Figure 2 South Durban: an industrial-residential patchwork, 2009

toxic sink has prompted specific forms of frustration, critique and documentation. Since action and reflection are twin sides of struggle over value, in Graeber’s (2001) broad sense, my concern is with some of the means through which people reflect critically on their material situations as a precondition for collective action. In this respect, photography has proven to be a powerful means of critique, both for Wentworth’s residents and for anyone brought into solidarity with their aspirations for social justice.

Over multiple visits during the past six years, including interviews, conversations, observations and archival research on everyday life and politics, I have witnessed many forms of poverty and stigma in this community adjacent to an oil refinery. Some forms of suffering relate directly to long-

term exposure to petrochemical pollution, evidence of which has been routinely ignored and dismissed by the corporations and municipality. Other forms have to do with a sense of being isolated in a neighbourhood with seemingly intractable racial values and few opportunities for solidarity with other forms of racialised suffering in a divided city. While no longer officially defined by race, Wentworth is still seen from without and within as a rough, class-differentiated Coloured township with a substantial working-class population, contrasting with more affluent (formerly) Coloured areas in Durban.

On my initial trip to Wentworth in 2002, I thought that this was a subaltern population without a bourgeoisie to represent them. I have since found residents tremendously innovative in

using governmental mechanisms to leverage resources from corporate capital and local government, through what Chatterjee (2004) calls a 'politics of the governed'. Still shaped by histories of racialised government, residents express their feelings of marginality to the black majority in ways consistent with the ambiguities of racial discourse circulating through other Coloured populations (Farred 2001; Adhikari 2005; Erasmus 2001). It is important to give pause to consider what these feelings refer to. In explaining Colouredness, some, like Erasmus (2001, 16–17), find evidence of fluidity, creolisation and reflexivity in what Coloured does or rather might mean. Others, like Adhikari (2005, xii), find enduring themes in Coloured experience, in hopes for assimilation in dominant (white) society, fears of loss of racial status (or of assimilation to the majority), shame associated with the notion of racial impurity, and, most broadly, continued social marginality.

Holding on to insights on both stability and change, what is clear is that experiences of Coloured liminality and marginality have been structured by broader forces. Colonial fears of 'miscegenation' and loss of race-purity were fuelled across nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonialisms by anxieties about the degeneration and potential militancy of 'poor whites' (Stoler 2002, 36–8). Racial subjects were categorised with some room for variation and mobility in the era of early twentieth-century segregation, through the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903–5 and the Natives Representation Act of 1936 (Reddy 2001, 69; Ashforth 1990; Posel 2001), so much so that a person could have been Coloured through work and Native through customary marriage (Posel 2001, 54). The apartheid state sought to eliminate these contradictions through a battery of laws, including the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No. 55 of 1949, the Immorality Amendment Act No. 21 of 1950, the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, the Separate Amenities Act 29 of 1953, a series of Group Areas Acts in the 1950s and 1960s, and transformations in labour law. In practice, racial governmentality worked precisely by affording considerable room for reclassification and re-interpretation through everyday public opinion and racial 'common sense' (Posel 2001, 57).

This variability has had a profound influence in shaping concrete experiences of Coloured liminality and marginality (Reddy 2001; Jeppie 2001; du Pré 1994, 69–70; van der Horst 1976, 7; Patterson

1953, 16 and Appendix I). Norval (1996, 189) goes as far as to argue that the Coloured question was a persisting site of instability in 'the onto-theology of apartheid', a marker of 'irrepresentability' in apartheid national territoriality which led to widespread debate by the 1970s about Coloured representation in all senses of the term. These contradictions allowed some to seek to exploit the levers of the apartheid state, and others to paint Coloureds as intrinsically complicit with apartheid (Erasmus 2001, 18–19), often without differentiating strategies of survival from outright collaboration (Farred 2004b). In Chatterjee's (2004) terms, certain intermediaries could manipulate racialised government to secure resources for communities. Subaltern Coloureds in Wentworth had few effective mediators in the 1970s, when apartheid economy and society entered a period of prolonged crisis. Instead, Wentworth's residents turned inward, to churches, soccer, gangs and a bittersweet valorisation of locality. At a time of minimal representation in both civil and political society, as I will demonstrate, amateur photography provided tools for critical reflection within the terms and limits of this localism.

This paper is part of a broader historical ethnography of contemporary social and spatial justice struggle in South Durban, as prior moments of racial space making and opposition are recalled and revived in relation to the present. Here, I focus on photographic artefacts that work in different ways as tools of memory and forgetting in relation to Wentworth's specific marginality on the racial borderlands of the post-apartheid city. These photographs can tell us how people do or do not recall various moments of dispossession, and what possibilities remain for writing geography that does not lapse either into colonial-racial nostalgia or the staged promise of redemption. What happens if we take seriously the active qualities of photography not simply as visual interruptions in textual argument, but as useful tools for a critique of both past and present?

This attempt resonates with and extends geographical work on photography (Gregory 1994; Watts and Boal 1995; Schwartz and Ryan 1996; Rose 2003a; Schwartz and Ryan 2003). Ryan's (1997, 16) study of imperial photography argues that photographs emerged as powerful objects of both art and science in the Victorian world, and that they continue in general to index the problem of truth. Schwartz (2006, 65) explores the parallel histories of photography and archiving, and the

extent to which photographs were considered particularly reliable forms of documentation. Certain chapters in Schwartz and Ryan (2003) focus on the effects of landscape photography, as Nye (2003) approaches photographs of the Grand Canyon as an eternally empty landscape, erased of violent histories, pace Williams (1973). Foster (2003) explores early twentieth-century photography from the South African Railways and Harbours that brought into view a national space in the making. Images of the veldt from the carriage window – immense, legible, emptied of people – connected older notions of exploration with bourgeois interiority in a ‘white man’s country’.

Also drawing on railway photography, in Canada in the 1920s, to understand intersecting gazes in images of immigration, Osborne searches for agency in immigrants’ ‘sullen stare back into the lens of a camera’ (2003, 191). Since we can never know what they thought, this work forces attention on the indexical aspects of photographic signification. As Sekula puts it, ‘photographic “literacy” is learned’ (1982, 86). This point is taken on fruitfully in Gregory’s (2003, 225) argument that amateur photography in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became deeply masculinist in relation to the gaze of organised tourism. Under different conditions, I show how masculinist amateur photography can have rather a different political valence.

Another line of argument links amateur photography to domesticity, as, for instance, Rose (2003b) views white English women’s displays of family photographs as a spatial and temporal extension of domestic and maternal sentiment. While Rose suggests that race, class and gender are archived in these sites of memory, Blunt (2003) turns to a case in which what might be presumed to be archived is not. Blunt asks why photographic portraits of British colonial families taken at a highly ornate tomb, the Husainabad Imambara in Lucknow, India, just before the ‘Mutiny’ of 1857, make no use of Orientalist tropes in the backdrop. Indeed, these images make facile argument about exoticism and the imperial gaze impossible. What Blunt sees as familial portrayals of ‘placelessness’ might also be demonstrations of Victorian bourgeois interiority in India, on the eve of colonial revolution. The significance of these images lies both in what they portray and in what they scrupulously avoid, or what Stoler calls ‘a stubborn colonial aphasia’ (2002, 14). These papers question boundaries of exterior and

interior, home and the world, and the distribution of imagined spaces captured or elided in the photograph.

As a final note on this body of scholarship, little is made of the enlisting of photography, and portraiture in particular, in criminology, immigration or labour controls, or in the workings of racialised government, let alone in attempts at counterforensics, as I will suggest, pace Benjamin (1977 1992) and Watts (2008). To return to photographs as objects of both art and science, Sekula (1982, 94) argues that the question of which aspect predominates has to do with whether the context of reception is governed by sentiment or by an empiricism in which the photograph has the legal power of proof. The pseudo-legal and affective qualities of photographs shift through the cases I think within this paper, alongside their political instrumentality.

The photographs I address in this paper are archived in Durban’s Local History Museum: a photograph of Afrikaners leaving an Anglo-Boer War concentration camp in Wentworth in 1902, a pair of photographs of young people taken in the early 1980s in one corner of Wentworth, and a pair of photographs taken by a black political photographer in the 1980s and early 1990s. The first photograph had a clear documentary purpose, to demonstrate the British victors’ resolve to return civilians incarcerated during war back to their homes. Once archived, the photograph over the ensuing century becomes evidence of an irretrievably lost Afrikaner past, or what Williams calls an archaic cultural form:

wholly recognised as an element of the past, to be observed, to be examined, or even on occasion to be consciously ‘revived’, in a deliberately specializing way (1977, 122)

A specific form of colonial aphasia prevents these photographs from being seen otherwise, cloaking their potentially wider political significance.

The second set of photographs appears more amenable to becoming what Williams calls a residual cultural form, ‘formed in the past, but ... still active ... as an effective element of the present’ (1977, 122). I turn to the way in which these images were recently used in a museum exhibit on Wentworth’s violent past, and suggest how they might rather be interpreted. I approach the contemporary effectivity of these photographs through a third pair, by photographer Cedric Nunn. Nunn’s work, and his reflections on it, show how the normativity

of black political photography shifted during the turbulent 1980s. By pointing to broader questions of political literacy, memory and the politics of sentiment, this photograph clarifies how we might rather see the three sets of images in relation to each other. Post-apartheid photographic ideology makes interpretive space for these images to document persisting traces of dispossession, and of differentially raced and gendered sentiments of frustration and longing for justice today.

These sentiments are all too real for residents of Wentworth waiting for the transformation of a built environment that is slow to change. On this point, it is important to note that questions of space and spatial justice have been central to a long tradition of radical scholarship on South Africa, focusing on colonialism, racialised dispossession, segregation, apartheid planning and ongoing struggles for the city (Swanson 1968 1976; Legassick 1975; Mabin 1986; Maylam 1990 1995; Beinart and Dubow 1995; Breckenridge 2004; Fine and Rustonjee 1996; Maharaj 2004; Marais 1998; Scott 1994). What is clear is that the 'land question' has proven insufficient as an analytic for grasping the many scales and dimensions of socio-spatial inequality and subsistence crisis in contemporary South Africa (Hart 2002, 309–10). At an abstract level, Coronil (1997) shows how fetishisms of space, nature and land remain central to imperial ontologies, past and present. This is painfully concrete for neighbours of oil refineries who cannot, despite their best attempts at accruing scientific knowledge of pollution and ill-health, combat official dissimulation that cloaks the corporation's command of the landscape. As a consequence, to most residents in Wentworth, the refinery appears as nothing less than an obstinate imperial occupier.

While apartheid's built environments have been difficult to dislodge, what is important to note about post-apartheid South Africa is that there has been significant restructuring of state and capital, through a combination of capital flight, downsizing and political decentralisation (Marais 1998; Breckenridge 2004, 26). Job-shedding in the mines as well as in labour-intensive industry has made large sections of the erstwhile working-class dependent on crumbs of informal or atypical work along with social payments from the state. Post-apartheid surplus spaces and populations have become spaces of abandonment and gradual devaluation with few promises of re-entry into circuits of capital accumulation, particularly as South Africa slips into the

global recession. The dramatic rise of the political faction associated with current President Jacob Zuma since late 2007, culminating with his Presidency of the African National Congress (ANC) and of the country, marks a political rupture with the recent past, with unclear possibilities for social and spatial justice.

In this moment of profound uncertainty, what is clear is that widespread dissatisfaction with respect to the commodification of basic services and the insufficiency of access to housing, medicine, work and food continues. President Zuma's government owes its rise to power in large part through this disaffection, but, as I have suggested, we are only just getting a sense of the lived, sentient fabric of this frustration, and its emergent modes of critique. In light of this contemporary reality, I turn to prior moments at which people sought to document a complex mix of loss, frustration, nostalgia and resolve.

In the next section, I turn to a photographic remnant of an Anglo-Boer War concentration camp in Wentworth. I try to explain why this past is forgotten, and how the process of forgetting might resonate with the present. Following this, I turn to the circulation of photographs from a micro-neighbourhood in Wentworth called 'SANF'. I use local lore of the lanes of SANF to rethink this lost geography as a commons produced fleetingly after people were dispossessed and dumped into a Coloured township. The lure of redemption to such a narrative is quickly curtailed by a different archiving of these photographs through dominant discourses of stigma and criminality. Finally, I turn to the work of black political photography and film on Wentworth that takes this stigma and its many sentimental asides seriously and critically. Drawing lessons from this work, I suggest how we might return to photographs from various moments of the past relationally, to understand how, in one corner of contemporary South Africa, people continue to wait for justice despite uncertainty and official dissimulation, in a state of anticipatory frustration.

The camp, and forgetting

The form of a carceral space was apparent when I first walked through the gates of today's Merewent Cheshire Home in 2002. The gate, the courtyard and its low buildings, and the proximity to the railway line seemed to cohere as iconic of a camp.



Plate 1 First Boers Leaving Camps for Home

Source: Local History Museum, Durban

The concentration camp was indeed a British innovation in the Anglo-Boer War which, along with barbed wire, was used to conquer agrarian space with such a viciousness and rapidity that it was cause for serious consternation in the British Parliament (Netz 2004). While Afrikaner men were sent to prisoner of war camps, Afrikaner women and children were held in camps, first as humanitarian intervention, and then explicitly to break the resolve of the Boer woman, alleged backbone of the resistance.

The Merebank concentration camp was erected in the swampy lands of 1901 South Durban, followed by the Jacobs and Wentworth camps (Wohlberg 2002). An important socio-technical innovation in the newer camps was the use of wood and iron buildings – corrugated iron sheets covering a timber frame. These essentially prefabricated structures were crucial to the infrastructure of the British Empire, and they were particularly good for temporary prisons. Wood and iron construction allowed easy assembly and easy disassembly, to remove all traces of concentration camps at the end of the war. The Local History Museum in Durban contains a collection of photographs of Boer soldiers and their agrarian families, some standing outside farm houses that might then have been blown up or set alight. The photographers are clearly allied with

the victorious British, as they zoom in with the clear lenses of colonial superiority on fierce, Amazon-like Boer women on their embattled homesteads, or on Boer warriors making their final stand.

Plate 1 shows women and children leaving the Wentworth camp when it was dismantled after the war in 1902. Captioned ‘First Boers Leaving Camp for Home’, this photograph shows people in the distance standing or rushing towards a train that appears to have just steamed in. In the foreground, a group of children sit with their backs facing the photographer. It is unclear whether they are Boer or English, white or non-white, recent detainees or spectators. A lone figure at the centre of the picture looks back at the photographer from a distance, while all other faces are turned away, but there is no way to tell if this is a mark of defiance. The caption of this very ambiguous photograph – ‘First Boers Leaving Camp for Home’ – marks a cruel irony that for the camp’s inmates, homes had been raised and the Boer Republics lost.

One way to interpret this image might be through Benjamin’s comment on Atget’s photographs of deserted Parisian streets, that ‘he photographed them like scenes of a crime. The scene of a crime too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence’ (1977, 228). This is far more literally a photograph of the moment of

desertion from a crime scene, with wood and iron buildings that were easily demolished. Benjamin suggests provocatively that Atget's photograph 'acquires a hidden political significance' by bearing witness (1977, 228). Sekula (1984) questions this deadpan account, both for its conflation of nostalgia and affectless instrumentality in documentary photography, and for its valorisation of the nostalgic bohemian, Atget or Benjamin, who can resist the degradation of urban life. As a corrective, Sekula calls for social documentary photography that does not claim to be affectless, but which 'will frame the crime, the trial, and the system of justice and its official myths' (Sekula 1984, 57).

In fact, the camps, and reports detailing conditions therein, became the subject of fierce debate in Britain over war, patriotism and humanitarianism at the dawn of the twentieth century. Photographs such as this were part of the debate. For some, this image would have portrayed British humanitarianism towards captured Afrikaners, an adequate response to Victorian reformers like Emily Hobhouse who had been deeply concerned with hygiene, sanitation and suffering in the camps. Hobhouse had broken the news of the existence of camps to shocked British and world public opinion. The British Government prevented her return to South Africa, but created a committee of women headed by suffragist Millicent Fawcett to investigate conditions in the camps. While the Fawcett Commission corroborated Hobhouse's views, they did not reproduce her sentimental appeal to governmental and charitable support, particularly to ease the plight of children (Hobhouse 1902; Fisher 1971). As Hobhouse would later reflect, none of them documented black suffering and internment during what is now called the South African War. Elsewhere, following the insights of Keith Breckenridge (2001 2005 2008), I pose this moment as an extension to the colonial context of the concerns of trans-Atlantic Victorian progressives engaged in intervention, expertise and subjectivity with respect to the vitality of populations, or what Foucault (1980) calls 'biopolitics' (Chari 2008b).

As the photograph promises, the Boers left. The camp was dismantled. MacDonald's (2005) research on biopolitical control of Chinese indenture to Natal shows how nearby Jacobs camp was transformed into a depot to sequester indentured labourers on arrival, as part of the emerging carceral geography of the Southern African migrant labour system. The Jacobs camp became a model

for medical and sanitary supervision of Chinese indentured labourers, well appointed for its airy and ventilated compounds, as well as for its excellent railway connections at a remove from Durban (MacDonald 2005, 114). Breckenridge (2001, 10–11) shows how, on the Witwatersrand of the 1910s and 1920s, barbed wire and corrugated metal walls were used in the attempt to institute a panoptic system of fingerprinting and registration to control desertion from mines, a goal that would prove futile. While a failure in making disciplined bourgeois bodies, this exercise did demonstrate the state's lasting obsession with identifying and controlling unruly subjects, and of harnessing the means of incarceration to new spatial formations.

Constant breakdowns and failures would be intrinsic to the carceral projects of South Africa's long twentieth-century history of segregation and apartheid. Hence, Legassick's (1975, 261) argument that apartheid's racial townships were 'carefully segregated and police-controlled areas that resemble mining compounds on a large scale' is intended to be more than an argument about resemblance. When the Wentworth camp was dismantled, the wood and iron structures came down, and new military buildings took their place and form. The area around the camp became part of a bigger housing scheme for subalterns of the Royal Navy during World War II. The former camp became a training school for Indian policemen in apartheid's segregated police force. Today, part of it is a massive Pentecostal ministry, but the section that is still recognisably a camp is now a workshop for disabled black people from various parts of the country. This is the Merewent Cheshire Home. When I first visited this place, in 2002, I was shown various handicrafts and met some of the working inmates.

Today, their state subsidies have been cut, the workshop hires in labour from surrounding Wentworth, and the disabled inmates sit aimlessly in the yard. They told me that without work they have nothing to do. Like the forgotten population in 'The Arc' on the top of Austerville Drive, they live in what Biehl (2005) calls a state of social abandonment. The camp remains in a metaphorical sense. When I told an activist friend from Wentworth that I was interested in the concentration camp in the neighbourhood he had grown up in, he laughed in embarrassment. Like others, he had never heard of it.

What is to be explained here is not memory, but forgetting. To interrogate a site of forgetting

is to ask about why possible historical and practical connections are not made in the present, and how a photograph like 'First Boers Leaving Camp For Home' becomes an archaic object in a museum. A key explanation for forgetting those who suffered in the Boer camps is racially fragmented historical consciousness, a key remainder of a long century of segregation and apartheid. Given South Africa's racial fragmentation, it might be hard to imagine widespread black solidarity for Afrikaner dispossession, a foundational moment for the framing of the 'poor white' problem and for the proliferation of subsidies – infrastructure, welfare, housing and work being central – to the urban white working class. The stabilisation of the white working class and the exclusion of blacks underpinned the differential making of racial areas long before the making of apartheid's townships. Persisting racial geographies, along with segregated archival and historiographic conventions, make it implausible for a Boer prisoner-of-war camp in a recent Coloured township to become a site of memory. For now, the only memorialisation of Afrikaner dispossession in Wentworth is a forgotten plaque on Voortrekker Road.

If, as radical historians have shown in more intricate ways, the concentration camp, labour camp and township are linked in the history of segregation and apartheid, how do people in Wentworth express articulations, pace Hall (1980), between Wentworth and other spaces of confinement, whether neighbouring black townships, the old migrant workers' hostel next door in Mobeni, or zones of social abandonment like the Merewent Cheshire Home? From the biographies of workers I have collected over the past few years, it appears that Wentworth's male migrant careers were in some respects similar to those of other South African migrants, for instance in familial anxieties about what in isiXhosa is referred to as the *Itshipa*, the 'cheap' migrant absconder who neglects his familial responsibilities (White 2001, 468). The figure of the absconder recurs when Wentworth's residents narrate the experiences of industrial artisans on long-distance contracts at refineries in Sassolburg, Richards Bay, or Cape Town's Caltex, or indeed on engineering projects that have taken them across the continent. These men speak of sites of estrangement, risk and transgressive pleasure in ways that are shared with other South African migrants, and yet the neighbouring Mobeni Hostel

for migrant workers is viewed from Wentworth as an alien space with entirely separate African histories.

Talk within Wentworth about the most marginal residents, like those in the Merewent Cheshire Home, is shaped by an authoritative discourse that echoes Victorian expertise with respect to the Anglo-Boer War camps. Quite simply, people engaged in 'community work' tend at various points to differentiate the deserving from the undeserving poor (Chari 2008a). This is apparent in cues embodied in gestures, comportments and habits through which some people demonstrate their interest in moral and economic betterment as opposed to others purported to require such aid. In doing so, they unwittingly reference Victorian reformers who came to inspect conditions in the camps and reported through a metropolitan common sense in which the deserving and undeserving poor were neatly bifurcated. In Wentworth, however, the social class of reformer and potentially reformable are not that different, so there is an element of risk involved in drawing boundaries overtly or too clearly. Instead, people make sporadic moral distinctions, in an ongoing process of hedging against the collective stigma and sense of alienation posited on them as Wentworth Coloureds.

The forgetting of the camp in this sense reinforces a dual process of invisibility. On the one hand, people who live in the Arc or the Merewent Cheshire Home can be treated as internal outcasts within the neighbourhood of Wentworth, while many others can be characterised as part of the undeserving poor. On the other hand, a broader section of Wentworth's residents participate in this moral discourse to avoid collective confrontation with the ongoing life of a Coloured township after apartheid, which might resonate with other still-racialised post-apartheid geographies. Forgetting articulations with other carceral geographies over the history of twentieth-century South Africa – the hostel, the prison, the township – makes Wentworth seem different from other places, its Coloureds different from other populations, and its migrant workers different from other South African migrants. Forgetting the camp is part of a process of introversion that furthers the isolation of its residents from the post-apartheid present. The spatial form of the camp remains, but with no referential indicator, and Wentworth's Coloured subalterns retreat inward in a frustrated sense of being

besieged by the present. The archaic photograph of 'First Boers Leaving Camp for Home' cannot quite critique a dominant sensibility conveyed by residents in Wentworth of being subaltern Coloureds

stuck in place. A second set of photographs, however, provides a more surprising set of possibilities, reaching back to a more recent history of dispossession and place-making.



Plate 2 Untitled

Source: Private photographs on display at Cycle of Violence exhibition, KwaMuhle Museum, archived at the Local History Museum, Durban



Plate 3 Untitled

Source: Private photographs on display at Cycle of Violence exhibition, KwaMuhle Museum, archived at the Local History Museum, Durban

The lanes, and the mechanical reproduction of frustration

'SANF' is the acronym for former World War II military housing for the South African Naval Force. South of Austerville Drive, the barracks-style homes of SANF are arrayed down a gentle hillside. Though the lanes that used to run through them are now fenced in, the 'lanes of SANF' are recalled in specific ways through personal photographs and daily talk. I use two such images as a window into a prior moment of subaltern reclamation of the commons, and an ongoing process of waiting with particular sentiments in the remains of apartheid today. Importantly, these images ignore the refinery that protrudes at every inopportune scene on the other side of Wentworth, as if to announce that it rules the landscape and can pollute with impunity.

I encountered the images first in reproduction at an exhibition called 'The Cycle of Violence', at Durban's KwaMuhle Museum in late 2002. Curated by Wayne Tiffiin from Wentworth, the exhibition was laid out in four stages, exploring the making of Wentworth as a Coloured township out of older military housing stock, life under apartheid, the emergence of gangs and the community 'taking charge' with the Catholic Church in a prominent position. The script portrays forced removals to Wentworth through the Group Areas Act as pushing young men into a dystopian world of gangs, from which they are then seemingly redeemed by an alliance of church, police and 'community'. This much is standard fare in local talk about the causes of 'gangsterism' in the 1970s and 1980s.

The primary evidence of this common sense was a set of photographs of young boys and men hanging out, walking, wearing smart clothes and hats, and spending time in 'the lanes'. Several things could be said about the commentary, but what concerns me here is not the history of street gangs and neighbourhood politics, but how photographs were presented for their documentary qualities, as a body of evidence about the truth of gangs.

The curator managed to get residents to provide photographs of their youth in the micro-neighbourhood of SANF. I have heard mention of the lanes between semi-detached homes, running down the hillside to Adam's Shop. People speak about gangs ducking into the lanes to evade one another, or to escape the police. Others, for instance the members of the spectacular anti-apartheid underground cell

led by Robert McBride, speak of armed activists disappearing into the lanes as if into the safety of a labyrinth. Here, through photographs the curator accessed through private collections of men who grew up in SANF in the 1970s and 1980s, is an auto-ethnography that shows visually how young men represent being in the lanes.

Plate 2 shows a group of young men sitting by the side of a lane, sharing the frame equally with the lane itself. Plate 3 shows the lane in full use during a party in which not everyone seems to be posing for the photographer. There are hints in the set of photographs about the importance of body language and gender performance, in the way young women lean into men, or in a man's stance, hand in pocket, leg outstretched. Body language is indexical; it draws on shared social and historical associations. To a stranger, some photographs look respectable, as a group of young men pose with a baby in the lane, or as a family poses next to a fenced lane. Masculine style and fashion seem important. However, I want to give pause to the most important, yet uncommented, visual convention in this set of photographs, represented well by Plates 2 and 3, which is to frame people in such a way as to give the lanes their due. All the photographs either frame people in the lanes, or split the frame between people and the lanes. Clearly the lanes were important to the people being photographed in them, most but not all of whom were young men. Since an indexical sign only reveals existence, and says nothing about causality, we can infer little about what the lanes meant (Keane 2005). All we really know is that the lanes were important to document.

Several people I have interviewed recall the lanes of SANF while in the midst of describing an early period of settlement in Wentworth, when recently dispossessed people struggled to make a strange Coloured township their home. Peter McKenzie, says he only realised that he had to think of himself as Coloured when forced to move to a Coloured township, and that he rediscovered life in the gulleys:

There was a corner you could go to, always people you could talk to. There was help if you needed, to go and fuck someone up on the other side of town. You learnt about sex on the corner ... Everybody walks up and down cause it's too hot to stay inside, you got this continuous mobility of people going 'Ey, howzit? What happened yesterday?' ... The life of those gulleys was

also about being in Durban, and the heat of summer. You could not stay in your house. It was too crowded. It was too hot. So life was to be lived on the streets outside. This is where things are happening, this is where life goes by ... It's a parlour ... a communal space for those after work, and of course for those who weren't working. (Peter McKenzie, 31 July 2008, interview with Chari)

In these narratives, the lanes mark a reclamation of the commons after the violence of forced removals, and before the arrival of drug lords and the decline of regular jobs. 'The Cycle of Violence' exhibition concluded with the Catholic Church leading the community in the eradication of gangs, but what it did not say was that one of the mechanisms used was the privatisation of the lanes. Today, the old lanes are criss-crossed by private walls, with little gaps that mark a lost geography. The lanes do not appear in the archives of anti-apartheid activism, nor are they memorialised in lore. To many, they would appear illegitimate, insular, and possibly dangerous, gang turf. This is not to say that the photographs do not provide evidence of territorial gangs. Indeed they provide exactly the evidence lost in generic accounts of gangs as an inevitable consequence of forced removals, by showing that young people forged affiliations 'based on overlapping personal and territorial familiarity' (Glaser 1998, 726).

What is certain is that these were intimate spaces of masculine affirmation and stigma, injury and pride worth photographing and holding onto. The lanes may have been the kind of transitory site that include the qualities of what Lefebvre (2001) calls lived space: emergent, sensual and practical dimensions of space that might be appropriated for as long as is possible, but are not codified in dominant terms for easy translation. As auto-ethnography, these photographs demonstrate what Stewart calls 'the strange agency of fashioning aesthetic effects out of things that are always falling apart or already fallen into decay' (1996, 44). Stewart follows the ways in which people remember in visceral ways as they occupy the ruins of Appalachia. These insights remind us that every occupied landscape prompts varied poetics of subaltern counter-occupation.

In contrast to the mass of objects through which people remember in Stewart's ethnography, the lived space of the lanes is not remembered. This commons, however gendered and exclusionary, has been lost. What remains are photographs from personal albums, now catalogued with the material from the exhibition on 'The Cycle of Violence' in Durban's Local History Museum. The mechanical reproduction of photographs of the lanes suffer a doubled loss, first of a particular appropriated



Plate 4 Playing Soccer at Highbury Sports Ground, Wentworth 1995

Source: Cedric Nunn file, Local History Museum, Durban



Plate 5 Coloured Beach, Durban 1982

Source: Cedric Nunn file, Local History Museum, Durban

space, and secondly of the memory of appropriation. The few recollections I have found from people still in SANF are fragmented and inchoate, reflecting gendered sentiments about masculine style, low-level violence and attachment to neighbourhood. People rarely look at these photographs in their albums. The photographs have largely lost the aesthetic value they may have had for the people who posed for them in their youth.

Benjamin argues that in the process of mechanical reproduction 'the quality of [the work of art's] presence is always depreciated' (1977, 223). Mechanical reproduction challenges the object's authenticity – 'the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced' – but the loss of the object's 'aura' both shatters traditions and opens new creative possibilities (1977, 223). We can never know what the lanes meant or felt like, nor can these photographs bear witness to a lost history. That kind of nostalgia could easily become what Benjamin so sarcastically calls 'a processing of data in the Fascist sense' (1977, 220).

What creative possibilities now appear through the mechanical reproduction of the lanes, twice removed from personal albums in Wentworth as

well as from the exhibition on 'The Cycle of Violence'? Serially de-contextualised, the reproductions can now be seen not for what they represent but how and through what visual conventions they index spaces that are arrestingly intimate, and also potentially political. Bearing in mind Benjamin's (1977, 228) comment that Atget photographed deserted Parisian streets 'like scenes of a crime', and Sekula's (1984, 57) counter to the bohemian resisting urban change, how might we think differently about these photographs of young people and the space they photograph themselves in? In a subsequent essay, Benjamin returns to Atget to ask:

[I]s not every square inch of our cities the scene of a crime? Every passer-by a culprit? Is not the task of the photographer – descendant of the augurs and haruspices – to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty...? (1992, 256)

While the exhibit implied that these youth were sliding into 'gangsterism', the photographs make no explicit reference to guilt or innocence. If these amateur photographers revive archaic forms of divination or prophecy as 'descendants of the augurs and haruspices', they do not comment on the power of the refinery or the apartheid police, or on

the crimes they may have visited upon residents. However, the images remind of other lost spaces of association and assertion, past and present, such as the securitised space in front of the oil refinery that labour and environmental activists have tried to fight for as public space for protest. The lanes are important precisely because they do not reference belonging in SANF. Rather, they are a rare form of critical nostalgia that indexes many forms of longing to reclaim commons in the wake of widespread social crisis.

The KwaMuhle Museum exhibit also included photographic evidence taken by black professional photographers documenting everyday life in communities in the last years of apartheid, and what has come next. In the penultimate section, I turn to the work and insight of Peter McKenzie and Cedric Nunn, two men who spent the formative years of their childhood in and around Durban. Both came to reject their classification as Coloured, as they affiliated with the broad and diverse currents of the liberation movement as self-consciously black political photographers. Their work during and after apartheid provides some insight into the challenges of photography in relation to the crimes of state racism. McKenzie's work in particular also provides cues as to how specific sentiments might be productively read back through the images of the concentration camp as well as the lanes of SANF, to make them relevant to our fractured present.

The photographer as spatial critic

[P]rophesy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection: it is space, not time, that hides consequences from us. (John Berger, in Watts 1992, 115)

After spending several years working in a sugar mill as a young man, Cedric Nunn's interests expanded to include worker issues, the Black Consciousness Movement, and photography. He began to shoot with the young McKenzie, and was subsequently mentored by a key figure in South African black photography, Omar Badsha. Nunn recalls an early awareness of racism within and across communities, and also of thinking of photography as a way of providing people with a conception of how others lived across apartheid's racial divides. This was the ideology with which Nunn and a few black photographers sought to document everyday joys and privations in rural and urban South Africa. They were quite literally representing the

way in which, pace Berger, space hides apartheid's consequences.

Nunn took Plate 4 in Wentworth in 1995, just after the democratic elections. He uses iconic signs in clearly juxtaposing vitality beneath the industrial Goliath. Here, the photographer 'reveals guilt and points out the guilty' (Benjamin 1992, 256). This was the kind of image Nunn remembers being asked for by various political organisations in the 1980s. In contrast, Plate 5 captures textures and sentiments in a fragment of everyday life at Durban's 'Coloured Beach', frequented by people from Wentworth. Despite its aesthetic coherence, the photograph is replete with ambiguities: a mother's back to her sleeping baby, a sensual indeterminacy in the incomplete partner to the woman's intimacy, a packet of cigarettes tossed on the side, her back to the viewer, and only a little dog bothering to look towards the camera. Nunn's photographs of Wentworth in 1992–3 are often directed around themes of work and politics, but in Plate 5 there is an attention to personality, and to something other than iconic, perhaps a recognition that indexical signs cannot be interpreted by a stranger.

But is this also a crime scene, of the stolen innocence of female, (aspiring) middle-class leisure? In this vein, Hayes (2005, 534) writes on a photograph by Daniel Morolong of three African women at the beach in the city of East London, taken just before they would have been forced to move to the Ciskei Bantustan, that this image 'has the capacity to pull us into their history', to sense their 'loss of modernity' at the moment of apartheid's forced removals. Nunn's Coloured beach is from 1982–3, the moment at which the government offered Indians and Coloureds limited political voice in what would be called the Tricameral Parliament: a provocation against Africans that would launch the mass movement to boycott undemocratic 'elections' under the United Democratic Front. Against this turbulent background, Plate 5 is profoundly ambivalent. This photograph cannot be salvaged in the manner that Hayes (2005) suggests, as it could as easily be a portrait of apathy, just before Robert McBride's underground unit from Wentworth would blow up a café on the Durban beachfront, not far from Coloured Beach.

While Plate 4 was the kind of image that could be used by anti-apartheid activists as struggle photography, Plate 5 was not. Photographs such as this have made something of a comeback through a set

of shifts in the dominant semiotic ideology. Established photographers like Nunn, Paul Weinberg and Jenny Gordon have returned to images of everyday life taken decades earlier, which had been ignored by the dominant imperatives of anti-apartheid representational politics for which images of everyday life had to index the crime of apartheid (Weinberg 2002).

Peter McKenzie narrates his emergence into critical photography differently, but questions of crime and justice remain central. McKenzie thinks of himself as from Wentworth, though his family was forcibly moved there, and though he left the stifling atmosphere as soon as he could. He spoke to me about how the 'corner' and 'gully' were where everything happened for him and his friends. He conveys the heat, claustrophobia and frustration that could only be dealt with through a collective appropriation of public space, but he also inevitably felt the need to leave this commons when it proved too provincial and limiting. When he returned a few years later, he began a long career as an activist photographer. He says that when he had the choice of critical tools, he picked up a camera rather than an AK-47 machine gun. While he has returned periodically to Wentworth, he continues to be profoundly ambivalent about the mixture of frustration, racism and marginality that characterises a place he once called home. His 2005 exhibition 'Vying Posie' means going home, a nagging question, but expressed in his intimate vernacular (McKenzie 2005).

McKenzie's 2007 documentary film with Sylvie Peyre, 'What Kind?' (something like 'What's Up?'), returns quite literally to the scene of a crime. The film centres on five of McKenzie's friends who received exemplary prison sentences in 1983 for the alleged murder of a young man from rival gang territory. After serving prison terms ranging from nine to 13 years, they began coming out after 1994. To this day, they claim their innocence. Peter 'Piet' Usher repeats ruefully on film, his hat covering his eyes, 'we paid the time, they did the crime'. McKenzie uses the coincidence of their release and the advent of democracy to question perceptions of freedom in the new South Africa.

One stream in the film is hand-held video footage from a moving car, a passerby's montage of daily life, with industrial smokestacks and barbed wire as backdrop. This is interspersed with McKenzie's black-and-white photographs taken over the years. Recognisable community leaders interject

with expert opinion about forced removals, gangs, youth and racism, in ways not unlike the narrative in 'The Cycle of Violence', or their Victorian predecessors.

These key personalities make a striking contrast with McKenzie's often diffident friends. While the experts speak in measured tones and standard English, looking directly at the camera, the former gangsters speak in slang, and in fragments, either at their shebeen (informal bar) or as they walk down the street. Terrence 'Terrible T's' Fynn laughs, playfully showing the camera the tattoos all over his body while he jokes, 'When I waaied in [went to prison] I was a young lightie [youngster], check I'm like a drawing board!' The music of the shebeen sets a scene that is not meant to be a staged interview. These men do not have the onus of having to explain anything but show that they are marked by their past. They recount details about the scene of the crime in 1983 and of their unheard alibis, with some general statement of the times. When they get to the present, they despair.

Perhaps the most reflective figure in the film, 'Piet' Usher, insists that young men like him didn't have a choice but to associate with gangs. He speaks softly about his innocence, first as someone who was 'made like a gangster', then as someone who was wrongfully arrested:

I didn't even see the guy who died on that particular day, but I was put in this case because of the enemy; the enemy ... I don't know if they feared me or what but they just put me in this case, in fact all of us.

What is profoundly unclear, perhaps necessarily so given the layers of the accusation, is who exactly the enemy is. The lack of a recognisable anti-apartheid idiom among these men brings an anti-climactic character to their response to the film's brief, to reflect on their release in the time of transition. Terrence Fynn says nothing has changed, repeating the stock racialised statements that others around them make.

All that time in jail, nothing's changed ... Ey, but even like now, it was still like the same, never mind things is changing and whatwhat, it's like the same my bru. Like me I don't even vote, because the witous ['white men'] were doing things that time, the darkie-ous [black Africans] are doing the same thing. I'll tell you waaruit ['straight out'], It's darkie for darky, witou for witou, charou [Indian] for charou my bru.

What he does not say is bruinou [Coloured] for bruinou. Despite repeating the same racial common

sense as the experts in the film, none of these young men reference Coloured community leaders in Wentworth as their representatives in any sense. Usher, the most discerning figure in the film, appears to express the collective feelings of the five men. His words are measured, but heavy with remorse:

We tried to put our past behind us ... but you can see what's happening to us, the people is bring our past forward. We're marked with our past, for things what we never even do.

The film does not adjudicate on the guilt or innocence of the five men. In this sense, it leaves a forensic exercise aside. However, it does give the men space to present themselves as living with the effects of their sentence, and with the injustice of not being able to prove their innocence. They never name the enemy, but they do indict apartheid's police and juridical apparatus as much as the rival gang across the street, and the forces that drove them collectively to gangsterism. Unlike the experts, who explain the complex relations linking poverty, gangs and racism, they display their despair, showing off their prison tattoos, as well as their emotional scars. There is a visceral, sentimental critique with all the ambiguities of Stoler's notion of intimate injuries replete with 'hypermasculinity, guilt, alienation, rage at and acceptance of a system that nurtures violence' (2002, 40). While some photographers shy away from these sentiments so as not to reproduce stereotypes about Wentworth, gangs and Coloureds, Nunn and McKenzie take on their representational risks directly. As photographers allied but not subservient to dominant currents of anti-apartheid thought, they present a critical tradition engaged with the experiences of racialised dispossession but also of aspirations for common life.

Conclusion

In posing photographers as our modern diviners, Benjamin opens a Pandora's box. Space hides as much as it reveals inequalities, and photographic representations mirror these possibilities. Indeed, when photographers think beyond the given – to engage in prophecy in some form – they have insisted that their work is interpretive, not mere mechanical reproduction (Ranci re 2009, 8). The same can be said of all users of photographs. Several critics, geographers among them, have pointed

to ways in which photographs continue to index, rather than resolve, problems of truth and documentation (Ryan 1997; Schwartz 2006). The pseudo-legal and affective aspects of photographs also shift and change, but not in arbitrary ways.

A materialist approach to photographs requires attention to context, and to the critical visual traditions through which images might be seen (Sekula 1982). The photography of Nunn and McKenzie allows us to see the images in this paper relationally, through a specific tradition of photographic literacy that sought to see through the infrastructure of apartheid, and its many intimate costs. Precisely after the end of apartheid, these photographers' ways of seeing provide tools to revisit the images considered in this paper for both their documentary and aesthetic qualities, as traces of differentiated and episodic histories of dispossession and of embodied sentiments of loss and injustice.

The photograph titled 'First Boers Leaving Camp for Home' lies in a file with 'Anglo-Boer War Photographs' at Durban's Local History Museum. Images like this have been used as evidence of a founding moment of imperial humanitarianism, South African whiteness and urban segregation. As historical evidence, this image was an archaic cultural form, stuck safely in the past (Williams 1977, 122). We cannot know what the inmates might have imagined waiting for as they waited for the trains, except that they would not have anticipated 'returning home', as the caption proposes. The photograph captures the many aspects of this moment of danger at the launch of a century of segregation, as colonial aphasia and the neglect of the black majority would rest on the alleged defence of this recently dispossessed class of 'poor whites'.

Many decades later, amateur photographs of 'the lanes' work as 'residual' cultural forms (Williams 1977, 122), secured to exhibit the sociology of 'gangsterism' in Wentworth. As a consequence of the exhibition, copies of private photographs are now archived in the Local History Museum as sociological, not historical data. Apart from the curator, there are no mediators to legislate whether these images are evidence of wayward youth, or of stolen intimacies in the heat of summer. They might record fleeting moments of appropriation and belonging, but they certainly mark in their form the importance of affect when pseudo-legal documentation is not enough. In the absence of effective mediators for Wentworth's

Coloured youth in the 1970s, amateur photography may have found an important niche. Renewed feelings of frustration and marginality, coupled with official dissimulation from the oil refineries and local government, make the critical sentiments in the photographs relevant to Wentworth's present.

Despite constant breakdown and transgression, lives under apartheid were profoundly shaped by its carceral geographies. Most South Africans today continue to inhabit a fragmented and discontinuous landscape, often despite their most cosmopolitan intentions. The remains of the past appear as differently temporalised artefacts, such as the varied photographs I attend to in this paper. Viewed through the critical sentiments of Nunn and McKenzie's work, these images have the power to challenge Wentworth's introversion and internal racism, to open these tendencies to comparison and trenchant critique. I have suggested that solidarity across these moments is limited by segregated historical consciousness produced by differentiated means of life. What photographs can do is to shock the viewer into recognising resemblances and connections. They remind us of lost solidarities between camp inmates who wait for trains as they wait for justice, not for a murderous century created in their alleged defence, and township youth, many decades later, who enjoy their 'lanes', not their criminalisation and rescue by church and state. They remind us that those who wait for justice today in the ruins of apartheid might have allies elsewhere, everywhere.

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Note

- 1 Coloured is a racial category of the apartheid state still used in everyday talk. I treat all such racial categories as historical and colloquial terms, while I use black in a generic sense as substitutable with non-white, realising that this concept has its own historical, political and sociological presumptions, the most important of which is of internationalist anti-racism.

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