For decades, the South African township was a global byword for oppression and cruel exploitation. Yet, these vast spaces were also sites of a thriving and innovative community life, more modern and evolved than the rural past, and often defying the apartheid regime's promotion of 'traditional culture' as a bulwark against radical politics. Today, it is increasingly clear that this life of the township profoundly shaped the very idea of what freedom after apartheid could look like. Drawing on material from a formerly Indian township outside of Durban, this lecture explores how the 'cultural autonomy' of the apartheid township decisively has shaped the horizon for political life and cultural identity in the post apartheid republic.

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