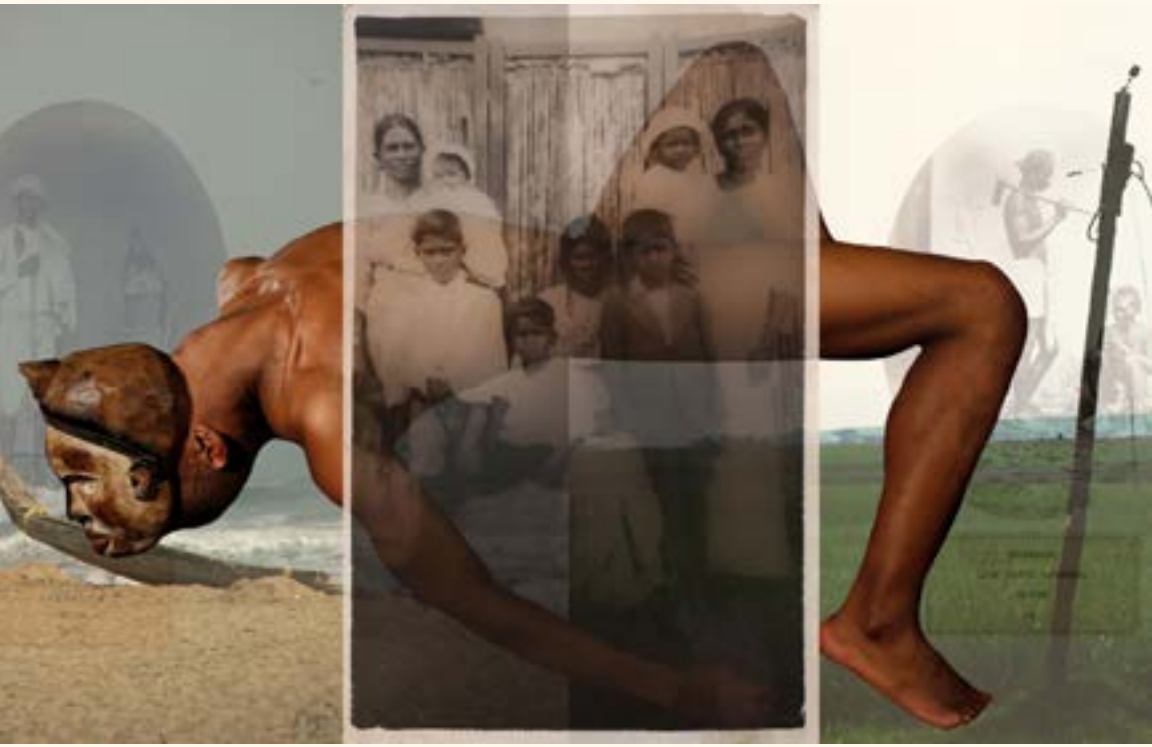
JORDACHE A.
ELLAPEN

Afro-Indian Femininities and
the Queer Limits of
South African Blackness

Indenture Aesthetics



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JORDACHE A. ELLAPEN

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for my mother,
VELLIAMMAH ELLAPEN
(née Moodley)
and
my father,
REUBEN ELLAPEN

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Preface: Mother, Memory, Movement

Indenture Aesthetics: Afro-Indian Femininities and the Queer Limits of South African Blackness is a book about the feminine, the vulnerable, and the feminized, those who unsettle the authentic and normative parameters of the postapartheid nation and sanctioned formations of postapartheid blackness. This is a book about my mother, an Afro-Indian woman, who lived her life in rural KwaZulu-Natal, one generation removed from the sugarcane plantations and coal mines on which her parents were indentured as a cheap and expendable labor force. Traversing the sugarcane plantations and coal mines, rural and urban geographies, overlapping regimes of coercive labor practices and migration routes across Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, while troubling the common sense of race and racial categories in South Africa, *Indenture Aesthetics* is my attempt to articulate a positionality—an Afro-Indian positionality—that may possibly reframe how we understand Afro-Indian relations and South African blackness in a context where identitarian categories have coalesced and sedimented in dangerous ways. This limits the possibilities for us to imagine our collective possible futures, in a context like South Africa, where the future has largely been foreclosed, particularly for those I categorize as the *new black/ened Others*.

Much of the redrafting of *Indenture Aesthetics* has been informed by three major events: first, the death of my mother in 2019; second, the civil unrest that erupted in the country in 2021, which affected rural and semirural communities in KwaZulu-Natal, along the Indian Ocean; and third, two major storms in the first half of 2022 (April 11 and May 21 and 22) that resulted in major flooding, destruction, and the displacement and deaths of hundreds of people—black African and Afro-Indian—in oThongathi (Tongaat) and neighboring towns along the Indian Ocean. In oThongathi, the floods destroyed

the water supply infrastructure, leaving hundreds of people without clean, drinkable water for almost a year. Together with regular electricity cuts—load shedding—and the collapse of various municipalities, rural and small-town South Africa reveals a different understanding of black and blackened life that rubs against the linear and progressive narrative of freedom we have come to associate with postapartheid South Africa. At first, the three events above may seem disconnected. I begin with my mother because of her positionality as an Afro-Indian woman whose life trajectory was shaped by indentureship and colonial apartheid. Indentured women were the most vulnerable within this coercive labor system, and for many descendants of indentured laborers, vulnerability and violation continue to be their collective inheritance. This is a story that has not been fully told in South Africa.

Throughout this book, I use indentureship as a hinge to understand overlapping forms of racialized labor and gendered forms of violence, connecting the past, present, and future while troubling South African racial categories to understand the deep entanglements between those who continue to live in the afterlife of colonial apartheid. The communities that were most affected by the civil unrest in 2021 and the flooding in 2022 were both black African and Afro-Indian communities living in rural and semirural small towns along the Indian Ocean. For those living in rural and small-town South Africa, the hegemonic narrative of South African freedom constantly rubs against underdevelopment, state abandonment, decay, and deterioration. People live in precarious conditions, but they continue to create livable lives alongside conditions of absolute vulnerability and violation. From rural Indianness to rural and small-town South Africa, *Indenture Aesthetics* demonstrates the ways in which vulnerability and violation not only thread together the past, present, and future but also provide a lens to understand why a new politics of solidarity is urgently needed in South Africa; one organized around the feminine, the femininized, and the vulnerable; one that prioritizes coalitional building across difference.

In 2019, my mother transitioned after a debilitating illness. I was able to take an emergency leave from the university to spend my mother's last days with her. This was the first time I spent a substantial amount of time in oThongathi, a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal nestled within expansive sugarcane plantations and often referred to as the last bastion of indentureship in Southern Africa. This time I spent with my mother taught me a lot about love, care, compassion, and the complex ways in which life and death rub against each other. We knew that we were now waiting for my mother to transition. She knew she was dying. She was not unfamiliar with death. Being the youngest girl of ten siblings, she was called upon constantly to take care of sick and dying relatives on both her

side and my father's side of the family. Having spent a lot of time trying to understand her experiences as a young girl growing up under colonial apartheid, I also understood how she was intimately familiar with death and violence. This was part of life growing up in the immediate afterlife of indentureship.

I remember visits to the hospital, the numerous doctor visits, and the many invasive procedures she had to undergo before her diagnosis. I remember how she slowly became smaller and smaller as the illness progressed and ravaged her body. I cooked for her, and we spent afternoons chatting. I remember the urgency with which she recalled moments in her life and experiences that she may have still been reckoning with as her life cycle was coming to an end. She spoke with fondness about growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal (Van Reenen's Pass and Ladysmith) with her nine siblings and their families on a farm that included horses, sheep, goats, and chickens. She talked about her father, a Natal-born Indian, and her mother, who was three years old when she arrived with her parents from British India on a coolie ship. My grandmother's parents were indentured in a coal mine in the interior of Natal. Her mother refused to speak English, preferring her mother tongue, Tamil. She did not romanticize life in rural KwaZulu-Natal. She spoke openly about gendered and racialized forms of violence within her own family and community. She revealed family secrets, and as she reckoned with her life, recognizing that her own life cycle was coming to an end, she spoke about the limited choices she had as an Indian woman one generation removed from indentureship and firmly located within the violence of apartheid. My mother understood the precariousness of life and understood futurity as solely located in the present. Living in rural KwaZulu-Natal, my parents' experiences of Indianness (Afro-Indianness) iterated differently than urban Indianness. Indenture history and its afterlives were visible all around us. We did not have the luxury of escaping this history or pretending that we had overcome this experience.

From a young age, my mother and I bonded over her storytelling abilities. When I returned home during the university holidays, we stayed up late at night as she narrated stories of her life and experiences. She had the ability to remember intricate details and scenes from the time she was a child. What I remember most fondly is our shared interest in photography and the many hours we spent talking about her photoarchive and trying to make sense of its meanings. As her illness worsened, our afternoon conversations became shorter. I watched as my mother slowly deteriorated and shrunk before my eyes. One of the most difficult things in life is watching one's parent die and waiting for death to release them from a body that had become no longer viable to host human life. When my mother passed on, my experience of time changed. In

the immediate days after her passing, time slowed down and sometimes sped up. Her death disoriented me. I felt like I was orbiting in space and had no control. I felt unhinged.

I returned numerous times to the following quote from Saidiya Hartman's book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2008b, 85): "To lose your mother was to be denied your kin, country, identity." When my mother transitioned, I felt a deep sense of disconnection from South Africa. I recognized how my Africanness was intimately tethered to my mother (to the "maternal feminine"), everything she embodied, and the histories she evoked as she navigated the everyday. Every time I returned to Tongaat, which was yearly before the COVID-19 pandemic, I returned to my mother, to the home-space of the Afro-Indian family in the afterlife of indentureship. To return to my mother was to return home, to Africa. When I began this project, I did not understand what impact the feminine would have on this book. My very notion of an Afro-Indian positionality is only possible through the feminine.

Two years after my mother's death, on July 9, 2021, civil unrest swept swiftly across South Africa. The unrest was sparked by the imprisonment of Jacob Zuma, ex-president of South Africa, who defied the Constitutional Court's order to testify at the Zondo Commission. The Zondo Commission was set up in 2018 to investigate "allegations of state capture, corruption, fraud, and other allegations in the public sector" during Zuma's presidency from 2009 to 2018. Charged with contempt of court, Zuma was sentenced to fifteen months in prison. Zuma's defiance was viewed as a "politically motivated smear campaign" against the Constitutional Court, the commission, and the judiciary. Judge Khampepe accused Zuma of attempting to "corrode the legitimacy of the Constitutional Court." She is quoted as saying: "No person is above the law. . . . An act of defiance in respect of a direct judicial order has the potential to precipitate a constitutional crisis" (McKenzie, Cassidy, and Picheta 2021).

The unrest was mostly concentrated in two provinces—KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma's home province, and Gauteng, the economic center of the country. People in these communities, both Indian and black African, along the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal from Durban to Stanger, felt abandoned by the state and an ineffective police force which quickly abdicated its responsibilities. For the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African National Defence Force deployed 25,000 soldiers to restore law and order. It was estimated that the looting and destruction of property and businesses in KwaZulu-Natal over a period of approximately eight days would impact the local economy by about ZAR twenty billion. The death toll stood at 337 in KwaZulu-Natal and

Gauteng. This event in modern South African history will go down as a failed insurrection.

What was initially viewed as an insurrection began to reveal the tears in South African society and the failures of our postapartheid "freedom dreams" (Kelly 2003). As I watched social media footage of the looting, it was apparent that those participating in these protests were from the black underclass, a class of South Africans whose experience of freedom differs significantly from that of the black political elite, those who have *arrived* through material and economic success. In one social media video circulating out of Tongaat, I watched as a man carried an entire butchered sheep on his shoulders, running through the crowd. These scenes revealed the desperate conditions of black life. The state has since tried to criminalize these protestors and has also embarked on a campaign to recover stolen goods. However, criminalization of the poor and destitute is an act of violence and violation against those most vulnerable, and it does not tackle the problem of economic injustice. These protestors were described as having *nothing to lose*, and their targeting of grocery, furniture, appliance, and clothing stores became symbolic of the African National Congress (ANC)'s failure to deliver on its promise of a better life for all.

The civil unrest erupted in a context where the unemployment rate rose to 32.6 percent in the first quarter of 2021, which is an average for the nation. In terms of racial demographics, by the fourth quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate was as follows: black African 39.1 percent, Indian/Asian 27.5 percent, and white 8.8 percent. The youth unemployment rate between fifteen- and twenty-four-year-olds was at a record high of 63.3 percent. According to an article published in *The Conversation* on September 7, 2021, by Cecil Mlatsheni and Lauren Graham (2021), the black African youth unemployment rate is the worst at 57 percent.[1] The protests revealed in very explicit ways the effects of the ANC's neoliberal economic policies exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, which have seen the closures of businesses and large-scale unemployment. What has been referred to as an insurrection begins to look very different once we focus on the economic inequalities that continue to shape the experiences of the majority black South African population.

As I watched these scenes of protests, I feared that the narrative would develop into a familiar one of Afro-Indian antagonisms. As I discuss in the introduction, from the colonial-apartheid era to the present, the Indian community has been represented as an economic success story by the media and popular representations. Indeed, among the Indian community, like the black African community, an elite and middle class has always existed in South Africa, obscuring intracommunal fissures of class within the Afro-Indian community.

KZN is the Zulu Kingdom, and because of British colonialism, the province has the highest density of Indians (people of Indian origin) in South Africa and outside of India. Many Indians from these communities along the Indian Ocean are descendants of indentured laborers. The civil unrest unfolded in a context where Indian and black African communities have long lived and worked alongside each other. However, because of the specificities of apartheid social engineering, the class distinction between these communities is significantly stark. This became an opportune context for some political parties to reignite long-existing and strategically crafted antagonisms between these two communities, which have been racialized in opposition to each other since the colonial era.

Political parties like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who have, since their inception, stoked anti-Indian sentiment in the province, saw this as an opportunity to organize a march against "racist Indians." On Twitter, the hashtag #IndiansMustFall painted a picture of a homogenous and racist Indian community alien to South Africa and intent on exploiting the livelihood of black Africans. On Twitter, members from other racialized communities in South Africa, like the coloured community, used this as an opportunity to distance themselves from Indians, anxiously asserting that they are not *like* the Indians.

The most vitriolic comments were made by Jackie Shandu, labeled by the media as a "Phoenix massacre activist." A recorded video of Shandu at a protest rally chanting "one Indian, one bullet" has been well-circulated on social media. In an interview with *Good News Community Radio*, Shandu made comments that provide insight into the complexities of how the Indian is seen and perceived in contemporary South Africa. According to him, Indians are a foreign element who have outstayed their welcome. He accuses Indians of taking advantage of black Africans who "have been good hosts." He conflates all Indians as business owners who are taking away jobs and resources from black Africans. He attributes "crime and drug abuse and those kinds of things" to Indian businesses in black African areas. According to Shandu's logic, Indian business interests, rather than the effects of the ANC's neoliberal economic policies and white monopoly capital, have strategically impoverished the black community. However, it is also important to note that all these factors work together and that business owners outside of white monopoly capital also exploit the poor in South Africa. In the video, Shandu argues that it is better to die than "be *terrorized and harassed by a foreign minority*."[2] The interview ends with Shandu asserting that "this country belongs to its *African native majority* alone." He evokes Idi Amin's expulsion of Indians from Uganda as an example

of how the state should deal with the Indian problem. Shandu asserts that black Africans are the rightful "owners of the land," whereas Indians are *foreigners*, *parasites*, and *bloodsuckers*. The most recent emergence of Afro-Indian antagonism echoes early twentieth-century "race riots" between Indian and black African communities in KwaZulu-Natal. Both repeat the "unresolved questions of land and dwelling" (Hansen 2012, 102) that can be traced to the colonial era. Anxieties over the Indians emerge during times of crisis when issues of belonging and citizenship are framed around the question of who is truly entitled to enjoy the nation in the postapartheid period. Such sentiments have also circulated through popular culture. In his 2022 song AmaNdiya ("Indians"), the internationally renowned songwriter and artist Mbongeni Ngema chastises "Indians for their alleged unwillingness to accept Africans as equals, for resisting change, being interested only in making money, and being exploitative" (Vahed and Desai 2010a, 3). The song expresses fear over the increasing visibility of Indian and Pakistani immigrants post-1994, urging the Zulu nation ("strong men") to stand up against Indians (3). Interestingly, for Ngema, the *Indian* is a homogenous category. He does not differentiate between the Afro-Indian and more recent immigrants from the subcontinent. According to him, all Indians are foreign and alien Other.[3]

In the postapartheid period, the state's neoliberal economic policies created a new black middle class (across the categories Indian, coloured, and black African), replicating the problem of settler capital. The economic success of this middle class relies on the distinct demarcation between *those whose lives matter* and *those who are disposable and irrelevant* to the state's linear narrative of progress. The civil unrest once again revealed how economic and material hardships are felt most by the majority black African population, whose experience of what it means to be black is not the same as the Zumas, the Mbekis, the Ramaphosas, and the Mandelas—the black political elite and those aligned with them. The current civil unrest is one example where there is evidence that Zuma's children (part of the black elite) and those aligned with him used social media strategically to rile up the masses against the country's highest court. The protests explicitly indicate the ways in which blackness has shifted in South Africa. Today, blackness is no longer a site of collective political organization through which freedom was envisioned during the antiapartheid struggle. Blackness today is increasingly a signifier of the authentic national subject determined through autochthonous parameters that coalesce around various normativities related to class, gender, sexuality, and region. This marks a significant shift from radical oppositional political frameworks, like Black

Consciousness and nonracialism, that emerged during the antiapartheid struggle as a site where apartheid-era categories of race were challenged by the disenfranchised.

The recurring scenes of Afro-Indian antagonism reinscribe the relationship between black Africans and Indians as a "strange story of mutual nonrecognition," characterized by a "willed incomprehension derived from a lack of desire, intimacy, and respect" (Hansen 2012, 97). The civil unrest revealed the painful ways in which Indianness and blackness rub against each other in a context where apartheid social engineering strategically obscured the deep entanglements between black African and Indian communities. This "willed incomprehension" rests on the recurring trope of the Indian as the colonial middleman and the specificities of race-making in South Africa that position the Indian as alien and foreign Other. Indeed, *Indenture Aesthetics* troubles this homogenization of the Indian within the South African imaginary.

Then, on April 11, 2022, a storm raged through the KwaZulu-Natal Province, affecting the very same towns and villages that were most impacted by the civil unrest in 2021. These areas experienced the "heaviest rains in 60 years," destroying bridges, roads, houses, and other infrastructures. In June 2022, it was estimated that these communities would not have access to tap water for the next six to twelve months. The everydayness of those who live in this area, and in other areas across South Africa with similar, and sometimes even more desperate conditions, is characterized by hardship and struggle for the most basic amenities like drinkable water, electricity, and infrastructure. Largely abandoned by the state and the local municipalities, my sister describes it as a "forgotten ghost community." Such forgotten ghost communities and towns are common across the country, particularly in rural and semirural areas. For them, freedom is elusive and yet to arrive. The storms, together with the civil unrest, are powerful reminders that the majority of South Africans exist outside the linear narrative of progress and development associated with the newness of the new South African nation. These people live in desperate conditions. Their everydayness is structured around a different temporality, which could be harnessed as an alternative site of coalitional building in contemporary South Africa.

This book is an attempt to rethink and reimagine the racial categories Indian and black in South Africa by reorientating the reader to the various contours of Southern African blackness. Through the Afro-Indian positionality and that of the new black/ened Others, *Indenture Aesthetics* disrupts the narrative of postapartheid freedom by returning to indentureship and its afterlives as an intervention into black class respectability politics, which mani-

fests through authentic blackness and the conflation of the Indian experience with that of the trader/merchant middleman class. Both these positionalities, as this book demonstrates, are unable to account for the specificities of Afro-Indianness as a particular iteration of South African blackness.

What can we learn about our entangled pasts, presents, and futures outside racial-identitarian categories, if we attune ourselves to the lives of those forgotten, rendered disposable and abject, and constructed as vulnerable by the state? What do these black and blackened people and these spaces (rural, semirural, and township spaces) reveal about embodied practices of freedom that rub against the liberation associated with, and foreclosed by, postapartheid? What can we learn differently about freedom, solidarity, and coalition-building when we prioritize the feminine and feminized, the vulnerable and violated?

This is the context out of which *Indenture Aesthetics* emerges. *Indenture Aesthetics* is committed to reimagining Afro-Indian relations and Southern African blackness by curating an archive of aesthetic practices that juxtaposes texts created by Afro-Indian and South African black artists. As a curatorial project, this method of juxtapositioning slowly erodes the hegemonic narrative of "mutual non-recognition" that has, for too long, structured Afro-Indian relations. Through the aesthetic realm, I trace lines of embodied desire between Afro-Indian and South African black communities to illuminate our deeply entangled pasts, presents, and futures as a practice of "imagining otherwise" (Chuh 2003; Crawley 2016). I am convinced that as a political project, the labor of imagining otherwise can only emerge from the positionality of those subjects who find themselves outside of the nation's linear narrative of progress and development. The urgency of this moment requires us to willingly abdicate the desire for the nation and agitate for forms of relationalities that are structured around a politics of (un)belonging as an urgent praxis of collective survival.

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Blackness is still to be thought.

—KEGURO MACHARIA,

Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora

Introduction

AFRO-NORMATIVITY, INDENTURE AESTHETICS, AND SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKNESS

In a self-portrait titled *I Am Kali, I Am Black*, the artist Reshma Chhiba uses photography to complicate the relationship between (South African) Indianness and (South African) blackness by evoking the deviant and transgressive feminine energies of the Indian goddess Kali. *I Am Kali, I Am Black* is a medium close-up shot that frames the artist from just above the head to below the shoulders while drawing attention to her facial expressions. Chhiba stands in front of a white background gazing directly into the camera. The right half of her face is strategically blackened out by her use of lighting, while the left half is visible. Her hair is disheveled and extends from her head outward and outside of the photographic frame. In a disrespectful manner, her tongue points downward from her mouth as she gazes defiantly into the camera.

I Am Kali, I Am Black was part of a multimedia and multisited exhibition titled *The Two Talking Yonis*, imagined as a conversation between Chhiba and curator Nontobeko Ntombela. The exhibition opened on August 8, 2013, one

FIGURE 1.1. Reshma Chhiba, *I Am Kali, I Am Black*. Courtesy of the artist.

day before Women's Day, an official South African public holiday that honors approximately twenty thousand women across the racial spectrum who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 to protest the "pass laws." These laws required all *black* people to apply for a government-issued document to travel within the country. The artist located the portrait *I Am Kali, I Am Black* inside a spectacular twelve-foot walk-in *yoni*, titled "Come Inside." Yoni is a Sanskrit word that can be loosely translated to mean vulva, vagina, womb, and "sacred portal." The installation dominated the entrance to Constitution Hill, which houses the country's Constitutional Court, formed soon after the first democratic elections in 1994. As the highest court in the country, it governs all matters related to "the interpretation, protection, and enforcement of the constitution."[1] The 1996 Constitution of South Africa, recognized as one of the most liberal in the world, enshrines the protection of gender and sexual rights, disability rights, and minority group rights under the larger purview of human rights protection. Importantly, Constitution Hill was the site of a women's prison built in 1910. Prominent antiapartheid political activists, including Fatima Meer, Albertina Luthuli, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, as well as hundreds of other women, were incarcerated on this site.

Designed to be haunting and disruptive, Chhiba described the installation as a "screaming vagina . . . revolting against this space . . . mocking this space, by laughing at it." Chhiba's screaming yoni mocks the 1996 Constitution for its inability to protect women and children from gender-based violence, which includes rape, murder, femicide, uxoricide, and filicide. Through an aesthetic of female/feminine excess, Chhiba renders hypervisible the vulnerability and violation of South African women as a provocative critique of the limits of freedom in postapartheid South Africa. *I Am Kali, I Am Black* also critiques the shifting nature of South African blackness, mocking the repetition of colonial-apartheid logics of race in the postapartheid period. Chhiba unsettles the "visual regimes of colonial [-apartheid] modernity" (Gopinath 2018, 7) as it continues to organize South African sensibilities of race. Her portrait evokes the identification-style photograph—an instrument of state bureaucracy central to the governmentality of race in South Africa—used to "[document] and [catalogue]" physical differences (Masondo 2019, 79). Linked to the administrative and social control of native and colonized populations, the identification photo consolidated and overdetermined racial categorizations, rendering the racial hierarchy "common sense" to South Africans (Posel 2001). Indeed, South Africans live in the afterlife of the visual regimes of colonial-apartheid modernity, which continue to "determine what we see, how we see, and how we are seen" (Gopinath 2018, 7).

By titling the portrait *I Am Kali, I Am Black*, Chhiba troubles the boundaries between the racial categories black and Indian, evoking Black Consciousness (BC). Black Consciousness emerged as a politicized blackness during the antiapartheid struggle to include black Africans, Indians, and coloureds, those *blackened* by the colonial-apartheid state. Chhiba writes: Kali is "*Indian in her blackness and black in her Indianness*," referencing the deep historical entanglements between Indianness, blackness, and Africanness, obscured across time and space through the colonial governmentality of race in South Africa (2017, 48). Through her Afro-Indian aesthetic, Chhiba mocks the consolidation of postapartheid blackness through the abjection of Indians (and coloureds). This abjection secures the boundaries of the proper/authentic national black subject of the new nation.

Indeed, Chhiba draws on Kali's association with female/feminine excess and deviance to disrupt the boundaries between the racial-identitarian categories Indian and black and to trouble the binary and hierarchical relationship between Indianness and blackness. Chhiba offers a provocative representation of Afro-Indianness forged firmly within South African blackness. The artist gestures toward the importance of reimagining Afro-Indian intimacies in a context where particular performances of blackness consolidate as normative and nativist, repeating a longer history that constructs the Indian as alien to South Africa. I begin with *I Am Kali, I Am Black* because Chhiba engages the visual field to critique the shifting nature of South African blackness, while drawing on Kali's transgressive feminine energies to reimagine Afro-Indian relationalities through the aesthetic realm. *Indenture Aesthetics* is my attempt at theorizing and imagining an Afro-Indian positionality as an iteration of South African blackness, which functions as a site of reorientation to understand Afro-Indian intimacies and blackness otherwise.[2]

Indenture Aesthetics uses the term *Afro-Indian* in various ways. First, Afro-Indian refers to the indentured class and their descendants (those who continue to live in the afterlife of indentureship), troubling the homogenous racial-identitarian category Indian. This category has for a long time been conflated with that of the merchant/trader class. Afro-Indian works against this misrecognition and reminds us that the longer histories of slavery in the Cape and indentureship in Natal have emplaced the Afro-Indian differently within South African society. This emplacement necessitates an engagement with South African blackness. Even though all South African Indians (across the merchant class and indentured class) were blackened through colonial-apartheid state policies, it is important to recognize that the blackening of the trader class was significantly different from the blackening of the indentured

class; and the emplacement of the trader class was also significantly different from the emplacement of the indentured class.[3] Second, Afro-Indian refers to the relationalities between Afro-Indian and black African communities, invisibilized through colonial-apartheid social engineering and racialization. Last, I use Afro-Indian not as an identitarian category but as a positionality, a site of reorientation through which we can reimagine our interconnected pasts, presents, and futures otherwise.

In this book, I work with, through, and against colonial-apartheid-era racial categories—Indian, African, coloured—because of the enduring impact it has on social life in South Africa. It is important to recognize that we, South Africans, continue to understand ourselves, our relationships with one another, and our relationship to the state through these racial categories. Within the colonial-apartheid racial hierarchy, coloureds and Indians occupied a similar positionality. However, *Indenture Aesthetics* does not engage coloured artists and perspectives for various reasons. First, coloureds occupy a different positionality within South African society, and their relationship to blackness (and whiteness) also manifests differently from Afro-Indian relations to blackness (and whiteness.) Second, unlike the Indian, the coloured is not framed as a foreign-Other through political and popular discourse, even though coloureds are abjected from postapartheid nativist articulations of blackness. Last, ongoing political calls to shift the category coloured from a racial identity to an ethnic identity (Khoi or Griqua) would refigure coloured relations to land, indigeneity, and nativism as a mode of postapartheid belonging. This would require a different contextualization than this book is able to provide. My hope is that my concept of indenture aesthetics, structured around the importance of organizing and imagining across difference, would be capacious enough for other researchers to engage the intimacies between coloured blackness and Afro-Indian blackness.[4]

Indenture Aesthetics curates an archive of aesthetic practices in order to understand the relationship between cultural politics and political culture in South Africa. It examines how Afro-Indian and black African women and queer artists turn to the aesthetic realm to examine the (queer) limits of freedom after 1994. By illuminating the aesthetic practices of Afro-Indian and black women and queer artists, *Indenture Aesthetics* seeks to displace the normative subject across the sedimented racial categories Indian and black to articulate, through a radical politics of difference, forms of intimacies that disrupt the desire for belonging to the nation. Indeed, within the South African context, Indianness is racially queer to the black-white colonial-apartheid racial hierarchy. *Indenture Aesthetics* carefully teases open the racial-identitarian

category Indian, as it manifests within the South African imaginary, to reveal indentureship as the queer limit of South African Indianness. Thus, this book locates indentureship, and its afterlives, as a form of feminization that situates Afro-Indianness as always already queer. Harnessing the queer potential of indentureship as a world-making practice, I develop a queer (femme) analytic that is central to this book's queer curatorial mandate and queer-reading practice. In order to imagine otherwise, *Indenture Aesthetics* confounds what we think we know about race in South Africa by foregrounding various forms of feminization, femininities, and femme-ness, which unsettle and render pliable/queer the categories black, Indian, and African. This book examines how the aesthetic has become a site of critique and one of endless possibilities to understand the emergence of "new political vernaculars" (Macharia 2016). These "new political vernaculars" emerge out of various positionalities of vulnerability and feminization/femininity to destabilize the narrative of newness, queering the linear and progressive narrative of freedom associated with the postapartheid era.

I Am Kali, I Am Black informs two main points this book makes in relation to the aesthetic. First, I am interested in how the feminine, and its different manifestations, is central to the emergence of new aesthetic practices that become the vehicle of possibility to imagine otherwise. Second, I am interested in how the queer-aesthetic practices of Afro-Indian and black African artists, when curated together, illuminate our deeply entangled pasts, presents, and futures. Indeed, to begin with a portrait that evokes the *Indianness of blackness* and the *blackness of Indianness* is to locate this project firmly within the imperfect philosophies of Black Consciousness (BC). BC guides the ways in which I seek to rethink an ethical politics of relationality through the aesthetic and what that could possibly look like in contemporary South Africa.

In this book, I argue that it is within the realm of the aesthetic that we can trace, imagine, and rearticulate forms of intimacies between Afro-Indianness, Africanness, and blackness. In a context where the fixity of racial-identitarian categories repeats the colonial-apartheid hierarchy of race/being, the aesthetic functions as a hinge through which we can comprehend the deep intimacies between the categories black, Afro-Indian, and African otherwise. *Indenture Aesthetics* curates an archive that rubs against hegemonic and normative ways of seeing, knowing, and sensing race and belonging, agitating for an alternative politic organized around those deviant, transgressive, wild, and unruly subjects who disrupt and exceed the boundaries of the black nation and the authentic black subject. In a context where the hegemonic narrative of "mutual non-recognition" has for too long structured Afro-Indian relations, I turn to

the aesthetic realm to trace lines of embodied desire between Afro-Indian and South African black communities to reorientate our understanding of race and to illuminate our deeply entangled pasts, presents, and futures. I coin the concept of *indenture aesthetics* to understand how race, sexuality, desire, pleasure, and violence become entangled with one another to open up possibilities to read and imagine South African blackness and Afro-Indiannness *otherwise* (Chuh 2003; Crawley 2016).

History and Context

Slavery, Indentureship, and the Making of Race in South Africa

In order to understand the role of the aesthetic and its relationship to the political, it is necessary to delineate some specifics of South African history as it relates to race and racialization, focusing specifically on the relationship between the racial categories Indian and black. It is also necessary to sketch some of the specifics of Afro-Indian intimacies as they relate to the making of South African blackness. Indians/Asians were relocated to Southern Africa through distinct but overlapping imperial processes: a combined Dutch and British colonial system of slavery that lasted from 1653 to 1852 in the Cape and a system of British indenture labor that began in 1860 and ended in 1911 in Natal. As colonial expansion and settlement progressed in the Cape, the need for cheap and exploitable labor arose in a context where it was illegal to enslave Indigenous peoples—the Khoi and the San. Initially, Cape slavery was tightly controlled by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company) that, "excluded from regions such as Dahomey and Guinea by the Dutch West India Company," sought out alternative markets in the Indian Ocean World. Scholar Gabeba Baderoon (2014, 8) writes: "The Dutch exploited nodes of an existing slave trade established by the Portuguese, and people were captured as slaves from Mozambique, Madagascar, India, and territories in South-East Asia." From the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, the composition of the enslaved population in the Cape shifted significantly. While in the "seventeenth century, most slaves were from Madagascar . . . early in the [eighteenth] century, almost half of the slaves were from India and Sri Lanka. Twenty percent were brought to the Cape via Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). Toward the end of the VOC's reign, the number of slaves from Asia had declined considerably as they were replaced by men and women from Mozambique" (Young 2017, 14). Lasting approximately two centuries, the enslaved population in the Cape numbered "more than 60 000 people"

(Baderoon 2014, 8) and "encompassed a large variety of languages, cultures, religions, and even phenotype" (Young 2017, 154).[5]

After the abolition of slavery in 1834, the British devised an alternative coercive labor system called "indentureship," designed to replace the transatlantic slave trade. In colonial Natal, Indian indentured workers did not replace enslaved Africans on plantations like in the Americas or in Mauritius.[6] The British introduced the indentured labor force into a context where the Zulus were "relatively secure in [their] tribal economy" and resisted marketing their labor to white colonists (Meer et al. 1980, 1). Over a period of fifty-one years, 152, 641 Indians were relocated to Natal and indentured mostly to sugarcane plantations as well as to coal mines, tea plantations, and European-owned estates in the Natal Midlands.[7] Initially, indenture contracts were for a three-year period, but by 1864 indenture contracts were extended to a five-year period. After ten years, indentured workers shifted to "free" Indian status. In this context, free signals a shift in status from being bound to the indenture contract to being able to sell one's labor independently within the colony. Some "free" Indians continued to work on plantations, while others sought work in coal mines and on railways. Many attempted to live and work independently as fishermen, market gardeners, and agriculturalists. However, determined to restrict the importation and settlement of indentured workers, Natal colonists introduced Act 17 of 1895. This act imposed a three-pound tax on Indians designed to limit new Indian immigration and restrict the movement of "free" Indians within Southern Africa. The three-pound tax forced many ex-indentured workers to reindenture, ensuring the subordinate and temporary position of the indentured class in South Africa.

In the early 1870s, "passenger" Indians began to immigrate to Natal. Passenger Indians paid their own way to the colony and were a merchant/trader class (a colonial middleman class) mainly from Gujarat and Mauritius. Even though the colonists (colonial-apartheid state) made no distinction between the passenger Indian class and the indentured class, it is undeniable that the "Indianness of the trader . . . was [and continues to be] distinct from the Indianness of the worker" (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000, 14). Indeed, the racialization of the indentured Indian through coercive labor practices disrupts the homogenization of these two groups into a singular racial type based on phenotype and geography. As indentured Indians moved from the official system of indentureship to other forms of labor like market gardening, for instance (overdetermined as free labor), the colonial-apartheid state invisibilized the differences between the indentured class and the passenger Indian class. Within the South African imaginary, all Indians occupy the positionality of the merchant/trader

class and have become a homogenous racial-ethnic category. Through this class positionality, the colonial-apartheid state positioned the Indian as a buffer population between the European settler community and local African communities, which continues to fuel Afro-Indian antagonisms. Within this context, the abstract figure of the Indian functions as a scapegoat where anxieties over economic exploitation, of which the "unresolved question over land and dwelling" is but one element, are displaced.

In nineteenth-century colonial Natal, Europeans referred to Indians as the "Asiatic Menace." The Indian, a category conflated with that of the colonial middleman class, threatened the positionality of Europeans because they were perceived as "competing for space, trade, and political influence" within "colonial society" (Swanson 1983, 404). Indians were denied full access to political rights, which the merchant class viewed as essential to protecting and developing their capitalist interests. The trader class, unlike the indentured laborer, was able to "claim civil and economic rights as British subjects" and was "exempt from class legislation affecting Natives, Coloured persons or members of uncivilized races" (404). As passenger and "free" Indians settled across small towns and cities, anti-Indian sentiment was also driven by competition over space. Since class could not be used to restrict Indian settlement, Europeans framed Indian "habits and customs" as being "totally at variance with and repugnant to those of Europeans" (406–7), thus racializing Indians as a foreign element in the country with nothing in "common with the established South African community."

It is important to note that African voices are largely absent from early colonial archives (mid- to late nineteenth century); thus we cannot know for certain black African impressions of early Indian indentured workers. By the early twentieth century, the rift between the Indian community and the African middle class was well noted by John Dube, founder of the newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natali* and the first president of the ANC. In an article titled "The Indian Invasion," he wrote, "We know by sad experience how beneath our very eyes our children's bread is taken by these Asiatics: how whatever earnings we derive from Europeans go to swell the purses of these strangers, with whom we seem obliged to trade" (quoted in Hughes 2007, 163). In colonial Natal, Europeans and Africans blamed Indians for all sorts of social ills.[8] For many Africans, the Indian was seen as an "extension of foreign domination." Within Indian communities, it is not uncommon for black Africans to be referred to as *ravans*, a reference to the South Indian god Ravana. This derogatory term "captures the sense of the African world as alien, distant, threatening, violent and peopled by strong and violent sexual predators who are consumed by uncontrolled

bodily drive" (Hansen 2012, 98). By this stage, Africans had adopted colonial attitudes toward the Indians and vice versa. The structures of colonial rule and racialization did not allow any form of recognition and desire between these two communities. However, within this context of deep racial fractures, Afro-Indian political solidarities began to emerge.[9]

With the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, Indians, homogenized as an undifferentiated group, posed a problem to the national question and the creation of a "white man's land" (Peberdy 2009, 32–33). In 1925, D. F. Malan, Minister of the Interior, declared, "The Indians, as a race in this country, is an alien element in the population" (quoted in Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000, 15). Mobilizing their rights as subjects of the British Empire, "many merchants, in an attempt to negotiate colonial hierarchies, reinforced their supposed superiority to native Africans" (Young 2017, 149). Scholars like Soske (2017) and Young have noted that within this context, "Indianness came to have meaning through ritual enactments of an imaginary culture in need of protection from the corrosive forces of modernity. These imaginary investments in Indianness did not reproduce India in various locations across time and space. Instead, they resulted in coerced performances of racialization based on difference from blackness and loss of cultural authenticity" (Young 2017, 170).

When the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came into power in 1948, one of their main objectives was "to produce fixed, stable, uniform, criteria for racial classification which would then be binding across all spheres of a person's life" (Posel 2001, 98). The colonial-apartheid state solidified categories of race mostly through the Population Registration Act of 1950.[10] With the Act of 1950, the state invested in producing a new national population register and identity documents that recorded a person's race as either white, coloured, or Native. Initially, Indian was a subcategory of coloured, a category reserved for mixed-race people that still functions as a racial category in contemporary South Africa. Indians were never imagined as a permanent population and therefore the Population Registration Act of 1950 did not initially include Indian/Asian as a distinct racial category. The racial category "Asian" emerged after South Africa became a republic in 1961 (Dlamini 2020, 21).[11] Descendants of Cape slaves were incorporated into the category coloured, flattening "South Africa's complex entanglement with Indian and South Atlantic Ocean histories" (Erasmus 2017, 6). In 1951, the Afrikaner Nationalist Party began to use the category "Bantu" instead of "Native." In 1978, this category changed to "black" (Erasmus 2012, 1). The colonial and apartheid state's use of Native, Bantu, and black referred to those who were "members of the aboriginal races or tribes of Africa

south of the Equator" (Posel 2001, 90).[12] *Indenture Aesthetics* follows many South African scholars' preference not to capitalize "black," "white," and "coloured." Scholars like Asanda Ngoasheng (2021, 147) write, "This is a political statement to remind us that race is a 'social construct.'" While recognizing that there are a heterogeneity of positions regarding the use of *Black* or *black* in the United States, in this book, when referring to US Blackness, I use *Black* for two reasons. First, to make a distinction between South African blackness and US Blackness, and second, to respect US Black scholars who argue that this is a form of empowerment and respect that "honors Black experiences and speak with moral clarity about racism."[13]

Blackening and Racialization

The complex histories of coercive labor practices, indicative of overlapping regimes of racialized labor, denaturalize today's racial-identitarian categories. In the 1860s, when indentured workers arrived in Natal, the racial-identitarian categories Indian, African, and black were not firmly established categories. However, practices of racialization were already embedded in colonial society since the era of slavery in the Cape. During this period, a racial hierarchy began to congeal around a "color prejudice," subscribed to by "'respectable' whites," which "articulated a link between the inherent deviancy of the 'non-white'/less human and systems of coercive labor" (Young 2017, 6). Within this context, "whiteness became essential to the category of the human, [while] slavery and other forms of coerced labor began to be inextricable from notions of blackness" (6). Coercive labor practices like slavery and the different manifestations of indentureship that stretch from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries are forms of blackening that are unaccountable for within our contemporary understandings of racial formations in South Africa. My notion of blackening evokes the "deathscapes" (Mohabir 2019) associated with racialized labor and their afterlives. In the context of indentureship, the *kala pani* (black waters) has become an important metaphor to evoke the "deathscapes" of indentureship.

The journey across the *kala pani* reveals a process of blackening—a form of abjectification that is a defining feature of a labor system that not only was designed to replace transatlantic slavery, but which also saw the Indian as replaceable, disposable, and in large supply. Within the Indian Ocean World as well as the Caribbean and the Pacific, on ships and plantations, slavery and indentureship imbricated and rubbed against each other. My concept of indentureship and its afterlives draws on Saidiya Hartman's notion of the afterlife of

slavery. *Indenture Aesthetics* does not argue that indentureship and its afterlives are a substitute for or new version of slavery and its afterlives. The question of whether indentureship is another form of slavery continues to be debated and is not something taken up in this book.[14] *Given the context in which the indenture system developed, indentureship is part of the afterlife of slavery*. Not only were the indentured described by colonial authorities as "of a black color" (Anderson 2009, 99) thus entering a colonial racial schema; to enter the indenture system was to enter a blackened world characterized by high mortality rates, various forms of sexual and physical violence on board coolie ships, and deadly work conditions on plantations, coal mines, and tea estates. Meer (1969, 11) notes that by "contracting to Natal, Indian workers had unwittingly chosen one of the worst conditions of labour under the indenture system."

However, these deathscapes cannot be neatly assigned to the past; they repeat into present forms of coercive labor systems like the extensive African migrant labor system that continues to blacken those who work on sugarcane plantations and coal, gold, and platinum mines, as well as the extensive labor system associated with the wine industry in the Cape. This is the afterlife of colonial apartheid, which recognizes that those black/ened by the state continue to live within the logics of the plantation, troubling the racial-identitarian categories and the hierarchy of race designed to keep us in place.

Blackening also evokes the colonial-apartheid racial hierarchy and the way labor (extraction and exploitation) has historically positioned some communities at the bottom of this racial schema while recognizing that practices of racialization shift across time and space. I am drawn to the notion of blackening because it shifts the ways in which Indianness and blackness manifest within the South African imaginary as incommensurable racial-identitarian categories. Furthermore, the homogenization of all Indians into one category, that of the merchant/trader class, was a deliberate strategy employed by the colonial-apartheid state to fracture Afro-Indian relations by positioning the Indians in the middle of the colonial hierarchy. This occurred through state-practices/modes of governmentality as well as within the community, informed by a deep desire for respectability and belonging, submerging the history and afterlife of indentureship. Blackening evokes the death-worlds of the sugarcane and tea plantations, the coal mines, and other spaces where Indians and black Africans from Southern Africa were indentured across colonial Natal, reduced to units of labor, and rendered exploitable and replaceable. Drawing on Black studies scholars, to be blackened is to be written out of history by "being rendered abject," to evoke Darieck Scott (2010, 38). Blackening provides a framework

to understand the slippery forms of intimacies formed between displaced and disenfranchised groups as they coagulate/d within the death-worlds of labor. These forms of intimacies exceed and explode the project of colonial-apartheid racialization. Blackening shifts how we understand South African blackness by troubling its nativist underpinnings. Thus, my notion of blackening also encompasses the lives and experiences of those I categorize as the new black/ened Others. Blackening reveals where the boundaries between the new black/ened Others bleed and collapse into one another, illuminating the material and psychic conditions that position the new black/ened Others—those rendered intimate strangers through the project of racialization—within a similar structural frame. Within this context, my notion of blackening functions as a site of reorientation, queering the nativist and (hetero)normative iterations of postapartheid blackness redirecting us to those who exist outside of the time-space of the nation.

The specificities of Cape slavery, indicative of the deep entanglements between different forms of coercive labor practices criss-crossing the Indian Ocean and the African continent, have a particular valence in this region that is significantly different from the Atlantic World. In the Indian Ocean World, systems of coercive labor practices like slavery, indentureship, Indigenous labor, and other forms of migrant labor overlap across time and space.[15] Young (2017, 158) argues that in the context of coercive labor systems, the distinction between "free" (indentureship as it applies to both the Khoikhoi during the era of slavery and Indian indenture labor in the nineteenth century) and "unfree"/slave labor is difficult to maintain. She argues that "all labor relations at various moments combine aspects of freedom and unfreedom. Slavery and indenture repeat the same performances on the same plantations across time and space; both systems, in their deployment of similar narratives of race, consent and force, function as surrogates for imperial labor."

Throughout this book, I foreground the iterative nature of indentureship that connects various coercive labor practices across time and space as they unfold on plantations in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean Worlds. The iterative nature of indentureship also evokes contemporary forms of coercive labor practices, like African migrant labor, which continue to construct blackened lives within the death-worlds of capital.[16] Thus, indentureship functions as a hinge through which we can understand how older forms of racialization are entangled with more contemporary forms of postapartheid racialization.[17]

Indenture Aesthetics evokes the notion of blackening to complicate and shift how we have been conditioned through the colonial-apartheid state to see and imagine the Indian in South Africa. I argue that indentureship was a form of

blackening that is unaccountable for within contemporary formations of race in South Africa. Indentureship both stretches and reveals the queer limit of South African blackness (Richardson 2013). My notion of blackening reveals the making of Afro-Indianness within the longue durée of Southern African history that can be traced back to the era of slavery. Cape slavery exceeds the association between modern understandings of Blackness (via the Black Atlantic) and the notion of a "universal transparent . . . black body" (Young 2017, 7). The entanglements that occurred between Indianness/Asianness, blackness, and indigeneity during the era of slavery in the Cape unsettles contemporary categories of race in South Africa as routed through the Atlantic World and sedimented by the colonial-apartheid state.

Given this context, *Indenture Aesthetics* traces various aesthetic forms of blackening that queer the hetero-nativist parameters of South African blackness and Indianness to rethink the positionality of the Afro-Indian in relationship to South African blackness. For example, in Sharlene Khan's *when the moon waxes red*, the journey through the death-worlds of indentureship and its afterlives is a form of blackening that aesthetically engages the sugarcane plantations as well as scenes of gendered violence and death. In FAKA's performance art practice, blackening manifests as an aesthetic of bodily *excess* and *waste* through which the artists explore the violent expulsion of black queerness from the boundaries of authentic blackness. As a critique of temporality, memory, and collective national amnesia, Mohau Modisakeng mobilizes an aesthetic of blackening that references the death-world of the coal mining industry. In his photographic and video art, Modisakeng focuses on the mine worker who exists outside of nation-time. Through an aesthetic of blackening, Modisakeng emphasizes the vulnerability and fungibility of the black body in the afterlife of colonial apartheid. As a critique of Afro-normativity, blackening directs us to the afterlives of colonial-indenture-apartheid, disrupting the linear and progress narrative of development associated with the post apartheid.

From Black Consciousness to the Afro-Normative

By evoking the notion of blackening within this larger context of colonial-apartheid space-making, *Indenture Aesthetics* reactivates Bantu Stephen Biko's notion of Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness emerged as a radical oppositional political framework during the antiapartheid struggle, which attempted to redefine blackness, drawing attention to the constructed nature of race. BC emerged within the context of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), formed in 1969. SASO initially used the word *non-white* but shifted

to a new framing of blackness, recognizing that the term *non-white* reiterated the positionality of black people as nonsubjects, while centering "whiteness as the aspired-to-norm" (Desai 2015, 39). In December 1971, Biko defined black people as "those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in . . . South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations. This definition illustrates to us a number of things: 1. Being black is not a matter of pigmentation—being *black is a reflection of a mental attitude*. 2. Merely by describing yourself as black, you have started on a road toward emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being" (my emphasis, Biko 2017, 52).

By redefining blackness, the movement shifted understandings of blackness from an ontological given (pigmentation) to an understanding of blackness situated within the everyday lived experiences (phenomenology) of the three oppressed racial groups, black Africans, Indians, and coloureds. BC shifted the meaning of blackness from a "racial designation" into "an antiracist political subjectivity" (Rassool 2019, 364). BC organized the oppressed "around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin" in order to "rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude" (Biko 1971). BC recognized that white supremacy blackened the lives of those under the weight of colonial power. Biko referred to Africans, coloureds, and Indians as the "various segments of the black community" (Biko 2017, 56). It is important to note that Biko's definition of blackness is a politicized blackness that rubbed against the colonial-apartheid state's racial categories and cultural blackness. BC "was readily accepted by the politically initiated whilst the masses in all three black communities tended to regard themselves as just Indians, coloureds, or Africans" (Mpumlwana and Mpumlwana 2014, 105). As a form of political blackness, BC was a particular strategy for coalition-building across difference.

BC emerged during a period of immense social upheaval and political repression in South Africa. The 1960s were marked by the Sharpeville Massacre, the destruction and displacement of well-established communities through the Group Areas Act. In 1961, Indians were for the first time recognized as part of the permanent South African population after the apartheid state abandoned its desire to repatriate Indians back to India. During this period, BC was attractive to a particular set of Indians who recognized the dangers of the colonial-apartheid state's positioning of Indians as a colonial middleman class. Within the context of the 1960s, some Indians "began to call

themselves 'black' and embraced the Black Consciousness Movement" (Desai 2015, 37). Saths Cooper, a student and founder member of SASO, writes, "BC [Black Consciousness] was a way of identifying subjectively with the conditions we found ourselves in objectively. We rose above the narrow ethnic and tribal definitions . . . [that] remove[d] people from collective action and collective identification" (Saths Cooper quoted in Desai 2015, 42). BC introduced the term *black* into "South African political language" (Mpumlwana and Mpumlwana 2014).[18]

The BC movement failed to understand that complete liberation must tackle the deeply entrenched patriarchal roots of black liberation organizations. South African black feminists have critiqued this era for its conservative gender and class politics. Mamphela Ramphele (1991, 215) writes, "Women were . . . involved in the movement because they were black. Gender as a political issue was not raised at all." The recuperation of the black community depended on the remasculinization of the black man, rendering the specificities of black women's oppression irrelevant to the larger project of liberation.[19] The class dynamics of BC further complicated the movement. The BC movement voiced the "*specific* oppression of relatively educated Black students (predominantly men), which forms only *part* of the overall oppression suffered by all other sectors of the black community" (Gqola 2001, 136).

In 1994, Mandela's government adopted Biko's definition of blackness to include Indians, coloureds, and Africans. The category black and, indeed, apartheid-era racial categories were reincorporated into political language and institutional structures by the state as a form of racial redress against the economic and social injustices of the past. Even though the ANC incorporated Biko's notion of blackness within its policy frameworks after 1994, it is important to note that there is a heterogeneity of positions within the ANC itself regarding the place of the Indians within the postapartheid national polity. With the end of apartheid, South Africa secured itself as a fully African nation, and all who lived in it became African. This new understanding of Africanness shifted the category black to "designate those previously classified as 'native,' 'Bantu,' or . . . 'African'" (Rassool 2019, 365). This resignification of Africanness to mean blackness is played out in the public arena as it relates to capital, the economy, and who is rightfully entitled to "enjoy" the nation (Mishra 2005). This shift has also complicated the ANC's identity as a nonracial organization.[20] In 2009, Julius Malema—former ANC Youth League president and current president of the Economic Freedom Fighters—voiced his frustration that Jacob Zuma had appointed "'minorities' to strategic economic positions" in his cabinet (Malefane 2009). According to Malema, the economic cluster should be populated with "Africans," meaning black Africans. He argued that:

"We need to build confidence in the markets that Africans are also capable of handling strategic positions in the economic sector" (quoted in Malefane 2009). In this statement, Malema clearly defines the authentic national subject as black African. The ANC reacted strongly; their secretary general Gwede Mantashe expressed rage over Indian and coloured ministers being referred to as "minorities." According to former Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa, the word *minority* is not familiar to the ANC because it is a nonracial organization, and he stated that "*There is no such thing as coloureds and Indians as they were part of the struggle*" (my emphasis, Malefane 2009). Here, Mthethwa references struggle-liberation politics as a site where old identities gave way to new, nonracial, forms of identification. This reaction failed to engage with the everyday lived experiences of race and its hold on life in South Africa.

These debates are indicative of the shifting nature of South African blackness and signal two important shifts in postapartheid South Africa. First, the postapartheid nation is imagined as a black nation in a context where blackness has shifted from an "anti-racist political subjectivity" (Rassool 2019, 363) to a signifier of the "authentic national subject" (Chipkin 2002, 571), *he* who is entitled to enjoy the new country. Second, blackness itself is a contested site, where the boundaries of the authentic national subject and authentic Africanness are played out. As the debates above demonstrate, the authentic national subject is increasingly performed through a narrow *nativism* that intersects with both *class* and *heteronormativity*.

Within this context, *Indenture Aesthetics* turns to the aesthetic realm to regenerate a feeling of BC through a radical queer African imaginary. Influenced by Chhiba's transgressive representation of the Indian goddess Kali in her portrait *I Am Kali, I Am Black* and BC's desire to redefine the political through a radical politics of relationality, *Indenture Aesthetics* articulates an alternative politics of relationality designed to unsettle the colonial-apartheid logics of race and their sedimentation in postapartheid society. My reactivation of BC is influenced by an intersectional understanding of race, class, and queerness. By queering BC through a radical and decolonial African imaginary, *Indenture Aesthetics* is committed to reimagining Afro-Indian intimacies, Afro-Indianness, and South African blackness.

Afro-Normativity and the Myth of a Better Life

Given the specific historical, social, and political context of South Africa, I coin the term *Afro-normativity* to understand how new formations of race, particularly blackness, intersect with normative notions of gender, sexuality, and

class to construct the new black authentic subject of the postapartheid state. I have chosen the lens of Afro-normativity because the phrase "South African black nationalism" does not adequately reflect the ANC's positionality as an explicitly nonracial organization and postapartheid South Africa as a Rainbow Nation, welcoming everyone irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. Indeed, it can be argued that the phrase "South African black nationalism" is the antithesis of the ANC's political identity. Thus, Afro-normativity allows me to engage with the presence of exclusive forms of black nationalism being performed, engaged, and discussed by folk who often claim nonracialism and inclusive forms of postapartheid belonging. Afro-normativity illuminates both the governmentality and nongovernmentality aspects of race and nation and how it circulates within the political and social domains to create a class of racialized outsiders. Furthermore, the making of the authentic versus inauthentic national subject must be contextualized within the context of colonial apartheid and the ANC's inheritance of a colonial-apartheid state apparatus in 1994. Thus, the logics of Afro-normativity are vestiges of colonialism and apartheid. Afro-normativity understands xenophobia and nativism as white supremacy, and settler-colonial violences that have a particular valence in the postapartheid era given our inheritances of the colonial-apartheid state. I am interested in how ideas of black authenticity and nativism attach to particular kinds of bodies to forge an authentic national subject that must abject those who are constructed through these attachments as inauthentic (the new black/ened Others). Thus, *Indenture Aesthetics* seeks to also understand Afro-normativity as a nationalist political positioning that treats black women, black LGBTIQ+ peoples, Indians, and coloureds (and those at the intersections) as outsider positionalities, hindering the ability to organize across difference.

How have we arrived at an understanding of postapartheid blackness as a racial-identitarian category representative of "the 'authentic national subject,' who manifests as elite capitalist" invested in maintaining a nationalist vision of black autochthony tethered to a (hetero)normative imaginary of the African body?

The roots of postapartheid economic inequality can be traced to the colonial era and the policies designed to displace, disenfranchise, and exclude Africans, and to a lesser extent, Indians and coloureds, from the economic mainstream. However, the transition to democracy did little to change the racialized nature of economic inequality in South Africa. Scholars have termed the transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an "elite transition" (Bond 2000). One of the compromises made by the ANC during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) meetings "allowed whites to keep the best land,

the mines, manufacturing plants, and financial institutions" (Bond 2004, 45), securing the privileged position of whites through the maintenance of settler capital. After being voted into power, the ANC shifted from being a "popular-nationalist anti-apartheid project to official neoliberalism" (Bond 2000, 1). The ANC's "adherence to free market economic principles has produced a context where there has been no profound challenge to the market, but rather an affirmation of its hegemonic role in the ordering of society" (1). Invariably, this ordering maps onto racialized lines to create a context where the black majority, those who do not belong to the black elite class, find themselves at the bottom of the racial-economic hierarchy. The ANC prioritized economic development through neoliberalism, ensuring the construction of a black elite class at the expense of the black/ened majority.

Furthermore, the ANC's affirmative action policies and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) policies, designed to redress the material imbalances of the past, have done little to change the racialized nature of capital in South Africa. BBBEE was not simply a "moral initiative." It was designed as a "pragmatic strategy to realize the country's full economic potential while helping to bring the black majority into the economic mainstream."[21] However, BBBEE policies have failed to even the playing field and have even exacerbated economic inequality, which, given the history of South Africa, maps along racialized lines. BBBEE and neoliberal economic policies have created a new black elite/middle class. According to sociologist Roger Southall (2016, xiv), the rise of a black middle class after 1994 "is one of the most visible aspects of post-apartheid society." Increasingly, the new black elite—popularly referred to as the "Black Diamonds"—have been associated with the post-apartheid phenomenon of "tenderpreneurs" and its relationship to state corruption.[22] The elite and neoliberal underpinnings of South Africa have created a context characterized by deep structural entanglements between the black elite and white capital, which necessitates the unfreedom of the black masses.[23] The making of the black elite through neoliberal economic policies, the preservation of settler capital through the negotiated settlement, and the ANC's inheritance of a colonial state structure all work together to create a class of outsiders.

The battle against the colonial-apartheid state was waged as one against racial discrimination. It was imagined that the dismantling of apartheid would restore the dignity and humanity of the black population while projecting a global image of the new South Africa as modern and civilized. Key to this new dispensation was a reframing of gender and sexual politics, even as the new nation was tasked with dismantling older regimes of race. However, in

postapartheid South Africa, race became the primary marker of freedom. The restoration of full humanity to the black masses was predicated on economic freedom with little conceptualization that gender and sexuality already variegate blackness. Indeed, black masculinities scholar Kopano Ratele (2006) argues that the ANC's promise of a better life, which narrowly focuses on economic development, is limited if it does not simultaneously tackle gender and sexual politics, particularly the dangers of "ruling masculinity."

In 1996, the South African state adopted one of the most liberal constitutions in the world. The Equality Clause of the 1996 Constitution secured minority rights protection, including ethnic/racial minority groups as well as the minority status of LGBTIQ+ South Africans.[24] Disrupting the apartheid regime's race-gender-sexual politics, the new South Africa positioned itself as exceptional both within the continent and globally through a politics of inclusion that informed the Equality Clause. In 1996, when the new constitution was adopted, South Africa was "the only country in the world" to constitutionally protect LGBTIQ+ rights. The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ rights was also informed by global forces, intersecting with local aspirations (Oswin 2007). The adoption of the 1996 Constitution also marked a significant shift concerning sexual politics in Southern Africa. This was one year after the Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe, declared his repugnance toward gays and lesbians, shaping a broader postcolonial African discourse that positions homosexuality as "un-African," a Western contamination, and a threat to African nationalism and the authentic African body.

Herein lie the major contradictions of postapartheid society. Constitutional protections, which guarantee the protection of gender rights—particularly the protection of "women's dignity and rights to full humanity" (Gqola 2007, 62), as well as LGBTIQ+ rights, do not translate on the ground. Not only has South Africa been labeled the rape capital of the world; gender-based violence affects straight, trans, and lesbian-identified black women in disproportionate numbers, while black LGBTIQ+ folks continue to experience significantly high levels of violence and death. African lesbian activist Bev Ditsie (2019) argues that the black queer/nonnormative body remains a threat to African culture and tradition because gay people's existence is perceived as a direct intention to "destroy Africa and Africanism." However, this rubs against the positioning of South Africa as a haven for gay, lesbian, queer, and sexually nonnormative people. Indeed, it can be argued that South Africa is a haven for white queer people. African queer studies scholar Xavier Livermon (2012a, 302) argues that this paradox (one of many in South Africa) is based on the "racialization of the queer body as white and the sexualization of the black body as straight."

In other words, the white queer body is a marker of freedom and attaches to the state's exceptional positioning in terms of LGBTIQ+ politics, whereas the black queer body is an aberration of the ways in which blackness is imagined and imagines itself as normative. It is well recognized in scholarly work and activist movements that "constitutional protections regarding race, class, gender, sexuality are far from sufficient in creating . . . [an] empowered citizenry" (Hoad et al. 2005, 19).

The high levels of gender-sexual-based violence in postapartheid South Africa can be attributed to the patriarchal foundations of South African society, informed and shaped by the violent conquest, settlement, and overlapping projects of racialization that can be traced from the era of slavery to the present. These imbricated histories of "violence and violation" are informed by an "ideology of militarism" (Gqola 2009) that can be traced to the ordering of Cape slave society through sexual subjection (rape, violation, sexual labor) and other forms of coercion. Indeed, Gqola and Baderoon (2014) call upon South African scholars to "take seriously the 'trauma of slavery and sexual subjection' on which South Africa is founded" (Gqola 2010, 42). Furthermore, in the postapartheid period, black feminist scholars have examined the relationship between the state and the violence of patriarchy (Ratele 2006; Gqola 2009; Hassim 2009).

South African scholars argue that we need to understand the different phases of South African history—colonialism, apartheid, and postapartheid—in terms of continuities rather than ruptures. This approach allows us to understand "how various power systems continue to shape contemporary South Africa" (Gqola 2009, 63). Thus, "heteropatriarchal recolonization" (Alexander 2005, 25) is a defining feature of Afro-normativity. In the context of the Caribbean, transnational feminist scholar M. Jacqui Alexander (25) coins this term to map out the continuities between "white imperial heteropatriarchy and Black heteropatriarchy" where "political and economic strategies are made to usurp the self-determination of the . . . people." Performances of Afro-normativity reveal how the state operates as a "citizenship machinery in order to produce a class of loyal heterosexual citizens and a subordinate class of sexualized, non-reproductive noncitizens, disloyal to the nation and therefore suspect" (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xxiii). My concept of Afro-normativity attempts to make sense of the realignment of race, gender, sexuality, and class in the era of neoliberal capital. Indeed, the boundaries of normative blackness are secured through the constant *violation* of those rendered most *vulnerable*. Violence and violation stitch together the colonial, apartheid, and postapartheid eras. Within this context, *Indenture Aesthetics* disrupts the logics of the Afro-normative by organizing around those who exceed the boundaries of

black authenticity. If the black normative subject is defined through nativist parameters, this reframing directs us to the new black/ened *Others* of the postapartheid period. Indeed, these new black/ened Others, a term I borrow from Michelle M. Wright (2004), agitate the class-gender-sexual-erotic respectability politics that define the authentic black national subject.

It is important to note that performances of Afro-normativity are entangled with performances of Indian normativity and respectability politics that construct the passenger Indian as the good Indian. A class analysis illuminates how the alienation of the passenger Indian is significantly different from the alienation of the indentured Indian. Through class, the passenger Indian has been able to claim partial belonging, and historically, this has played out in the economic arena where passenger Indians became politicized because of the colonial and apartheid state's infringement of their economic interests. Within the South African imaginary, the category of the Indian is both conflated with the merchant class and is always imagined as heteronormative. If Indian normativity (race, class, and gender-sexual politics) is secured through the merchant class, "indenture aesthetics" reveals the queerness of the indentured class (the Afro-Indian), its nonnormative positionality, which has historically challenged the project of Indian respectability politics. It is important to note that indenture aesthetics is not reducible to indenture history.

Black and queer studies scholars have argued that respectability politics (Higginbotham 1993) and homonormativity (Duggan 2002; Livermon 2012a) uphold rather than subvert systems of power and domination, rendering LGBTIQ+ as well as black and other racialized peoples more vulnerable to forms of violence and in the process hindering progressive organizing across difference. Indeed, respectability politics and homonormativity "[police] and [preserve] the boundaries between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability, and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories" (Hong and Ferguson 2011, 2). Thus, *Indenture Aesthetics* is invested in decentering the fixed unitary subject across the racial-identitarian categories Indian and black to reveal both the differences within these categories and the *strange affinities* between the new black/ened Others.

Since the Afro-Indian is always already marked as Other (alienated), the Afro-Indian reveals the (queer) limit of the nation and thus enables us to recognize how black queer subjects, refugees, immigrants, the working-class and working poor, the destitute, and township and rural dweller fall outside of the norm. Thus, this concept of the Afro-Indian is needed in order to make this larger critique of Afro-normativity. If the Afro-Indian represents the queer limits of Afro-normative blackness, "indenture aesthetics" disrupts these racial

normativities by displacing the normative subject across these racial structures. If Afro-normativity structures belonging to the nation through neoliberal subjecthood that creates strict boundaries between the new black/ened Others and the authentic black subject (the new black elite), then "indenture aesthetics" is an *articulation of a radical politics of (dis)belonging that provides a blueprint to think and feel outside of sedimented racial categories*. Thus, in this book, Afro-normativity names racial normativities, and my concept of "indenture aesthetics" is committed to a queering of these regimes of race.

Indenture Aesthetics is informed by the intersectional frameworks of US and South African black feminisms, Black queer studies, queer-of-color critique, and African queer studies. Drawing on a range of feminist scholars—Pumla Gqola, Shireen Hassim, Desiree Lewis, Barbara Boswell, Filomina Chioma Steady, Betty Govinden, Audre Lorde, Cathy Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, Grace Hong, Gayatri Gopinath—I consider the construction of the new black Others as racialized subjects, constituted through the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, region, and a number of other vectors of difference that shape postapartheid society. An intersectional framework reveals how gender and sexuality function as key determinants of authentic blackness. The construction of authentic blackness through the normative parameters of gender and sexuality depends on and exacerbates class differences.

In South Africa, black feminism emerges out of the long history of anticolonial and antiapartheid struggles. Black women have taught us that the struggle for freedom must simultaneously tackle race, culture, gender, sexuality, and class. South African black feminism resonates with the US category "women of color" feminism. The influence of Biko's notion of blackness as a site of collective political organizing among South African women of color is significant in contemporary South Africa (see Lewis and Baderoon 2021). South African black feminists have understood the importance of BC, even as they consistently eroded its heteronormative foundations. I am particularly interested in the ethical relational framework that is foundational to South African black feminism. This framework disrupts sedimented racial-identitarian categories as the basis of our political organizing, which inevitably subtend, rather than challenge, systems of power.

Indenture Aesthetics brings into conversation the radical work of South African black feminists with a queer intersectional framework that can be traced to Simon Nkoli. Nkoli was a black gay political activist who died from AIDS-related causes in 1998. Nkoli was a founding member of GLOW, the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand. He worked closely with the black lesbian activist and filmmaker Bev Ditsie until his death.[25] In 1984, Nkoli was

arrested with twenty-one other political leaders by the apartheid state and sentenced to death for treason. In prison, he came out as gay. Nkoli was initially part of the predominantly white Gay Association of South Africa (GASA). After his arrest, GASA refused to intervene on his behalf, claiming that they were an apolitical organization. As a prisoner, Nkoli was also reprimanded by his comrades for wasting his time "fighting for moffies." This revealed to Nkoli the importance of an intersectional understanding of the relationship between oppression and power and the pitfalls of identity politics. As a political and gay rights activist, Nkoli recognized the inseparability of his blackness, his gayness, and his class positionality. He stated: "I'm gay, I'm black and I'm a working class person and I'm a person living with HIV, and I'm fighting apartheid" (quoted in Davids and Matebeni 2017, 163).[26] South African studies scholars Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni (2017) identify this as the moment where a split occurs between white gay identity politics and a queer politic informed by an intersectional understanding of the everyday lived experiences of black gay men, disproportionately affected by HIV, living in townships, and in poverty.

If the authentic black subject of the postapartheid state is rendered legible only in relation to the new black/ened Others, a queer comparative racialization framework reveals the *strange intimacies* between the new black/ened Others. Through a queer racialization framework, it becomes possible to "craft alternative understandings of subjectivity, collectivity, and power" (Hong and Ferguson 2011, 2). For these queer and queered subjects belonging is always out of reach. Here, women of color feminisms and queer-of-color critique provide a more sophisticated framework to understand the relationship between those who constitute the new black Others. As an alternative comparative framework, women of color feminisms disrupt nationalist and identitarian modes of political organization. Solidarity emerged out of queer women of color who had to negotiate various forms of unbelonging within nationalist and cultural nationalist logics. Hong and Ferguson (3) argue that women of color feminisms and queer-of-color critique provide "an alternative method [of comparison] that, in its deep critique of the racialized, gendered, and sexualized devaluation of human life, gives us a blueprint for coalition around contemporary politics." This book brings South African black feminisms and queer African studies in conversation with US women of color feminisms and queer-of-color critique to provide a more supple framework to understand how performances of Afro-normativity mobilize gender, sexuality, and class to separate the valued from those who are disposable. Whereas Afro-normativity secures its power through performances of a particular kind

of black nationalist positioning that requires the abjection of differences, I am interested in centering difference as an urgent call to rethink the political and what constitutes the political.

Indenture Aesthetics is a call to reject, to refuse, to undermine, state-ist and cultural nationalist forms of belonging, in order to activate the politics of imagining otherwise. Indeed, *Indenture Aesthetics* is an experiment in unthinking the (Afro-normative) nation and nationalism that reinscribes the categories native, immigrant, and settler, maintaining what Nandita Sharma refers to as the "postcolonial new world order of nation-states" (Sharma 2020).[27]

Notes on Archive and Methodology

Vulnerability, Femininity, and the Otherwise

This book is a call, a practice, a curatorial project, a desire (my desire) for the otherwise. This desire for the otherwise emerges out of various recognitions: (a) the end of apartheid and the onset of a negotiated democracy in 1994 has resulted in a context where black unfreedom remains a central characteristic of postapartheid society; (b) categories of race formed within the crucible of colonial apartheid continue to shape postapartheid citizenship and notions of belonging, exacerbating xenophobic violence, of which anti-Indian sentiment is but one iteration; and (c) the trope of the Indian as the exploitative merchant class relies on a strategic misrecognition of Southern African history that renders the experience of Indian indentureship and a longer history of slavery in the Cape irrelevant to the past, the present, and the future. *Indenture Aesthetics* curates an archive of aesthetic and performance art practices committed to Ashon Crawley's (2016) call that "the otherwise is the disbelief in what is current and a movement towards, and an affirmation of, imagining other modes of social organization, other ways for us to be with each other. Otherwise is the enunciation and concept of irreducible possibility, irreducible capacity, to create change, to be something else, to explore, to imagine, to live fully, freely, vibrantly."

Methodologically *Indenture Aesthetics* is a queer curatorial project that develops a queer-reading practice informed by Black Consciousness. Methodologically, my reactivation of BC is organized around the blackened worlds of those who fall outside of the nation-state's normative strivings (Ferguson 2005) in my quest to articulate, through the aesthetic, a *radical decolonial politics of relationality*. My curatorial mandate is to bring into conversation Afro-Indian and black African artists whose works have not been positioned in relationship to

one another before. By juxtapositioning these artists, I reactivate BC's philosophy of disrupting and confounding colonial-apartheid racial categories as an ongoing practice of reimagining the political nature of blackness. I turn to the aesthetic realm because of the enduring legacy of the visual regimes of colonial-apartheid modernity, which continue to determine not just sensibilities of race but also how South Africans relate to one another through the visuality of racialized bodies.

In South Africa, the aesthetic has historically been connected to the political. During apartheid, legislation banned "media from explicit depictions of sex. . . . Pornography was wholly banned; the public display of eroticized nude bodies (particularly male) was unthinkable" (Posel 2005, 54). During the transitional period "an aesthetic shift [was] visible" in South African cultural production, described by Thembinkosi Goniwe (2017, 12–13) "as a radical move away from the restrictive culture of resistance to a culture of liberated expressions."[28] However, like other sectors of South African society, the arts sector—arts administration, curators, artists, critics, writers—continues to struggle to adequately transform in terms of its race and gender politics. Artist-scholars like Goniwe (2017, 2018) and Sharlene Khan (2006, 2018) have critiqued the continuing hegemony of whiteness within the arts industry that privileges white artists, curators, critics, and writers, while fetishizing a particular kind of black aesthetic.[29]

These dynamics of power construct a blind spot related to the aesthetic practices of Afro-Indian artists. Within the South African imaginary, Indians are not artists, but merchants, medical doctors, accountants, and lawyers, even though there is a longer tradition of aesthetic practices by South African Indians that can be traced back to indentureship. In South Africa, one of the problems with Afro-Indian aesthetic production is its sparsity, the absence of art education and art classes in schools in previously "Indian" areas, and the lack of official, financed spaces and institutions dedicated to the production, exhibition, curation, collection, and critical writing about Afro-Indian art. Afro-Indian artists struggle for recognition, space, and visibility within the art world. This problem is compounded within the Indian community, where art practice as a viable career is unacceptable and taboo.

Given this context, this archive gestures toward the possibilities of creating new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing from cultural objects that may at first appear disparate and incommensurable. *Indenture Aesthetics* does this through an analysis of Lebohang Kganye's digital photography projects *Ke Lefa Laka: Her-Story* (2013) and *Ke Lefa Laka: Heir-Story* (2013) in relation to my own photography projects *Queering the Archive: Brown Bodies in Ecstasy* and the *Brown Photo Album*: *An Archive of Feminist Futurities*. I read Sharlene

Khan's multimedia project *when the moon waxes red*, in relationship to various artworks by Mohau Modisakeng. I also examine Sabelo Mlangeni's photography projects *Country Girls* (2003–9) and *Men Only* in relation to my short film *cane/cain* (2011). Finally, I read Reshma Chhiba's project *The Two Talking Yonis* in relationship to various live performances, photographs, and literary explorations of black queer life by the duo FAKA. In the coda, I examine the radical work of the newly emerging Kutti Collective, a new generation of women, queer, femme, and gender-nonconforming artists organizing under the name *Kutti*. Through this method of juxtapositioning, I am interested in what emerges when these aesthetic works rub against one another.

Thus, in my quest to imagine otherwise, I curate an archive of aesthetic practices that rub against one another aesthetically, methodologically, and theoretically. What happens when these artworks rub against one another, and where do they stick to and slide apart, refusing to touch/connect? What kinds of intimacies are produced through this act of rubbing? How do individual and collective forms of pain and pleasure manifest through rubbing? How does rubbing articulate a politic where the enunciation of difference can provide alternative routes to understanding our interconnected pasts, presents, and futures? What does rubbing reveal about Afro-Indian desires for blackness and for Africanness? How does rubbing slowly erode the heteronormative ways in which the categories Indian, black, and African figure within the South African imagination?

Indeed, rubbing reactivates the queer potential of BC. My notion of rubbing is influenced by and departs from Keguro Macharia's queer concept of frottage. Macharia (2019, 4) positions frottage as "a relation of proximity" that "unsettles the heteronormative tropes through which the black diaspora have been imagined and idealized." For Macharia, frottage is an "intense longing for intimacy" (5) that is not anchored to a "genealogical tree" based on a notion of belonging through blood kinship models. Whereas Macharia is invested in the blackness of the black diaspora (intraracial experience), I am interested in interracial intimacies, produced out of what Lisa Lowe refers to as the "intimacies of four continents" (Lowe 2006, 2015).[30] For many African and Asian diaspora scholars (Macharia 2009; Reddy 2015), the relationship between intimacy and the aesthetic functions on numerous levels. According to Reddy (234), "Intimacy gives expression to tacit, minor, or ephemeral affective relations that remain difficult to locate in state or official archives and that may surface only within the domains of the aesthetic and representational." Macharia (2009, 162) argues that both queer studies and African studies historically "privileged aesthetics as a mode to access and forge ethical relations." The aesthetic has also

been mobilized as a method to read for "possibilities foreclosed or absent in official political discourse."

I am interested in a concept of rubbing that recenters the body, the libidinal, the erotic, and the sensual, queering the project of race-craft in South Africa and Afro-normativity's performance of a black African kinship model predicated on nativism and heteronormativity.

Rubbing displaces the normative racial subject across the categories Indian and black and the heteronormative imaginaries that secure the sedimentation of these racial-identitarian categories. Across the chapters that follow, rubbing reroutes my notion of the otherwise through the various positionalities of vulnerability, of which the feminine is one iteration. If rubbing articulates an "intense longing for intimacy," *Indenture Aesthetics* demonstrates that this intimacy can only emerge through the feminine and the feminized, the vulnerable and the violated.

Indentured Vulnerability

Across this book, I am attuned to the various ways in which vulnerability, femininity, and femme-ness attach to racialized male and female bodies. Two photographs—first, a composite image created by the colonial-apartheid state from official indenture identification photos of male laborers, and second, a family portrait consisting of an indentured female laborer (ca. 1942/1943) shot somewhere in rural Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal)—have been pivotal to my thinking and theorization of vulnerability, femininity, and feminization. Indeed, within a colonial-capitalist society, indentureship was a form of feminization that rendered men, women, and children vulnerable and disposable. This history of indentureship, a history of sexual violence, violation, and vulnerability, is one that has not been fully told in South Africa. Within the South African imaginary and against the overrepresentation of the Indian as the merchant/trader class, the indentured laborer appears and disappears within historical and contemporary scholarly and artistic engagements with the figure of the Indian. In South Africa, indentured vulnerability and its afterlives have been strategically invisibilized, rendering it almost impossible to imagine and grapple with Afro-Indian poverty and disenfranchisement. This invisibilization both occurs at the level of the state and has been exacerbated by South African Indian historians, artists, and curators in their quest to construct a linear narrative of Indian progress and development predicated on a politics of respectability. This indexes a particular memory and forgetting about indentureship that this book seeks to unsettle.

As the colonial-apartheid state consolidated its power in the late 1940s and 1950s, it constructed an official narrative of the Indian that inevitably conflated all Indians with that of the trader/merchant class (*the state's good Indian*). Importantly, the state chose photography as its medium to consolidate this narrative of the good Indian. In order to chart how my engagement with indentureship and its afterlives departs from the existing academic and artistic work, this section offers a brief overview of the interplay between the state's construction of the good Indian and South African Indian responses during different time periods.

In 1949, the colonial-apartheid state published *Meet the Indian in South Africa: A Pictoral History*, which was the state's official response to local and international critiques concerning the introduction of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946, also popularly referred to as the Ghetto Act.[31] Drawing on photographs, text, and statistics, the aim of the brochure was to "graphically show the progress, the wealth, the fundamental human rights that South African Indians enjoy" (1949, 1). It states: "The claim by Indian propagandists that, in consequence of this law, the Indian population of South Africa is oppressed and persecuted is ridiculous in the extreme, for it applies equally to both races [Black African and Indian]" (State Information Office, 1949, 1).

I want to focus on the first image that appears in this brochure. This is a composite image created from twelve mug-shot-style identification photos of male indentured laborers who have just disembarked from a coolie ship. For their mug shots—a form of identification photograph through which the indentured, similarly to those criminalized by the state, enters an elaborate system of surveillance—the laborer holds a number that corresponds with colonial ship logs.[32] The men are photographed in a state of vulnerability; they are bare-chested, and their emaciated bodies and protruding ribs, indicative of the arduous travel across the *kala pani*, are visible. In this composite image, each row consists of four photographs strategically placed next to each other, from page end to page end, with the fourth photograph in each row bleeding outside the frame of the page. The bare-chested men sit on a chair, gazing directly into the camera while holding a number. The first number is 7358, and the last number begins with 737, but the last digit has been cut out of the frame. The men vary in age from their late teens to somewhere in their forties. The numbers do not appear consecutively; there are strategic elisions in this arrangement of images. The most obvious elision is the indentured woman.

Relying on the photographic images in *Meet the Indian*, the figures of the indentured laborer are displaced for images of Indian success and social mobility

FIGURE 1.2. Composite image of Indian indentured workers, reproduced as is from the book, *Meet the Indian in South Africa: A Pictorial Survey* (1949, State Information Office, Pretoria). Reproduced with permission from Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

enabled by the colonial-apartheid state's goodwill. Through a strong work ethic, the indentured Indian can become a productive member of society—the state's good Indian—if they do not question the colonial-apartheid hierarchy that positioned the Indian between Europeans and black Africans (State Information Office, 1949). The brochure constructs the problem of racial disharmony between Indians and Europeans as a result of the Indians not understanding their subordinate positionality (their emplacement within the structure of the colonial-apartheid society) and wanting more than they are entitled to within the racial-economic hierarchy. Indeed, during this timeframe, the state was embarking on a larger project of social engineering by fixing the relationship between race and place.

One of the earliest responses to the state's good Indian is Fatima Meer's 1969 book *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, a thick sociological study of the effects of the Group Areas Act on the Indian community in Durban. Meer also uses the photographic image to complicate the narrative of the state's good Indian. Shireen Hassim (2019, 3) writes that Meer "was driven by an activist sociology *for* a common society, by a rage against injustice and by a profound belief in the value and capacity of research to convince the powerful of the consequences of their actions." Meer's book was designed to disrupt the colonial-apartheid state's policies that rendered communities with much commonality "strange to each other" (5), exacerbating artificial barriers based on perceived differences in relationship to race/ethnicity, class, culture, and tradition. *Portrait* is a fascinating documentation of the social life of Indians from the perspective of a South African Indian woman and is one of the earliest texts to delve into the gender and class dynamics of the Indian community in Durban. Throughout the book, Meer carefully distinguishes between the *indentured class* and the *trader/merchant class*, recognizing that within the South African imaginary, all Indians have been conflated with that of the trader class, invisibilizing the afterlife of indentureship.

Meer shifts her focus from the "Durban Indian business area"—an area associated with affluence and indicative of Indian economic success exploited through photos in the state's publication *Meet the Indian*—to the Indian suburbs and townships located outside of the city, where "Indian poverty predominates" (Meer 1969, 85). She argues that the signs of "visible achievement," which have been exploited by the colonial-apartheid state for their own propaganda purposes, invisibilize the *vulnerability* of the Indian worker class, those displaced by the Group Areas Act, Indian women (especially descendants of indentured laborers), and the effects of "poor schooling" on the Indian community (Hassim 2019, 9). Attuned to the dynamics of gender and

class within the Indian community, Meer uses photographs to reveal conditions of Indian poverty, destitution, and vulnerability, which the colonial-apartheid state strategically worked to conceal through their publication *Meet the Indian*. Meer's attention to class stratification is significant. She stresses that wealthy Indians make up a fraction of a percent of the entire Indian population, but this "façade of influence" has been strategically mobilized against vulnerable Indian communities. Meer understood that organizing collectively around the concerns of the indentured class was important to create solidarity across racial differences. Hassim (2019, 52) writes: "She used her research skills and her network of students to document and make visible the lives of poor people, and she used her access to elites to secure support for the demands of people who were disadvantaged and in distress." She believed that the influence of the trader class was on the decline and that the indentured class was on the rise.

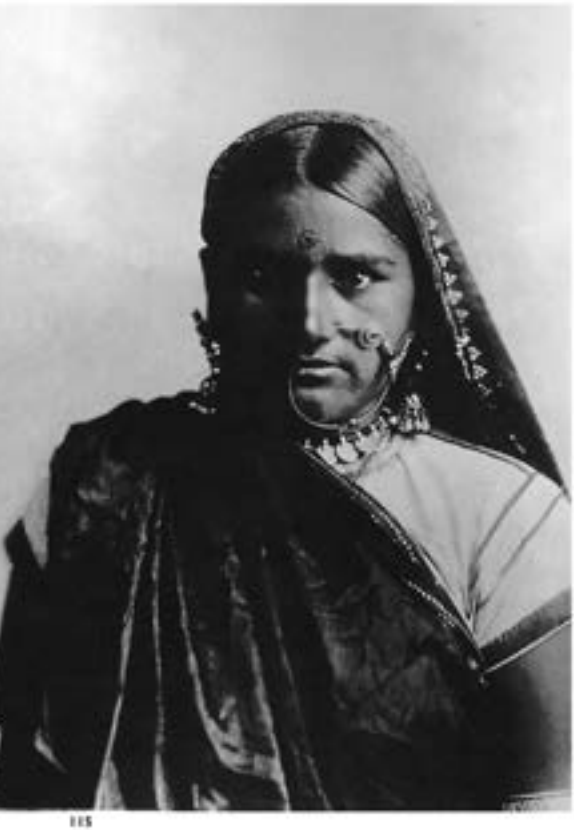
Meer recognized that the trader class had a different relationship to the South African nation than the indentured class. She believed that an alliance between Indians and the black African majority "was their best hope for full citizenship" (Hassim 2019, 53). For Meer, "Home was South Africa, and her people were both Indian and black." Meer's commitment to the underclass, the vulnerable, and the dispossessed across black Africans and the indentured class is an early manifestation of an Afro-Indian positionality. Meer deliberately defamiliarizes the state's good Indian, reaching outward across the racial divide to create a connection through the positionality of vulnerability. Meer reorients how we see and thus know the Afro-Indian.[33]

After 1994, the question of Indian belonging and the desire for inclusion into the postapartheid nation has been a top priority by South African Indian scholars, replicating an anxious and dangerous "longing for belonging" (Rastogi 2008, 1) to the nation.[34] This is evident in two curatorial projects: Riason Naidoo's *The Indian in Drum in the 1950s* and Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's *From Canefields to Freedom*. *The Indian in Drum* and *From Canefields to Freedom* reproduce the composite image of male indentured workers created by the colonial-apartheid state. Naidoo and Dhupelia-Mesthrie, like Meer, are invested in deliberately deconstructing and defamiliarizing the image of the colonial-apartheid state's good Indian. Although Naidoo and Dhupelia-Mesthrie offer complex pictoral histories of Indian social life in South Africa, mostly focusing on Durban, their curatorial projects inevitably displace indentured vulnerability. In opposition to the colonial-apartheid state's construction of the good Indian as weak and feminized, Naidoo's project inevitably recuperates Indian heteromasculinity.

Dhupelia-Mesthrie's curatorial project displaces the figure of the indentured female worker for that of the merchant-class Indian, demonstrating an investment in a politics of respectability that must disavow indentured vulnerability and its afterlives. In a striking arrangement of photos, Dhupelia-Mesthrie juxtaposes portraits of an indentured-class man and woman with portraits of a trader-class man and woman (2000, images 115–18). The arrangement of these portraits creates a linear and progressive development of the Indian from the backward and traditional indentured class to the fully modern Indian, as exemplified by the figure of the trader class. This linear placement erases the indentured laborer in favor of the trader class, the colonial-apartheid state's good Indian. The good Indian can achieve (partial) assimilation. Importantly, the series of photos begins with an indentured woman, the most vulnerable figure, who is strategically erased and replaced by a trader-class man who exemplifies proper Indian manhood and the state's good Indian. Whereas Meer was invested in deprivileging the trader class, Dhupelia-Mesthrie's curation of photos deprivileges the indentured class.

Naidoo evokes the blackness of BC, situating this archive of Indian social life in Durban as part of a broader black experience. Dhupelia-Mesthrie's book, on the other hand, focuses "on what is *Indian* about the *Indian South African*, but it also illustrates the commitment to South Africa" (2000, 28). The place of blackness within the construction of the Indian is unexplored, and her project pays little attention to South African blackness and Afro-Indian relations, other than through the realm of antiapartheid politics. The reproduction of the composite image of indentured male laborers suggests that both Naidoo and Dhupelia-Mesthrie are also grappling with the colonial archive of visuality, recognizing the unacknowledged place of indentureship in the racialized visual production of the Indian. However, Dhupelia-Mesthrie's project, as the title indicates—*From Canefields to Freedom*—maps Indian development onto the linear and progress narrative of the postapartheid nation, invisibilizing the afterlives of indentureship.

The history of Indian indentureship is a history of gender vulnerability, violation, and sexual exploitation. From the ship to the plantations, coal mines, and other spaces where indentured workers found themselves across urban and rural Natal, labor and vulnerability imbricate to produce the Afro-Indian. This is evident in the colonial photos of the indentured. In colonial Natal, indentured women were vulnerable and subject to exploitative labor conditions, the sexual needs of the master, as well as indentured men who often shared women because of uneven recruitment ratios.[35] Mariam Pirbhai (2009, 8) writes that indentured women's "vulnerable position . . . left them open to sexual assault



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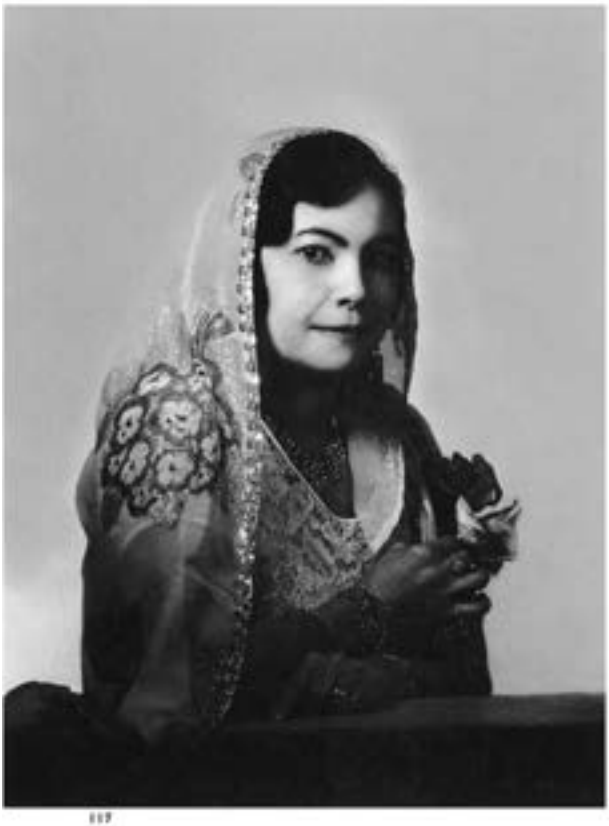
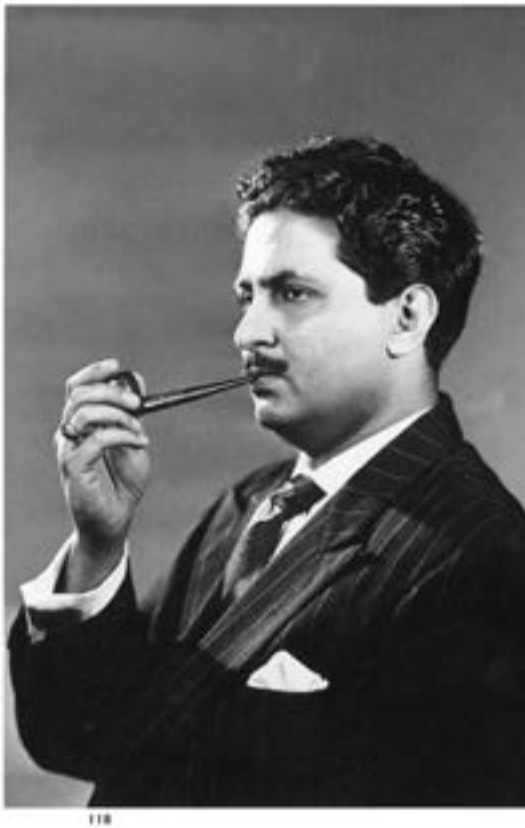
115. 116. 117. and 118. Four photographs reflecting the diverse regional origins and socio-economic classes of Indians and changes in dress over time. From left to right: traditional Hindu dress, possibly 1900s; a rural Indian, possibly 1900s; the wife of one of the wealthiest Indian merchants in the Transvaal, 1935; a modern Muslim businessman, 1960 – gone are the flowing robes and turban in favour of a pinstripe suit and pipe. Photos: MA

FIGURES 1.3 AND 1.4. Series of images reproduced from Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's book, *From Canefields to Freedom: A Chronicle of Indian South African Life* (2000, Cape Town: Kwela Books). Reproduced under fair use.

concubinage, prostitution, and even uxoricide." The indentured photos reveal explicitly the feminization of Indian indentured masculinity in relationship to colonial European/white masculinity. When indentured workers arrived in Natal, they entered a society with an already well-established black-white or settler-Indigenous binary. According to historian Goolam Vahed (2005, 241–42), "indenture masculinity" manifested as an in-between masculinity, positioned at the bottom of the colonial racial hierarchy. The emasculation of the indentured man





would have resulted in performances of hypermasculinity in the domestic arena, exacerbating violence against women, children, and one another.

But what of the femininity of indentured women and its construction within the death-worlds of labor? Since the official archive is unable to account for the indentured woman, I turn to the family album. Indeed, when I asked the librarian/archivist at the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to help me locate these indenture identification photos, particularly those of women, I was told to look at family albums and that the original indenture photos have been lost.

One photo, sourced by my mother from an extended family member, most powerfully evokes the notion of blackening for me and the relationship between blackening and the Afro-Indian positionality this book imagines as a site of reorientating how we understand race in South Africa. Shot somewhere in the Natal Province, this photograph is organized around an indentured

woman, her daughters, and their children. This photo is visually organized around the figure of the grandmother and tells a story about world-making on the edges of colonial society. It captures a sense of maternal intimacy and feminine energy directed toward kin- and community-making within the context of indentureship. The blackened face of the older woman radiates outward to tell a different story about Indianness in South Africa. Her blackened face is, for me, a haunting reminder of the horrors of indentureship and the blackened worlds of colonial labor extraction that rendered women and children most vulnerable. Her face tells a story deeply etched in the frown lines on her forehead, her dark eyes that are indistinguishable from her blackened face, and her tight lips.

The older woman in this photograph is my great-grandmother, Chinna Kolanthai Pillay, who was twenty-two years old when she arrived in Natal in December 1905 on the ship *Pongola LIV* from Madras. She arrived with her twenty-seven-year-old husband, Mutha Pillay, and their children, Yellamma Pillay (three years old) and Ammakanna Pillay (one year old). Like many others on this ship list, they were indentured to the Elandslaagte Collieries in Ladysmith. In the portrait photo, Yellamma, in her early forties, stands to the right of the older woman holding a girl-child approximately two years old. The young girl-child she holds is my mother, Velliammah Moodley. This photograph captures three generations of an Afro-Indian family, positioning the feminine at the center of the frame. Over time, Chinna Pillay and hundreds of indentured women like her recede from familial memory, similarly to how indentureship and its afterlives recede from South African history and the making of the nation. However, just as she haunts the family album, Indian indentureship and other forms of coercive labor practices like slavery in the Cape and African migrant labor systems, which overlap, resonate, and repeat across time and space in Southern Africa, remain an unacknowledged presence, continuously absented from the making of the postapartheid nation. My notion of Afro-Indianness is routed through the abject and vulnerable figure of this woman and the nonnormative (gritty, dark, ugly) femininity she represents, constructed within the context of indentureship. Her blackened face is haunting and a powerful reminder that indentureship was a form of blackening that is unaccountable for within our contemporary understandings of racial formations in South Africa. Her blackened face represents the coal dust that sticks to the surface of her skin, slowly permeating her body, becoming part of, and changing, the molecular structure of her cells. The coal dust filters into her lungs, staining her in unimaginable ways. This is the stain of slow death that is passed on generationally. Her body is an archive of a historical experience

FIGURE 1.5. Old family portrait photo from author's family photo album (ca. 1943).

strategically occluded from the South African imaginary, asking us to seriously think about what it means to continuously make and unmake race.

The feminization of the indentured male body rubs against the gritty, dark, ugly (nonnormative), disabled femininity of the indentured female body. Throughout this book, I follow various manifestations of vulnerability, femininity, and feminization that attach to male and female bodies, disrupting the gender binary and confounding the categories that secure proper subjecthood. The artists examined in this book, from FAKA to Modisakeng, use the positionality of male vulnerability as a form of disidentification, to evoke José Esteban Muñoz (1999), against hetero- and homonormative masculinities. Thus, this book situates male vulnerability as a feminine and feminized orientation toward the world. Femininity is a category associated with excess, fleshiness, vulnerability, and instability (Bersani 1987; Musser 2018a and b, 2023). Feminine and/or feminized bodies are sensual and eroticized (fleshiness), porous and penetrable, threatening the Cartesian divide between mind and body, self and other, male and female, masculine and feminine, returning us to various overlapping primal sites of woundedness, abjection, and fleshiness. Male femininity is particularly disruptive within what FAKA has referred to as a "cisnormative striving society." Indeed, male femininity and feminization embody the threat of penetration, challenging the notion of the ideal (masculine) body as "enclosed and autonomous" (Musser 2023). *Indenture Aesthetics* uses various manifestations of vulnerability to disrupt the ways in which hegemonic forms of masculinity organize social life and social value. Thus, throughout this book, vulnerability becomes the site to rethink an ethical politics of solidarity within and across the new black/ened Others. Drawing on the recent shift in feminist and queer scholarship, I am invested in understanding shared vulnerability as a radical openness toward otherness.

Vulnerability renders the categories black African and Afro-Indian leaky and interpenetrable. Thus, I am interested at the point where these categories bleed into each other, troubling the commonsensical nature of race in South Africa. Throughout this book, overlapping coercive labor practices allow me to further grapple with the relationship between blackness and Afro-Indianness. These labor practices reveal the ways in which black, African, and other bodies of color (Indian/Asian, coloured, Indigenous) were reduced to flesh and rendered vulnerable, a process that "depersonalizes and removes subjectivity" (Musser 2018b, 6). Hortense Spillers (2003) refers to this reduction of the body to flesh as "pornotroping." Spiller's notion of pornotroping is important because it allows us to understand, according to Musser, "the process of objectification that violently reduces people into commodities while simultaneously render-

ing them sexually available" (Musser 2018b, 6). Musser demonstrates how pornotroping occurs in relationship to "hierarchized systems of racialization" (6). Thus, fleshiness reveals "the ways in which power and projection produce certain bodies as other, thereby granting them a mysterious quality of desirability, which is always already undergirded by violence and the assumption of possession" (6). Black feminists have long articulated pornotroping as one of "white supremacy's tactics of domination."

Musser's turn to expand the notion of pornotroping beyond Blackness to "think about the way that the category that we understand as people of color [in the United States] is produced through late capitalism, colonialism, and globalization" is instructive to think through the politics of labor, heteronormative whiteness, and racialization in South Africa. In South Africa, labor necessitated the racialization of people of color outside of the domain of proper white citizenship; the colonial-apartheid state violently regulated the domain of gender and sexuality to protect the boundaries of white heteronormativity. The colonial-apartheid state's project of racialization constructed the racial-identitarian categories white, coloured, Indian, and black through intersecting "encounters with white supremacy" (Musser 2018b, 8). *Indenture Aesthetics* thus grapples with the violence and violation that stitches together the past, the present, and the future, while grappling with the "continuities in the forms of violence exerted by white supremacy" (Musser 2018b, 8) across racial categories. The various vulnerable, feminine, and feminized bodies encountered in this book are "highly charged affective objects" that disturb the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, male and female, masculine and feminine, and black and Afro-Indian, invested in harnessing the deep entanglements between the new black/ened Others as the foundation to reimagine coalitional-building across difference. Indeed, *Indenture Aesthetics* draws on male and female excess, abjection, and feminization to craft an "oppositional politics" (Nguyen 2014, 2) guided by an ethics of love and care for those the neoliberal state has rendered as waste and disposable.[36] Thus, I am interested in articulating a politics of difference that centers racialized femininity.

Throughout this book, I question the binary relationship between vulnerability and resistance. This binary logic is based on gendering vulnerable populations like racialized women, queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming folk as feminine, whereas resistance is gendered as masculine. Thus, the vulnerable must be brought under the paternalistic care of cisgender normative men. This binary and hierarchical logic inhibits any attempt at building solidarity across difference. In the 1960s, Fatima Meer recognized that the only way to organize across the racial categories Indian, black and coloured—to engage in a

project of coalition-building and solidarity across difference—was through the indentured class. Whereas Meer was invested in collective belonging (national belonging) to a nonracial South Africa, *Indenture Aesthetics* marks a radical departure. This book is not about a desire for Indians to be included within the South African nation or within Afro-normative blackness. This book, informed by a politics of (un)belonging, offers a blueprint to reimage what organizing across difference could look like in South Africa. The politics of difference routed through unbelonging mobilizes vulnerability, femininity, and femme-ness as "other possibilities for living, for being together in common, for *feeling* injustice and refusing it without the need to engage it through forms of conquest" (Singh 2018, 21). Thus, I am interested in vulnerability and femininity as productive sites to reimagine nonstateist forms of belonging. Thus, the feminine, in various manifestations, is central to *Indenture Aesthetics* and is the condition of possibility for the reimagination of Afro-Indian relations and South African blackness.

Methodologically, *Indenture Aesthetics* is also informed by my interest in curation and art-making. I examine my own approach to art-making as a response to Afro-normativity, which structures the invisibility of Afro-Indian bodies, desires, pleasures, and erotics within South African publics. My own creative practice is influenced by the South African artist Zanele Muholi, who has dedicated her career to documenting and celebrating, through photography, the lives of black lesbian, trans, gay, and gender-nonconforming South Africans. Muholi's commitment to creating an aesthetic archive of black queer life has influenced my own commitment to an art practice that examines queer Afro-Indian sensualities and femininities, routed through the afterlife of indentureship. I am interested in using art-making and curation to wrestle with the afterlife of colonial visuality. In a swiftly changing society like South Africa where black/ened people were historically reduced to mere objects of white knowledge production, and strategically miseducated, the question of what constitutes proper knowledge production and who constructs this knowledge is important. Thus, in my research creation, I situate the body (my body) as an alternative archive of history to activate a "theory in the flesh" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). Black queer studies scholar E. Patrick Johnson (2001, 3) expands on Moraga's theory to encapsulate the diversity of LGBTIQ+ people of color "while simultaneously accounting for how racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world." Johnson reformulates theories in the flesh as an "embodied politic of resistance" through praxis (where theory and practice come together) (4). This is a politic of survival informed by various overlapping regimes of corporeal dislocation. My theory in the flesh emerges

from a space of hunger for the otherwise and situates the body (my body) as the site through which the otherwise can be glimpsed.

Methodologically, I offer close readings of various kinds of aesthetic and performance art practices including photography, video art, needlepoint-lace art, film, and jewelry-making. My close readings are also informed by artists' biographies and interviews in order to understand how these aesthetic practices emerge out of, and engage with, complex social formations. Through close readings, I trace different articulations of Afro-Indian intimacies within particular texts, while my curatorial mandate of juxtaposing an Afro-Indian artist with a black African artist creates the exact intimacies this book argues for. While focusing on the aesthetic, I also examine the ways in which artists weave their own bodies into their aesthetic practices through performance art. Indeed, from Sharlene Khan to FAKA, the artists' bodies are crafted into generative sites to examine the tensions of the postapartheid in a context where the black/ened body is under attack "by continued economic and psychic oppression" (Pather and Boullee 2019, 1). If *indenture* functions as a hinge to understand overlapping regimes of racialized labor, and the *aesthetic* functions similarly to grapple with the entanglements between Afro-Indian, black, and African, then the *body* becomes a site that "complicate[s] old [and sedimented] claims of blackness" (Madison 2014, vii). The artists I examine seek a new vocabulary, one informed by their corporeal dislocation, directing us to the multiple contours of blackness and its boundless capacities once it is untethered from the normative. Performance unveils the *now* of blackness, working with and against "economies of dislocation and disciplinary power," reaching outward and inward, stretching across time and space, to reveal not just the past and the present but also the futures of South African blacknesses as they iterate across difference, troubling the deadly imperatives of the Afro-normative (Madison 2014, viii; Taylor 2003).

Indeed, my desire (for the otherwise) and my body repeat and resonate throughout the pages of *Indenture Aesthetics*. Growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal and coming of age—a form of critical racial-gender-sexual-class-consciousness—within the home-space of the Afro-Indian family in the afterlife of indentureship and colonial apartheid, from a young age I affectively understood that my body was an archive of history. I now realize that my queerness—my queer embodiment (of male femininity) and the queer ways in which I saw, felt, moved, and related—allowed me to comprehend and navigate the world differently. Through the violent (and often unseen and/or unseeable) regulation of my body within various spaces—the school, the church, the family, the streets—I understood (but did not have the language or the need to grapple with) vulnerability as a world-making practice. *Indenture Aesthetics* is about

the importance of embodied knowledge as a decolonial praxis of (un)becoming normatively human through which we can begin to glimpse the otherwise. I am invested, throughout these pages, in forms of embodied knowledge that emerge from the positionality of vulnerability. To insert my body throughout this text, and to theorize from the positionality of my body, is to enact a particular kind of vulnerability, a form of self-shattering (to evoke Leo Bersani)—which requires us to rethink the politics of knowledge production. As the reader navigates this book, they will encounter my body in various forms—my performing body, naked and open to the world, in my artworks, my orgasmic body in relationship to the church, my body in relationship to my mother's body and to the bodies of my ancestors, my body constantly negotiating my Afro-Indianness, my blackness, and my Africanness, my body rubbing against other bodies—as an embodied praxis of navigating the past, the present, and the future.

In this book, my own artworks (and art practice) rub against that of other South African artists. These are also artists who often use their own bodies to emphasize the importance of embodied knowledge to the political project of productively unsettling the violence of the Afro-normative. To position my body and my art practice so centrally in this book, and in relationship to other artists and artworks, speaks to not just my desire but also my commitment to an ethical politics of relationality. *Indenture Aesthetics* is thus a translation in the written form—an academic text, a queer curatorial practice—of offering my desiring body (shattered, fragmented, vulnerable), my body in pleasure and ecstasy, as a relational body, one that reaches outward, one that collectively invites us to imagine otherwise. Thus, throughout *Indenture Aesthetics* I offer my body as a kind of queer Afro-Indian critical methodology, and together with the reader, I want to think about the body—the Afro-Indian body, the black and black/ened body, the queer/ed body—as methodology. This is a body constantly in the process of becoming/unbecoming and one that is willingly porous and permeable, penetrable and fuckable. This is Fanon's questioning body (1986). Indeed, the questioning body as methodology, aesthetic, theory, and as a site where pain and pleasure, memory and archive, belonging and (un)belonging, rub against one another sets the stage and makes possible racialized queer, anticapitalist, and cross-racial coalition in South Africa, and the diaspora.

O my body, make of me always, a man who questions!
—Frantz Fanon, BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS

If Afro-normativity maps onto a linear and progressive narrative of the nation, throughout this book, the new black/ened Others are situated within a temporal

and spatial fracture/lag. In the chapters that follow, we encounter scenes of slow death; elastic notions of time; temporal lags; haptic encounters that disrupt the past, present, and future; and alternative articulations of time and space that emerge out of positionalities of fragility, porousness, and femme-ness. Indeed, to engage vulnerability and femininity is to engage alternative visions of time and space, those that rub against and slide off Afro-normative time and its unitary fixed subject. If Afro-normativity offers a temporal and spatial framework to understand how the necropolitical structures of colonial apartheid—from slavery in the Cape, colonialism, indentureship, apartheid, and the antiblackness of the postapartheid state—live on in the present, *Indenture Aesthetics*' attention to performance and temporality hones in on quotidian, minor, and embodied acts through which black/ened people constantly create and re-create livable lives in the face of constant state-sanctioned violence.[37] Performance illuminates the "phenomenology of [South African] Blackness—that is, *when* and *where* is it imagined, defined and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal" (Wright 2015, 3). Black studies scholars in the United States like Wright (2015), Sharpe (2016), and Quashie (2021) have relied on "temporal grammars . . . to articulate the complex and dynamic geographies of Black being, which are bound to, but not wholly bound by, the death machine of anti-Blackness" (Fleming 2022, 135). *Indenture Aesthetics* understands temporal and spatial fractures/lags as fecund nodes to grapple with our deep entanglements across time and space.

This book's curatorial mandate draws on a long tradition in queer studies dedicated to "valuing that which has been deemed without value" (Gopinath 2018, 4). Influenced by the artists curated in this book, *Indenture Aesthetics* enacts a particular kind of care-taking—a form of *wake work* to evoke Christina Sharpe (2016)—that prioritizes the vulnerable, the displaced, and the forgotten. Drawing on Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton's project *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (2011), Gopinath argues that "the relationship between curation and caring for . . . demands that we think of curation 'not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking—as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, interrelational obligation,' an obligation to 'deal with the past' in particular" (Gopinath 2018, 4) Thus, *Indenture Aesthetics'* curatorial mandate to focus on the afterlives of colonial apartheid offers a feminist-queer reimagining of vulnerability that prioritizes love and care-taking.

Indenture Aesthetics is the first book to develop a queer-reading practice to reimagine Afro-Indian intimacies and South African blackness. My method of juxtaposing differently racialized artists is dedicated to creating "new ways

of seeing" (Gopinath 2018, 5) across difference. As a queer curatorial project, this archive is invested in "messing things up, creating disorder and disruptive commotion within the normative arrangements of bodies, things, spaces, and institutions" (Manalansan 2015, 567). Throughout this book, my use of the term *queer* moves beyond the domain of nonnormative sexuality, desires, and expressions (although I also engage queer sexuality in its multiple dimensions). By categorizing those excluded from the domain of authentic blackness as the new black/ened Others, my investment is not in creating new categories but in providing a framework to disrupt "larger normative systems" (Tallie 2019, 7; Manalansan 2015). Indeed, performances of Afro-normativity construct the new black/ened Others as *queer*; queer signals their positionalities as abject and outside of the linear narrative of progress and development associated with the postapartheid era. The disruptive quality of queer reorients our relationships with one another via the field of difference rather than the narrow confines of identitarian politics. This relational understanding of queerness necessitates a deep reckoning with "one's relationship to power" (Cohen 2005, 22). It directs us to lives lived on the margins, to those who continue to survive, organize, and thrive in the face of constant vulnerability and violation. Nkoli's vision of an African queer politic resonates with Cathy Cohen's powerful call that "one's relationship to power, and not some homogenized identity, [should be] privileged in determining one's political comrades" (22). Thus, *Indenture Aesthetics* situates queer as a site of resistance and a praxis of refusal through which we can collectively reimagine what "progressive, transformative coalition work" (22) looks likes. Prioritizing the feminine and the feminized, the vulnerability and the violated, *Indenture Aesthetics* follows the lines of flight away from the Afro-normative in order to reimagine our entangled pasts, presents, and futures. *Indenture Aesthetics* direct us to the importance of crafting nonstateist forms of belonging as an urgent political project of coalitional-building across differences as a praxis of collective survival.

Contributions and Structure of the Book

Indenture Aesthetics is informed by three important contributions. First, *Indenture Aesthetics* reanimates Black Consciousness in postapartheid South Africa through an intersectional queer-feminist framework in order to understand the entanglements between the categories Indian, black, and African. Thus, reactivating BC by bringing into deep conversation Afro-Indian and black African artists, *Indenture Aesthetics* challenges the racialized ways in which knowledge production has historically developed within the South African

academy. Historically, South African scholarship maintained the racial divide, constructing knowledge about racialized communities within the silos inherited from colonial-apartheid logics. This is evident in studies that deal with Indian and black African communities. Historian Heather Hughes (2007, 156) argues that in South Africa "the political context weighted heavily on scholarship"; except for "moments of extreme racial tension . . . there has been little published on everyday relations between Africans and Indians."

Second, *Indenture Aesthetics* responds, writes, and imagines against the overrepresentation of the Indian as the merchant/trader class as it manifests within the South African imaginary. This work is indebted to South African scholars who have studied Indian indentureship through disciplines like history, anthropology, sociology, and literature. Black feminist scholar Betty Govinden positions much of this as part of the "memory work" that has emerged since the late 1980s, as the apartheid project begins to unravel. Govinden suggests that the history of Indian indentureship is inseparable from the indenture narrative and, more broadly, "any South African narrative" (Govinden 2009, 286). This body of work "recounts suppressed histories" and offers a fuller account of the South African experience (288).

However, *Indenture Aesthetics* works against the romance of the archive to give voice to subjugated people and communities (Arondekar 2009), recognizing the limits of history's methodological approaches to the archive and its focus on what counts as legitimate primary sources and objects of study. In South Africa, black subjects were historically written out of history, or where they do appear, they emerge as fragments and statistics, often rendered through the imperial/colonial gaze. In the postapartheid period, history often maps onto the recuperation of heroic figures or spectacular events, often focusing on cisgender males. This constructs a hegemonic narrative of the nation that must strategically erase vulnerable populations like women of color, the poor, the working class, the destitute, and gender and sexual nonconforming subjects. In South Africa, Indian histories have overwhelmingly focused on figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Indian participation in antiapartheid politics. Indeed, this focus privileges an elite understanding of the Indian experience that emphasizes an anxious "longing for belonging" (Rastogi 2008) to the nation. Within this context, *Indenture Aesthetics* is the first book to examine the Afro-Indian positionality and Afro-Indian relations outside of the structure of longing for belonging to the nation.

Studies of the indentureship narrative through literary forms have significantly shifted a largely social science approach to the study of Indians in South Africa. Literary scholars have been interested in how "indentureship,

paradoxically, allows us to see South African literature beginning to move beyond its somewhat parochial and exclusive concern with events in this country toward current transnational investigations of an Indian Ocean map of South/South interactions, as well as to other Indian diasporic sites" (Govinden 2009, 288). Most of this work overemphasizes the transnational turn (South/South interactions as well as connections to the African and Caribbean diasporas), producing a blind spot into which this book intervenes. This emphasis on the transnational risks obscuring local Afro-Indian relations. The routing of Indianness through transnational and diasporic routes (which privileges the Atlantic World) renders illegible the ways in which the Afro-Indian positionality can only be understood through a complex understanding of South African blackness. Thus, *Indenture Aesthetics* situates the aesthetic and performance art as interventions into dominant histories and literary narratives about Indianness and blackness in South Africa.

Historically, the Indian in South Africa has been imagined as straight/heteronormative, and this is evident in the different genres of scholarship and archival and aesthetic practices concering Indianness in South Africa. *Indenture Aesthetics* marks a significant shift from this line of inquiry by mapping the queer positionality of the Afro-Indian and prioritizing the queer Afro-Indian subject. *Indenture Aesthetics* also challenges the whiteness of queer South African studies, while deepening the emerging field of queer African studies. Within both contexts—queer South African studies and queer African studies—the queer Afro-Indian positionality has been largely erased, reflecting the contested positionality of the (Afro-) Indian both in South Africa and the continent. This book deepens our understanding of racialized Africanness, even as it attempts to deconstruct the racial hierarchy and the making and unmaking of race in South Africa.

Third, *Indenture Aesthetics* shifts the study of race in South Africa from an Atlantic to an Indian Ocean framework. Throughout this book, I am cautious about using the term *diaspora* as a mode of identification and form of belonging. Given South Africa's history of struggle/liberation politics informed by the imbricated regimes of exclusion that Indian, black African, and coloured South Africans have experienced in relationship to the nation, and the purchase that blackness held during the antiapartheid struggle in rescripting the terrain of belonging outside of the logics of colonial-apartheid era race categories, the term *diaspora,* as a descriptor of the Indian experience, has been at best tenuous and contested as a form of identification. For Indian-identified political activists, artists, and scholars, diasporic modes of belonging are incompatible with belonging to the *new* nation. Furthermore, the Afro-Indian

positionality, formed out of the long history of imbricated coercive labor practices in Southern Africa, reveals the limits of both the North American category "South Asian" and the category "Black" as they are informed by the Atlantic World. The Afro-Indian is not South Asian, and Afro-Indian blackness, like coloured blackness, formed within the specific histories of slavery, colonialism, indentureship, and apartheid and is rendered illegible within Atlantic Blackness, North American South Asianness, and subcontinental South Asianness.

Indenture Aesthetics seeks to understand Afro-Indian relations and Southern African blackness through an Indian Ocean studies framework, rather than an Atlantic framework, which is the hegemonic framework to understand race, and particularly Blackness, in the Global North and South Africa. An Indian Ocean studies framework directs us to a world of entangled coercive labor diasporas, confounding the racial categories Indian and black. The Black Atlantic has significantly impacted the study of black culture in South Africa.[38] Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic framework has also been critiqued for erasing Africa in the production of a transatlantic Black modernity (Masilela 1996; Hofmeyr 2007). South African literary scholars have also been interested in how the Black Atlantic framework emerges in South African Indian fiction. Scholars like Young (2017, 150) critique the ways in which South African Indian fiction writers evoke transatlantic slavery to "locate Indian claims of belonging in the performance of coerced labor." Through this strategy of conflating transatlantic slavery and indentureship in Natal, the Canefields unfold in an "Atlantic register" (Samuelson 2010, 272; Young 2017, 150). Literary scholar Meg Samuelson (272) argues that the evocation of the Atlantic register translates "oceanic routes" into "territorial roots" where the mobilization of tropes similar to the Middle Passage and plantation existence rescripts the indenture experience as another form of slavery. This can also be read as a disidentificatory strategy to "distinguish South African Indians with various histories from the stereotype of . . . 'oppressive traders' and thus work through African Indian historical antagonism" (Young 2017, 150). However, territorial roots translate into a "deep longing for belonging" to a nation that abjects the Indian. Furthermore, by working through the specificities and complexities of Indianness in South Africa through the Atlantic framework—where diasporic Blackness and South African Indianness relate to each other because of intimacies shared between transatlantic slavery and Asian/Indian indentureship—such works erase the positionality of black Africanness within these structures of identification and affiliation. An Indian Ocean studies framework offers a more supple understanding of the specificities of colonialism and coercive labor practices, migration, and nationalism, as well as processes of race and racialization that

are significantly different from the Atlantic World. Importantly, an Atlantic framework forgets that the system of Asian/Indian indentureship was designed to replace the trade in African bodies and has been largely silent on the deep entanglements between these two forms of coercive labor practices.

In Southern Africa, the Black Atlantic framework has been the dominant mode to engage with the transnational turn in the humanities and social sciences (Hofmeyr 2007). This has privileged North-South modes of transnationalism, obscuring histories of contact, migration, and movement, and overlapping labor diasporas within the Indian Ocean World that both intersect with and depart from the Atlantic World. In the Indian Ocean World, the relationship between slavery and blackness and Indianness/Asianness and indentureship does not hold in the same way as in the Atlantic World. As I have discussed earlier, in the Cape it was almost impossible to distinguish between the enslaved, the indentured, and those, like Indigenous peoples, under other forms of coercive labor practices. These Indian Ocean labor diasporas require a different understanding of diaspora and race. Loren Kruger (2001) employs the term *black Indian* as a counterpoint to Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic. The black Indian Ocean directs us to forms of entangled coercive labor practices complicating how we understand the African diaspora; this is an African diaspora that includes the African continent, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea (Young 2017, 13). The notion of the black Indian directs us to how imperial labor *blackened* the lives of those enslaved and indentured—Indian, Asian, East African, Madagascan, Indigenous—across time and space. Indeed, throughout this book, I gently untangle South African blackness from an Atlantic framework to offer a conceptualization of blackness that considers multiple entangled routes across the *kala pani* of the Indian Ocean as they intersect with Southern African labor migration routes.

The specificities of South African slavery and other forms of coercive labor practices only gained academic traction since the 1980s as the apartheid state began to dismantle (Gqola 2010; Baderoon 2014; Young 2017). By this stage, the racial categories Indian, African, and black were well-sedimented in the apartheid state's official policy. The "dualistic constructions of Indianness and blackness" naturalize slavery and African migrant labor "as black and 'forgetting' those Asians whose presence in South Africa predated 'coolie' indenture" (Young 2017, 156). However, Cape slavery and the regimes of overlapping coercive labor practices that repeat across time and space require a different framework. Loren Kruger writes: "Narratives of migration, diaspora, settlement and naming on and around the 'Cape of Storms' bursts the bounds of apartheid racial classifications, or, indeed, of anti-apartheid categories" (2001, 35). Thus,

Indenture Aesthetics is committed to both a global black studies and a black queer studies that reorients the field toward the multiple contours of African blackness, while being in conversation with blackness elsewhere.

Chapter 1, "Afro-Femininities: Maternal Archives as Sites of Queer-Feminist Futurities," examines the aesthetic practices of two artists, myself and Lebohang Kganye, whose works are influenced by maternal archives. This chapter focuses on the maternal feminine and the home-space of the black/ened family in the afterlife of colonial-indenture apartheid. I focus on my interrelated projects *The Brown Photo Album: An Archive of Feminist Futurity* (2019) and *Queering the Archive: Brown Bodies in Ecstasy* (2013–present), which I read alongside Kganye's project *Ke Lefa Laka: Her-Story* (2013) and *Ke Lefa Laka: Heir-Story* (2013). Influenced by our mothers' photoarchives, I am interested in maternal archives as sites of feminist and queer possibilities that illuminate the making of Afro-femininities otherwise.

Chapter 2, "Afro-Vulnerabilities and the Aesthetics of Slow Death: Memory, Trauma, and Labor," examines overlapping regimes of racialized labor by reading Sharlene Khan's project *when the moon waxes red* in relationship to various performance art and aesthetic practices by Mohau Modisakeng. Whereas Khan's project takes us on a visual and affective journey through the sugarcane fields, emphasizing the experience of the Afro-Indian female subject in the afterlife of indentureship, Modisakeng focuses on the figure of the African migrant laborer in relationship to the coal mining industry. This chapter situates vulnerability as a feminine and feminized orientation toward the world. This chapter examines the making and unmaking of black/ened life within the death-worlds of the sugarcane plantation and the coal mine, two geographical spaces indicative of slow death. The queer aesthetic of slow death in these practices brings time to a halt as an urgent call to deal with the colonial-apartheid past and the ongoing violence that shapes black/ened life in postapartheid South Africa.

Chapter 3, "Afro-Intimacies: Queer-Kinship Formations and African Rurality," examines the emergence of black/ened queer life-forms in and alongside the death-worlds of capital, the sugarcane plantations, and the coal mines. This chapter analyzes Sabelo Mlangeni's photoseries, *At Home* (2004–9), *Country Girls* (2003–9), and *Men Only* in relationship to my short film *cane/cain* (2011). Mlangeni and I return to small towns and rural South Africa to offer complex articulations of queer world-making practices within these spaces. This chapter theorizes rural and small-town South Africa as feminized spaces where those who live in these spaces are still waiting for freedom. This chapter reads Mlangeni's femme aesthetic of temporality alongside my aesthetic

of sensuality. We both explore the entanglements between pain and pleasure as constitutive of queer world-making. This chapter considers how alternative queer life-forms and queer social worlds emerge when time slows down.

Chapter 4, "Afro-Transgressions: Queer Femininities and South African Sex Publics," focuses on two bodily spaces—the black queer anus and the Afro-Indian yoni—associated with female/feminized sexual excess and deviance. I examine the performance and aesthetic art practices of FAKA, a black queer femme duo consisting of Desire Marea and Fela Gucci, in relation to Reshma Chhiba's multimedia and multisited project, *The Two Talking Yonis*. This chapter examines FAKA and Chhiba's use of both abjection and erotics through performances of sex as art. FAKA's radical femme-ness rubs against Chhiba's Afro-Indianness in a context where the black queer and the Afro-Indian are both abjected from the nation through performances of Afro-normativity. Through these positionalities, Chhiba and FAKA reimagine the authentic parameters of postapartheid blackness to reveal the multiple contours of blackness as it is continuously made and unmade.

The coda, "Afro-Queer Diasporic Femininities and Emergent Imaginaries of Freedom," focuses specifically on the multimedia artist Githan Coopoo, a founding member of the Kutti Collective. The Kutti Collective, an emerging art collective consisting of femme, queer, womxn, trans, and gender-nonconforming artists, represents a new generation of performance and aesthetic art practices by Afro-Indians. Unlike earlier generations of Afro-Indian artists, the collective deliberately uses terms like *desi* and *South Asian*. In their art practice, Coopoo uses clay as their chosen material/medium. Clay, Coopoo reminds us, is symbolic of fragility, vulnerability, and porousness. Symbolic of the queer black/ened body, the nature of clay reveals the potential to reimagine the body outside of regimes of normativity and mastery.

Notes

PREFACE

Some sections of this book have previously been published as articles. Sections of chapter 1 have appeared in "The Brown Photo Album: An Archive of Feminist Futurity." An early analysis of Sharlene Khan's project *when the moon waxes red* was published in 2017 as "when the moon waxes red: Afro-Asian Feminist Intimacies and the Aesthetics of Indenture." I have also previously published two articles on FAKA titled "*Siyakaka* Feminism: African Anality and the Politics of Deviance in FAKA's Performance Art Praxis" and "Performing Blackness as Transgressive Erotics: African Futurities and Black Queer Sex in South African Live Art." All previously published work has been reimagined and significantly rewritten for this book.

1. https://theconversation.com/young-people-and-women-bear-the-brunt-of-south-africas-worrying-jobless-rate-167003.

2. Shandu and Ngema's discourse around the Indian begs the question of whether they also perceive whites as a foreign minority that have overstayed their welcome. The simple answer is no. I have not been able to identify any comments from either Shandu or Ngema to suggest that their opinion of the Indians also extends to the white settler community.

3. Ngema, quoted in Vahed and Desai, "Identity and Belonging." 3.

INTRODUCTION

Epigraph 1: Fanon 1986, 232.

1. https://www.concourt.org.za/index.php/about-us/role.

2. My notion of reorientation is influenced by Sara Ahmed's notion of orientation and what happens when we reorient ourselves, our bodies, toward those whom we have been trained to distance through the project of racialization. My use of reorientation understands its urgency in a context where we need one another to "help us find our way" (Ahmed 2006) out of the deadly trap of Afro-normativity, even as we create and recreate the "grounds on which we can gather" informed by difference.

3. The anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen makes a similar argument based on class positionality in Hansen 2006.

4. For more on coloured identities, see Erasmus 2000; Ahluwalia and Zegeye 2003; Adhikari 2005, 2009; and Palmer 2015.

5. Even though the enslavement of Indigenous peoples was technically illegal, on plantations enslaved peoples of African and Asian descent/phenotype worked alongside Indigenous populations. Gradually, the enslaved population in the Cape became a mixed-race population, representing the entanglements between various coercive labor routes across the Indian Ocean and the African continent.

6. In the Indian Ocean World, Mauritius, a slave-holding colony, was the first island to introduce Indian indentured labor after the abolition of slavery by the British.

7. Although coal mining was not popular among indentured laborers, between "1903 and 1913, they made up 40% of the labour force" on coal mines (Beal 1990, 61). On some estates, like the Reunion Estate, indentured workers and African laborers worked side by side (Meer et al. 1980, 135).

8. In colonial Natal, the illicit trade and access to alcohol became a contentious issue (Tallie 2019). Natives were prohibited from consuming alcohol, whereas it was available to both whites and Indians, who illicitly traded with Africans. Yet Africans displaced their anxieties over the social ills caused by alcohol onto the Indian rather than white colonists.

9. See Ramsamy 2007, 470. One of the most significant coalitions, known as the "Doctor's Pact," was signed in 1947. The Doctor's Pact was described as a "joint declaration of cooperation between the African and Indian populations in fighting racism." The "Doctor's Pact" was signed between Dr. Xuma (ANC), Dr. Naicker (Natal Indian Congress, NIC), and Dr. Dadoo (NIC). With the formation of the ANC in 1912, the struggle was understood to be "a racial one, and their [founding members of the ANC] approach was predicated on a primary need for the unity of the African people." Given the historical context of early colonial Southern Africa, it was obvious that political interests that later gave rise to political parties were organized according to racial/ethnic affiliations. The Natal Indian Congress (NIC), like the ANC, was formed along racial lines. Although the ANC only embraced nonracialism in various forms from the 1960s to the 1980s, their commitment to African-Indian solidarity against racial oppression can be traced to 1947. In 1969, the ANC shifted its position from being exclusively black African by partially opening up its membership to coloureds, Indians, and whites. However, full membership, with all privileges, was only granted to non-black Africans in 1985.

10. Apartheid criteria for evaluating race and determining racial groups was at best arbitrary and shifting. The state was invested in a system where categories of race were "powerfully rooted in the material realities of everyday life" (Posel 2001, 109). The process of determining a person's race included "both appearance [the visual] . . . social habits [cultural]" (Posel 108), and class position (economic).

11. See also Breckenridge 2014, 225–40, and Posel 2001 for insight into the Population Registration Act's origins and role in determining racial difference.

12. The Population Registration Act of 1950 paved the way for other apartheid-era legislation like the Group Areas Act of 1950, which set the stage for the segregation and reloca-

tion/displacement of people according to assigned racial groups. These worked in tandem with the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Acts of 1927 and 1950, designed to cultivate "racial purity through social segregation" (Erasmus 2017, 93).

13. Fleming quoted in Eligon 2020.

14. The following sources illuminate these debates and what is at stake: Polak 1909 and Tinker 1974 described the system as one of "temporary slavery"; see also Mohabir 2010; Carter 1997, 2006; and Young 2017's chapter "Slow Death."

15. I use the term *Indigenous* to refer to the KhoiSan people, the first peoples of Southern Africa, consistent with how the term is deployed in South Africa after 1994.

16. Also see Persad et al. 2024.

17. My notion of indenture as a *hinge* intersects with and departs from the use of indenture as a hinge in Islam, Parsard, and Quadir 2024. In "Indenture, Iteration" the authors "rearticulate indenture as a hinge—an iterative set of forms, structures, and knowledges—rather than consigning ourselves to the prevalent conclusion that indenture as a system is merely a 'buffer' between the seeming past of slavery and the future of so-called 'free' labor" (2). In my use, indenture as a hinge illuminates overlapping regimes of racialized labor, similarly disrupting the binary unfree/free labor. I extend this notion of indenture as a hinge to also argue for resituating indentureship as formative to the racialization of the Afro-Indian in South Africa.

18. BC is part of a longer trajectory of intellectual work by both "Black South Africans and Blacks from elsewhere" (Collis-Buthelezi 2017, 15). In "The Case for Black Studies in South Africa," Collis-Buthelezi traces the study of the South African black experience by black people to multiple genres of texts, including periodicals and pamphlets, that go back to the early 1900s. These include the work of Sol T. Plaatje, particularly his book *Native Life in South Africa* (1916). Marcus Garvey's influence on black life and political organizing should also be included. Scholars like Hill and Pirio (2014, 209) note that the "Garvey movement developed in South Africa after the First World War into a potent expression of mass-based African nationalism." The establishment of the Institute for Black Research (IBR) by Fatima Meer in Durban in 1972 as well as the Institute of Black Studies (1975) directs us to the multiple ways in which blackness emerged as a critical site of analysis. The primary aim of the IBR was to teach "Black people to research and write" (Hassim 2019, 47). Black students worked with Meer as research assistants, and their desire to craft an alternative "language for race" informed the shift in Meer's work. She shifted to using the category "black" as a new framework to understand the conditions of displacement and disenfranchisement experienced by black African, Indian, and coloured communities as a result of the Group Areas Act (47). Meer and her students were actively involved in the BCM, and together they contributed to understanding blackness more capaciously.

19. Ashwin Desai writes that the "story of young Indians who sought to break the mould of racialized politics has not really been told, none more so than the Indian women activists of BCM" (Desai 2015, 39).

20. "Non-racialism has been the ANC's official ideological force to promote reconciliation and nation-building" and is often positioned by the politically initiated as "the politically correct orthodoxy" (Ndebele 2002, 133). Alliances developed between the

ANC and other political parties like the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress in the late 1940s and 1950s informed discourses of nonracialism. These alliances challenged state-mandated racism but did little to question the constructed nature of race. Also see Everatt, *The Origins of Non-Racialism*.

21. https://www.businessinsa.com/bee/.

22. Tenderpreneurs, according to Southall, are "social actors who use their political connections with individuals within the state to obtain contracts which, in a properly competitive situation, they would be denied" (2016, xiv).

23. Many scholars have written about the 2012 Marikana Massacre, where South African police opened fire on striking mine workers, killing thirty-four men. This massacre by the postapartheid state repeated the violence of the apartheid state. However, "this time it was predominantly black policemen, with black senior officers working for black politicians, who were doing the shooting." In this context, "white and black business interests coincided with that of the neoliberal state to crush a strike of poorly paid workers" (Desai 2015, 48). The Marikana Massacre revealed explicitly the elite underpinnings of the ANC and sanctioned formations of postapartheid blackness.

24. The Equality Clause rendered it illegal by the state to "Unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic and social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth."

25. Ditsie was the first person to ever argue for the protection of lesbians and gays before the United Nations Conference on Women in 1995. Nkoli and Ditsie organized the first Gay Pride March in Johannesburg. Although Nkoli and Ditsie remained friends throughout his short life, Ditsie left GLOW because of its inability to recognize that lesbians were also women and black, and that the violence experienced by black (lesbian) women was different from that of black (queer) men.

26. See also the documentary film *Simon and I* (2002), directed by Beverly Ditsie and Nicky Newman.

27. *Indenture Aesthetics* is in conversation with Sharma's book *Home Rule*, as well as Mamdani's book *Neither Settler nor Native*.

28. During the antiapartheid struggle, culture (and cultural production) by the disenfranchised black population was viewed as a *weapon of the struggle*. In "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" (1991, 187–88) Albie Sachs argues that artistic expression should disrupt the "multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" and that art should be central to the emergence of a "new consciousness." For Sachs, the "cultural imagination" must be freed from the constraints of protest art in order to "grasp the rich texture of the free and united South Africa that we have done so much to bring about." A free South Africa should welcome artistic expressions that reveal the complexities and contradictions of South African society, and cultural producers should be encouraged to "express our humanity in all its forms" (Sachs 1991, 188). Njabulo Ndebele (2006, 63) makes a similar call when he urges writers to "free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from laws and perception that have characterised apartheid." According to Ndebele, writers, and other cultural producers, can achieve this by "rediscovering the ordinary," shifting the focus from the grand spectacle of apartheid to the intimacies of the everyday (51). Sachs

and Ndebele are not separating artistic expression from the political but are gesturing toward the limited ways in which humanity is understood and expressed if it is only routed through the antiapartheid struggle.

29. Importantly, both Goniwe (2018) and Khan (2006), in different contexts, have drawn attention to the racialized dynamics of the South African art world after 1994. In *Aluta Continua: Doing It for Daddy,* Khan argues that "a patronizing white mommy has displaced the art world's patriarchal apartheid white daddy." White women have become the new brokers of the art world, and the common justification for the exclusion of black writers, curators, and academics is that there is a lack of qualified black candidates to fulfill these roles. Goniwe published "The Sour Pleasure of the Art Industry" in the *Mail and Guardian* where he critiqued the "cosmetic transformation" of the arts industry and the insidious ways in which black artists, curators, and art academics are constantly under a "white gaze" that works to "police, haunt, and traumatize young and established Black professionals." Furthermore, most, if not all, elite gallery spaces, auction houses, and art brokers are white or white-owned, creating a context where "*white enterprises . . . rent natives for purposes of tokenism and window dressing, legitimacy and political correctness whilst alienating black professionals from the actual means of economic production and creation of wealth*" (Goniwe 2018, my emphasis).

30. In Lowe 2006, the use of the term *intimacy* is twofold. First, it refers to "the world division of labor that emerges in the nineteenth century," which produced overlapping regimes of racialized coercive labor practices (African slavery and Asian indentureship). Lowe's use of the term *intimacy* is twofold ("The Intimacy of Four Continents," 193). Second, intimacy suggests the "volatile contacts of colonized people" (Lowe 2006, 193) produced out of these regimes of racialized labor and "the possibility of cross racial alliance that emerged from this contact" (Gopinath 2010, 166).

31. Passed in June 1946, the act was designed "to curtail Indian property ownership in White areas in Natal" and to "preserve the European orientation of South African society" (Bagwandeen 1984, 63). Although the intention of the act was to curtail the economic success of the trader/merchant class, it was noted by Indian politicians and activists that the act unfairly discriminated against the broader Indian community.

32. From 1860 to 1911, four hundred ships arrived in Natal, each constructing a meticulous register, providing "a detailed account of the individual identities, physical and cultural characteristics" (Breckenridge 2008, 20). Through the indenture number one can trace "information about the person's names, caste or religion; age; physical markings, if any; and places of origin in the form of the village, *thanna* (police circle) and *zilla* (district)" (Bhana 1991, 1–2). According to Breckenridge (20), this registry system intersected with the Natal Immigration Laws, to subtend the colonial state's "draconian pass regime." The law allowed employers of indentured workers "the right 'to apprehend, without warrant, such Coolie immigrant being found a distance of more than two miles from the residence of the person" they were indentured to, "without a written ticket to leave, signed by the master" (quoted in Breckenridge 2008, 20–21).

33. Meer's book, published during the height of political, social, and economic turmoil, is indicative of a broader desire to map out a common humanism as an affront to the state's project of racial segregation. The research and writing of this book would inform her work

with the Institute for Black Research (IBR), established by Meer in the early 1970s. By this stage, the concerns of the Indian working class and poor would be framed through the language of Black Consciousness, indicative of a more capacious understanding of blackness.

34. The longing for belonging, according to Pallavi Rastogi (2008, 1), emerges because of the erasure of Indians from the "apartheid and post-apartheid consciousness." Rastogi coins the phrase *Afrindian identity* to make sense of Indian "desire[s] for South African citizenship . . . a need for national anchorage." Examining the period from the 1970s onward, Rastogi (2008, 3) focuses on the "overtly political nature of South African writing," curating an archive of literary texts that reinscribe the desire for the nation yet to emerge.

35. Some feminist scholars argue that indentured women—often viewed as disrespectful (prostitutes and/or loose women) and dishonorable—were escaping a strict Indian patriarchal society and that indentureship offered (limited) autonomy to escape arranged marriages and the practice of *sati*, for instance.

36. The question of male vulnerability has been recently taken up in US Black masculinity studies. For a recent example, see Bost et al. 2019; see also Ross 2021.

37. Black and queer studies have long engaged with Black and queer temporalities, respectively. For more info, see Freeman 2010; Sharpe 2016; Keeling 2019; Adeyemi 2022; and Fleming, 2022.

38. See studies by scholars like Mphahlele 1962; Nixon 1994; Campbell, 1995; and Chrisman 2005.

1. AFRO-FEMININITIES

1. Even as I recognize my mother's labor in creating the home-space and her influence on my own understanding of beauty and sensuality, I want to also acknowledge that the presence of the black African female domestic worker also informs the textures of the Afro-Indian home-space. The role of the black African domestic worker in the formation of the Afro-Indian home-space and the formation of Afro-Indian femininity remains unexplored at this stage and is an area of research that is much needed in South Africa. Literature and artworks examining the figure of the black African domestic worker are only now beginning to emerge, promising to be a rich site of analysis. See Du Troit 2013 and Jansen 2019. Also see works by artist Mary Sibande.

2. In this project, I play with the African mask. During the rehearsal process, the models were encouraged to develop a familiarity with a mask and to think of it as a prop. In some photos, the mask was used to cover their genitals. In other photos, the mask became an extension of their bodies, a site of sensuality as it was touched and felt. In the twentieth century, the African mask became a global symbol of Africanness and a fetishized object within the global art world. I am interested in how the mask and its use as an art object by the middle class and elite in South Africa and the diaspora have become a way to negotiate a postapartheid African modern. Although I am not aware of any masking traditions within local Indigenous African cultures in South Africa, the African mask becomes a "channel through which all senses of local identity [black, Afro-Indian, African, Colored, white] need to be brokered" (Peterson 2012, 154). By attaching the mask to queer racialized African bodies, I wanted to disrupt the association between the mask and an authentic Africanness (and its association with nativism). Instead, in these assem-