# 10 Beings of Concrete and Steel

## Spatializing Opportunity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Africa

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Schubart Park was constructed in the 1970s to accommodate low-income whites in Tshwane (previously Pretoria). The facility was luxurious by North American standards for public housing, boasting an on-site doctor and dentist, convenience store, green grocer, meeting halls, subterranean parking and subsidized daycare. Four high-modern residential towers with 813 units opened onto a recreational courtyard with swimming pools, tennis courts and ball fields. The flats were tiny compared to the expansive dwellings and manicured private gardens white South Africans ordinarily aspired to. Nevertheless, they were well-appointed and bathed with natural light pouring through floor-to-ceiling windows which permitted expansive views of the nation's bustling capital and the distant Magaliesberg foothills.

White poverty undermined the premise of biological superiority upon which the entire edifice of white power rested. The Apartheid regime accordingly sought to systematically uplift poor whites while debasing indigenous livelihoods. Schubart Park (Figure 10.1) fit into a suite of social services specifically available to qualified whites (Bhorat 1995). This racist social welfare system sought to cushion the lifestyle of people who were supposedly innately superior, but who failed to afford life within the regime's humming and prosperous administrative metropolis.

Schubart Park's concrete and steel towers soared over Pretoria's inner core which contained expansive government facilities and the corporate headquarters where residents worked as clerks and secretaries, bureaucrats, policemen and soldiers—essential workers who performed day-to-day administrative and military activities needed to perpetuate racial domination. In recognition, the state provided subsidized luxury—a whites-only enclave where working-class families could enjoy the trappings of stability and affluence—where children who represented both the history and future of the Afrikaner nation could play arcade games and soak in aquamarine swimming pools while their black counterparts languished in hunger.

"Shubies," as residents affectionately nicknamed the complex, quickly became a desirable address to certain segments of the white population. In addition to economical rent and close proximity to employment Schubies boasted a vibrant social life centered around sports facilities, small

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*Figure 10.1* Schubart Park Pool in the 1980s with one of the four tower blocks in the background. This full-page photograph appeared in a coffee table propaganda book published by the Department for Community Development.

local businesses and public recreational spaces. It was the first phase of an ambitious redevelopment plan for Pretoria's central core (Figure 10.2): an ultra-high-density, securitized settlement for upwards of 30,000 people. This white-supremacist, Corbusian utopia would ensure a high standard of living for even the poorest Europeans—both those who were already settled in Africa, as well as settlers whom the regime hoped to entice from abroad.

This high-urban manifestation of white supremacy died with the collapse of Apartheid in the 1990s. The new state quickly retargeted social welfare algorithms to assist the neediest of all, rather than the neediest of an elite ruling class. Meanwhile, upwardly mobile black Africans were eager to taste riches produced by a social order which until recently held them as slaves. As freedom ripened, young professionals moved with their families into the forbidden core while affording Europeans fled to the suburbs. With its newly destabilized population, Schubart Park was one of the most accessible European preserves.

However, the withdrawal of government support caused the facility to quickly deteriorate. An accumulation of managerial indifference and deferred maintenance revealed the inherent fragility of the urban Anthropocene and transformed an exemplar of Corbusian architecture into an exceptionally inconvenient abode. By 2010, when I came to know Schubart Park as a researcher (Figure 10.3) most of the young black professionals had moved on, to be replaced by increasingly marginalized populations. The swimming pool was filled with noxious sludge and few shops remained operational. However, even as state power receded, a new entrepreneurial class of pirate landlords began extracting rent from surging numbers of new residents. In the eyes of many Tshwane inhabitants, including senior government officials, Schubart Park had become "synonymous with crime and grime" and "unfit for human habitation" (Mbanjwa 2008). Yet in actuality, *thousands* of humans still lived there, including many youngsters who survived far worse terrors than urban decay in pursuit of South Africa's fabled riches.

Interestingly, Schubart Park preserved aspects of exclusivity for these new residents who were deeply attached to the facility and the communities they created within her embrace. They enjoyed spectacular views and natural lighting—unthinkable affordances in other informal settlements. Furthermore, proximity to downtown represented major cost and time savings on transportation. Schubart Park's location and architecture were originally deployed to build solidarity and align interests among Apartheid's poor whites. Forty years later, the centrality and centripetal design continued to facilitate community formation—but within the very populations it was originally intended to disenfranchise.

The fact that opportunity is spatialized lay at the core of Apartheid planning. By carefully siting, planning and constructing places—as well as by selecting and policing who could live and move between them—the regime's *meesterbeplanners* spatialized economic and relational opportunity so that wealth, power and community would accrue to whites while other populations were destabilized. It is widely acknowledged that racist geographies continue to shape life in the New South Africa, long after white supremacy's political demise (Brand 2014; Lemanski 2004; Samara 2010). Leafy, low-density suburban security villas established during Apartheid's waning years are still predominantly white enclaves while the plantation economy remains entrenched across large swaths of the countryside. Meanwhile, most black South Africans continue living in the very same high-density urban and rural "locations" where they were confined during minority rule. Tragically—*but often by design*—the socio-geographic inequities that human beings etch onto our planet's surface can be far more resilient than the regimes whose cement trucks, policemen and bankers were originally dispatched to fracture the landscape.

Yet social geographies also adapt in response to changing social norms and prejudices (Pellow 1988). Even as geographic racism infects new territory, marginalized groups can simultaneously appropriate places of

privilege. Schubart Park provides one opportunity to examine these reconfigurations. During nearly four decades, half a dozen scholars interviewed residents living in the complex while hundreds of newspaper articles chronicled her ascendance and demise. These accounts, alongside archival research and new conversations with former residents shows that Schubies was imbued by her creators with certain essential qualities that she unwaveringly deployed toward making life just a little bit brighter for her troubled children.

## The Erection of Racist Geographies

Schubart Park was erected within the *Goedehoop* (Good Hope) neighborhood bordering Church Square which was thusly named for the Dutch Reformed house of worship constructed shortly after the city's establishment as a Voortrekker outpost in 1855 (Jordaan 1989; Swart 2011, 48). Dutch pioneers periodically congregated there to sell their produce, play sport, receive communion and exercise civic duties in their new nation carved out of freshly conquered interior areas (Theron and de Wit 2010). Many important buildings were subsequently constructed on the surrounding blocks, including the *Volksraad* (parliament), the Palace of Justice and offices for prominent corporate stakeholders in colonization like Old Mutual and Barclays banks. Thus, Pretoria prospered as a political and administrative center while nearby Johannesburg grew into a mining powerhouse.

With its central location in the capital city, Goedehoop could have been a prestigious neighborhood. However, a major liability to European sensibilities and property values lay just across the Apies river, on the opposite side of Goedehoop from Church Square. African laborers and traders began congregating there soon after European settlement, near the homestead of Ndebele Chief Maraba. Nearby, a German mission station was populated by descendants of Afrikaans-speaking African slaves who had been captured as children by the Voortrekkers during their wars of conquest (Friedman 1994, 32). Chinese, Indian, Malay and colored families also settled nearby (Clarke et al. 2008). Collectively these non- white neighborhoods in the city's northwest quadrant were known as *Marabastad*.

Marabastad was culturally and politically vibrant, with diverse people mingling, transacting and even residing in close proximity—if not on equal footings (Chiloane 1990). Asian-owned businesses sold goods for the African market while a booming entertainment scene featured various cinemas and clubs from which emerged the famous Marabi jazz (Mphahlele 2013 [1959]). Marabastad was also an important node for early anti-colonial activism, including a successful 1920s mobilization to secure Africans limited sidewalking rights undertaken by the ANC under president S M Makgatho (Chiloane 1990; Friedman 1994, 174; Lodge 1988). Both Makgatho and Marabastad were well-known to the young lawyer Mohandus Gandhi who was president of the Indian National Congress at the time and also lived

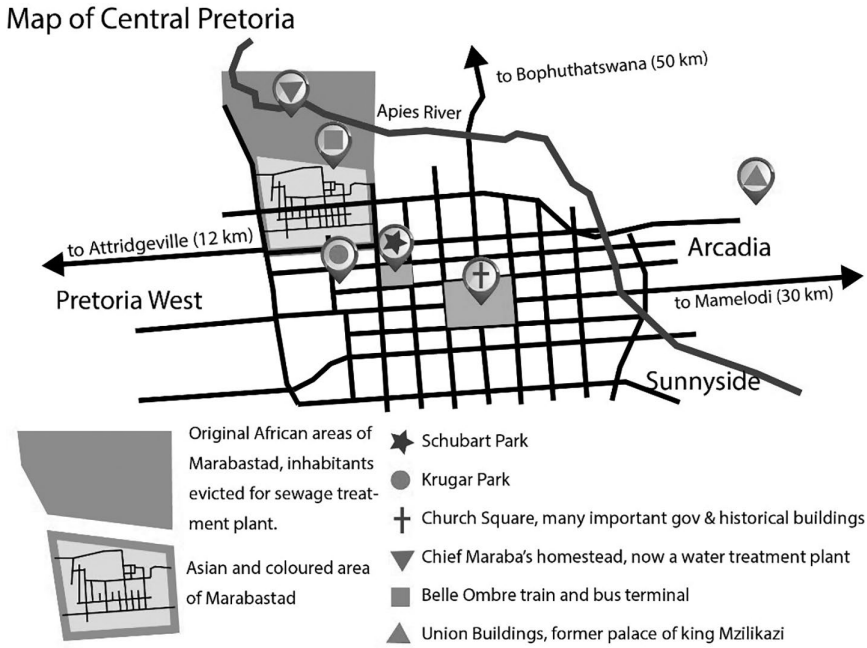



*Figure 10.2* Map of Central Pretoria.

in Pretoria before returning to his native country and becoming a central figure in India's liberation struggle (Clarke et al. 2008).

The evolution of Pretoria's inner city reveals how early efforts to racialize space were initially characterized more by negligence than design. Coerced black labor was a pillar of the settler economy. Nevertheless, Europeans were reluctant to invest in housing and infrastructure for African workers. White supremacist myths depicted Africans as fundamentally "tribal" in nature, asserting that they would only *temporarily* reside in town before returning to rural areas in retirement. In actuality, industry's cannibalistic appetite for black bodies trumped a competing desire to keep Africans at a distance. Thus, administrators initially took a hands-off approach, reluctantly allowing Marabastad to grow and flourish with the rest of the city.

Nevertheless, an increasing visibility of Africans in and around white areas led to attempts at "cleansing" the inner city. In 1910 Marabastad's African area was slated for a sewage treatment plant (Friedman 1994, 136). Evictions began the following year but many residents refused relocation. Instead, they rented rooms in Marabastad's Asian and colored areas or illegally constructed dwellings on nearby vacant land just beyond city limits. As Marabastad burgeoned, the area became an early target of Grand Apartheid which was the right wing's more methodical form of segregation.

Promulgated especially by the National Party, Grand Apartheid sought to entrench white power by endowing it with *spatial momentum*, literally etching racism onto the landscape through civil engineering projects that were buttressed by tons of concrete, miles of razor wire and millions of forced removals. Grand Apartheid systematically partitioned economic opportunity, a concept that could be rather abstractly construed as the probability that a person will accrue financial capital. To be sure, a person's disposition toward wealth must be shaped by many factors beyond the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, a central determinant of economic opportunity is access to emplaced natural resources including land and water, employment and accommodation, education, healthcare, physical safety and mobility. Grand Apartheid monopolized economic opportunity for Europeans. In rural areas, whites seized the richest mineral deposits and most fertile soils while establishing diminutive and largely barren "homelands" or "Bantustans" where they could dump uprooted African populations (Turshen 1986). Simultaneously, Europeans hoarded urban opportunity by clearing blacks and other "races" from deeply rooted communities like Marabastad.

Pretoria was at the vanguard of Grand Apartheid's socio-spatial engineering project due to its location at the epicenter of Afrikaner Nationalism. The city initiated industrial-scale removals even before the National Party clinched the 1948 elections. Evictions greatly picked up speed in the 1940s following completion of the Atteridgeville township some 15 kilometers west of the city center. By 1942, two thirds of residential dwellings in Marabastad were demolished, including not only African homes, but also the dwellings of Asians and coloreds who were reassigned to their own respective "group areas" even when they were allowed to continue operating their businesses. In 1943, the last remaining African residents were evicted in the wake of a bloody massacre of municipal workers who rose up in protest against dismal working and living conditions. In a brutal night of violence, a mob of police and civilian extremists went door to door destroying property, arbitrarily killing 17 Africans, and wounding 111 (Friedman 1990).

During the subsequent evictions, people who failed to prove their right to reside in the city were deported to the Bantustans. Meanwhile, those who could produce a paper trail substantiating that they were born or legally employed in Pretoria were relocated to Atteridgeville where they could be simultaneously out of sight but easily available for work. Monotonous rows of tiny concrete dwellings were touted as being a step-up from the destitute Bantustans because they were closer to urban employment, better serviced by public transportation, and had at least minimal water and electrical grids. In reality, both the urban and rural blacks areas were overpopulated and deficient in basic amenities and resources.

Grand Apartheid was premised on the belief that racial mixing inevitably resulted in conflict (Western 1997, 85). Interracial contact should accordingly occur within an asymmetrical power relationship with whites

in charge over subservient blacks. This so-called "friction theory" saturated the spatial logic of the colonial state. A more latent but no less important justification was the possibility that racial mixing would corrode the putative superiority of whites. This often-tacit belief is ascertainable in the "swart gevaar" paranoia that male domestic workers would rape their white mistresses, in the "sanitation syndrome" which argued that blacks were unhygienic and dangerous vectors for disease (Swanson 1977), as well as in the fear that exposure to African cultural practices and language could taint the putative purity of white society (Chiloane 1990, 58–60). Perhaps most disquieting was the possibility that counter- hegemonic understandings could emerge if racial groups mingled as they did in Marabastad.

Thus, segregation was not merely a way to spatialize and monopolize economic opportunity. Simultaneously, it worked to curtail *relational* opportunity—broadly, the propensity for people to interact and develop aligned interests and identities. Apartheid deliberately reduced relational opportunity between groups, both through material separation of residential areas and by criminalizing interracial communion. Deborah Posel compellingly argues that the core Apartheid doctrine which came to be known as "separate development" had a powerful, *material* effect on society. Defining and then siloing racial groups produced divergent "worlds of experience" which tricked people into perceiving racial stratification as intrinsic to very nature of reality (Posel 2001).

Grand Apartheid's reorganization of the urban core severely disrupted both economic *and* relational opportunity. Established, thriving communities were scattered. African landowners became renters and expenditures of money and time on transportation drastically increased. The new townships were tens of kilometers from the core while the nearest Bantustan, Bophuthatswana, was 50 km away at its nearest point. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, throngs of desperately poor Africans gathered just inside, and by 1982 more than 100,000 people commuted into Pretoria daily by bus or by train, often departing before 4:00am and returning late at night (Olivier and Booysen 1983, 127).

Tshwane's history was not unique. In urban centers throughout South Africa and the settler-colonial frontier worldwide, vibrant and diverse black communities were established near white frontier outposts. These include District 6 in Capetown and Sophiatown in Johannesburg, not to mention the Greenwood or "Black Wallstreet" District of Tulsa, Oklahoma in the United States. As settlements expended, outlying black neighborhoods came to occupy valuable central real estate, while a lack of investment in proper housing and infrastructure intensified environmental and social problems. With the ascendance of hyper-aggressive white nationalism in South Africa, Europeans rapidly and methodically executed industrial-scale removals and monumental civil engineering projects that physically manifested the doctrine of separate development as a pervasive *material and social reality*. Non-white populations were plucked up and displaced to

the outskirts—this time to places with more room available for expansion. Meanwhile, on the American frontier, Black Wallstreet was firebombed into oblivion by private aircraft (Simon et al. 2021). Worldwide, white supremacy's radical reorganization of social, economic and material space on the colonial frontier served to entrench and exacerbate preexisting inequities, engraving racial difference and racist ideologies onto the very bedrock of the planet (Beliso-De Jesus and Pierre 2020).

## The Conception of Schubart Park

By the 1960s, Marabastad was emptied of African *residents*, but not of African *users*. In fact, the neighborhood was more popular than ever for pass-through shopping and entertainment. It also remained a major transportation hub, with tens of thousands of workers alighting in the Belle Ombre station each morning before making their way into nearby white homes and offices (Brandt 2002; Olivier and Booysen 1983). Adjacent Goedehoop came to comprise light industrial facilities like warehouses and car garages, as well as run-down, low-rise apartments which likely housed a significant degree of racial mixing. According to the Department of Community Development, the entire area was "dilapidated" and in need of "urban renewal" (DCD 1972). Within the rubric of Apartheid planning, racial areas were supposed to be well separated by barriers and buffer zones with plenty of vacant space for unimpeded future expansion. The close proximity of Goedehoop to Marabastad, however, demonstrated the practical impossibility of rigid adherence to Apartheid's ideological principles.

This Department for Community Development (DCD) was a key player in the consolidation of racist geographies. Its central mandate was to provide affordable housing for whites, Asians and coloreds. In pursuit of this directive, the DCD redeveloped African "slums" for whites and asians (i.e. Marabastad) while also pumping money into existing neighborhoods. Planners at this time viewed densification as a solution to the shortage of housing which afflicted all racial groups to some degree. High-density housing was already well-established in settler society. Mines, factories and other industries had long housed coerced African workers in dormitories, far from their families (Van Onselen 1976). However, this style of housing was unpalatable for whites who aspired to live amidst sprawling gardens. Furthermore, sociological research on public housing projects abroad like Pruitt-Igoe in the United States suggested that high-rise architecture easily leads to over-stimulation, a loss of privacy and other detriments to wellbeing.

Nevertheless, the DCD moved forward with ambitious inner city redevelopment plans. In Pretoria, 10 blocks in Goedehoop were targeted. A scale-model was unveiled in the DCD's 1972 annual report. Each city block was a walled garden supporting one or more residential skyscrapers. Ten self-contained islands of urban parkland were purchased atop ground-level parking garages, thereby elevating these white supremacist utopias

high above the crosscutting streets below. A network of pedestrian flyovers linked these compounds to each other and to government complexes including the Central Police Station, the Department of Defense and the Human Science Resource Council Building. By providing accommodation for up to 30,000 people, this visionary redevelopment would mitigate the city's urgent need for affordable white housing while simultaneously functioning as a formidable bulwark against the ever-encroaching Marabastad and the omnipresent specter of retaliatory violence.

Schubart Park was the first phase of Goedehoop's redevelopment to break ground in 1973, with residents moving in scarcely four years later. Upon completion, the four imposing towers would have been prominent fixtures on the skyline for Africans alighting at Belle Ombre station each morning. Indeed, the complex would have been visible *throughout* the city, where until the 1960s zoning requirements prohibited residential units taller than 30 meters (Donaldson, Jurgens, and Bahr 2003, 11). In contrast to American "projects" which housed an oppressed and impoverished minority, Schubart Park was designed to accommodate the poorest of a tiny *elite*. Where Pruitt-Igoe and similar projects skimped on materials, landscaping and shared amenities (Bristol 1991, 165; Comerio 2014), South Africa's iteration incorporated numerous luxury and community-centered features. As one person explained on a Facebook group created by early residents:

> [I] Lived there since it started till 1982. Block A was a very neat, clean block as the caretaker was very strict. The grass was always green, the tennis courts well maintained and the swimming pool was always clean and supervised. The retail section was well equipped with what was required, a Doctor, milk shop, Spar, Video shop, Spar was the hangout as there were game machines in the back, lots of government employed people lived there.
>
> (Facebook User 2016)

Flats were preferentially available to low-income but certifiably white families with children. Ninety percent spoke Afrikaans, more than half were born in rural areas, and a strong majority had a standard ten (high school) education or less (Schutte 1985, 27, 29). Three quarters earned below R12,000 (~US$10,714) per year (Schutte 1985, 27, 28), which was less than a third of the white per-capita income (Van der Berg and Louw 2004, 11). Apartments were easily affordable to any white civil servant. In 1977, the monthly rental for a two-bedroom flat was R 198.25 (~$177) including water and electricity. Further savings were realized from the central location, which greatly reduced transportation expenditures. Schubart Park's towers were a far cry from the mansions and private gardens enjoyed by many whites of the time, including the young Elon Musk who lived in Pretoria's leafy Waterkloof Ridge neighborhood in the 1980s and was destined to become the richest man in 2022. Nevertheless, Schubart Park's affordable rents, central location

and vibrant social life resulted in a waiting list that was five-years and 3,220 applicants long by 1982 (DCD 1980, 12; Schutte 1985, 15, 18–29). Buoyed by this breakout success, the DCD initiated the second phase of Goedehoop's "renewal:" the adjacent Kruger Park tower which rocketed *thirty stories* above the city and contained more than 400 dwellings (DCD 1982, 22).

Schutte's quantitative study of Schubart Park entitled "social interaction and place perspectives" revealed that residents had generally *positive* impressions of the facility. They greatly appreciated the low rents and central location. Many reported being socially invested in the community, making new friends, having cordial interactions with neighbors and occasionally dining in each other's flats. Essentially, her research depicted what anthropologists describe as a *centripetal* place, one which pulls people into interaction with one another, thereby enhancing a sense of togetherness and shared purpose (Hall 1968). This was evident in the DCD's own definition of *community development* as the "process whereby human needs are met in housing, community facilities, and all other amenities indispensable to a full and balanced family and community life (DCD 1977)." Schubart Park was designed from the outset to bring residents together.

Schutte's glowing assessment was undoubtedly influenced by the state's financial support for her research. Even so, her findings resonate with the online reminiscences of youths who lived there during the 1980s. Their experience growing up in Schubart Park was so profound that they managed to port Schubies onto social media as a way of reconnecting and reminiscing with long-lost friends. Now in their 30s and 40s, they warned me that my research could never convey the great depth of experience which emerged from coming of age there:

> Don't know if a your research project could handle the stories I have of my days with the mates, no money could ever teach me about life the way Schubies and real friends did!!!
>
> (Facebook User 2016)

Some of their most evocative memories revolved around common areas—architectural features that programmed-in casual meetings and serendipitous encounters between neighbors. Of these, the swimming pool was the most famous:

HL: Decembers in the 80's were the best at that swimming pool
EV: I learned to swim here at the age of 5…good times!
VS: I remember the nights we went skinny dipping and then D and M would switch on the lights so we could see him do a bomb splash. Then the poor caretakers would come while we already sat in the flats laughing at them.
EV: Oh yes! And we mustn't forget about unscrewing the lights in the lifts and then riding from the ground floor to the 21st floor…he he he!

VS: @EV…I won't even ask!
EV: Do you think we were swapping recipes? Ha ha ha!
(Facebook User 2016)

Schubies provided access to opportunities at the nation's core and the semblance of a normal childhood within chaotic and turbulent times. She was the architectural culmination of a philosophical ideal: separate development materialized in concrete and steel. As Casey writes, "places gather" things, memories, and especially people (1996). Schools assemble children and teachers. Parks assemble pensioners (Low 2010), protestors (Bosco 2001) and lovers (L'Aoustet and Griffet 2004). Markets gather buyers and sellers who operate according to localized rules of negotiation and exchange that may be recorded, but are more often tacit derivations from millions of transactions (Richardson 1982). Schubart Park likewise gathered together the poorest, most marginalized white children of Apartheid, lifting them high above the nation's citadel as a gleaming testament of the regime's commitment to the least among God's predestined. "I miss all the friends and all the hugs and how we were the heart of the youth in Pretoria," remembered one Facebook user "and yes, the swimming, soccer, volley ball, cricket on P level and the make- out sessions on the stairs. I miss the people I can't track down. I miss everyone" (Facebook User 2016).

## Coming of Age

Times were turbulent. The post-WWII boom was sputtering. Skilled labor was in short supply due to barriers for black advancement. European immigration dwindled as blatant white supremacy became globally unfashionable (Brown 1987). Decolonization isolated the Apartheid regime, while the civil rights movements led to sanctions and divestment. Within South Africa, vigorous protests increasingly diverted state resources toward suppressing dissent.

By the 1980s, widening cracks appeared in Apartheid's racist geographies. Housing in African areas was strained by growing families and rural-to-urban migration. Earning cash wages in the white economy was by now one of the only viable ways to survive, and wages were highest in cities. Seemingly overnight, large informal settlements appeared on the fringes, and eventually within the urban core (Sapire 1992). As Africans moved into the city, Europeans left. Inner-city white neighborhoods like Hillbrow in Johannesburg and Sunnyside in Pretoria had blossomed during the 1970s and 1980s, but with the approach of independence, whites began relocating *en masse* to fortified enclaves in the suburbs (Hart 1974; Mabin 2005).

Faced with rising vacancies, landlords leased inner-city apartments to non- whites, especially Indians and coloreds who could not find suitable accommodation in their own, overcrowded and far-flung group areas (Morris 1994). Initially, spatial subterfuge was met with brutal crackdowns, but

the weakening regime was largely powerless to prevent integration. Signaling its waning grasp on power the state moved toward tolerating and then legalizing some mixed-race areas (Simon 1989). The regime also accelerated initiatives to perpetuate white privilege into the forthcoming era of majority rule, largely through market-driven strategies. For example, the legalization of "sectional title" enabled whites to purchase individual units within apartment buildings or townhouse and "cluster" developments, putting wind into the sails of real estate speculation which made home owners tremendously rich (DCD 1981, i). Generous financing and homeownership incentive programs helped white renters transition into ownership. For example, the "Home Owner's Saving Scheme" helped newly married, non-black couples buy their first home (DCD 1972, 3).

Du Toit's ethnographic research conducted in Schubart Park during the 1990s describes a community in transition (1998). Approximately half of the residents were white. These holdouts had been most dependent on Apartheid's welfare system and had few other options when this safety net vanished. The others were newcomers; upwardly mobile non-white families—especially employees of the integrating civil service. In 2010, I interviewed Happy, who along with her brothers were the first black children at Schubart Park. Happy's father, a South African, had met and married her mother Emily in Zimbabwe while he was in exile. After returning to South Africa in 1992, the family was looking for a place to live. Happy attended one of the first integrated public elementary schools where she learned about Schubart Park:

> There was no way we could afford living in normal flats. I had a friend in school, and I used to visit her at Schubart Park. I asked her how much she paid rent, and because we were extremely poor, I told my dad and said "why don't you do your thing?" And because my dad was in exile and all of that, he did his magic, and he got us into Schubart Park. We lived on the 21st floor. It was beautiful! [The Apartheid government was] seriously taking care of their people. It was a small Afrikaans community that took care of its own. My brother and I had our [swimming] costumes on, just casually walking into the pool. It was painted with white, just white. And as we walked, they kind of like looked at us. So my little brother starts running to me and says: "this one boy called me a K*****." So I said "show me." And this boy is like an Afrikaans rugby player. I physically *attacked* him. Every single white person saw that, and that's how I earned their respect.
>
> (Happy 2013)

Children have a remarkable capacity for overcoming parents' prejudices when presented the opportunity to connect on their own terms. Before long, Happy and her brothers became fast friends with a group of youths she described as "the lost generation" of the Afrikaans community:

> "Schubart Park was intense. Beautiful people with beautiful minds, it was just that poverty had taken over. And obviously, with them being white, there was nothing left for them…
>
> I was the first black kid who ever knocked at the door. They were hardcore racists. *Hardcore*, with all these tattoos. They would invite me in, but still have that rage against black people. But they wouldn't against me, I'm telling you! They would have an AWB [white power] meeting that I'd attend. A lot of them would sort of joke: "when are you and I going to get it together then?" But the guy is raw. He hates blacks, but now he's sort of in love with this black girl. He had to bring this girl home and say "dad, this is my girlfriend," and his dad had to accept it because now he sees who I am as a person.
>
> I grew up like that, being the first black everything. And those are the type of people we were hanging out with--myself and my brother. And none of them gave us a hard time. Obviously they used the word K***** a lot. But these guys didn't do anything to oppress me and my brother, we felt at home with them.
>
> (Happy 2013)

Happy depicts the youth of Schubart Park as caught between the racism of generations and optimism for the new South Africa. Children who were taught to hate each other suddenly encountered opportunities to form meaningful friendships. Even romantic entanglements flourished as Schubart Park integrated, wreaking havoc on cherished taboos. The very same centripetal aspects which functioned during Apartheid to draw the white community inwards upon itself suddenly began to support an integrated identity and fleeting glimpses of renewal.

History, alas, can be cruel. Happy and her brothers arrived just as heroin began ripping through poor white communities (Leggett et al. 2002). Apartheid's fall brought economic sanctions to an end. After reengaging with the global economy, South Africa suddenly became a strategic transshipment hub for opioids. Its affluent white population was also a lucrative, untapped drug market in its own right.

Schubart Park's role in this tragedy was to furnish a safe base of operations to the white drug cartels which also unleashed this poison into their own communities. Happy recalls:

> There were really dangerous names that were well known, that went to prisons and all of that. They formed a gang, the Original Punks for all of us who were sort of oppressed. It was a very unstable place for lost kids in those days, if you wanted to see raw, real punks you went into Schubart Park. We were typical "project scum," to put it like that. But there was also good as well. We all made family in a gang. P-level was where we did our drugs and got high. I was popular on the party scene until I started using heroin. I became like a hobo—crazy,

> homeless. I was melancholy! Who does that? Leaves their house to go to the streets? I did that for three years. My mother found my brother [dead of an overdose] at the Schubart Park toilets. It's true.
>
> Now if you ask, a lot of them are either in the streets or in shelters or you just don't know what happened to them. You ask: "what happened to that one? What happened to that one?" The answer is: "Dead, drugs, dead, street." You know, it's a sad case.
>
> (Happy 2013)

As much as Schubert Park brought people together—and this is accomplished spectacularly for nearly every single cohort of residents—it simultaneously presented opportunities for tragedy. Ironically, Happy and her brother succumbed to an opioid epidemic which was almost entirely confined to the white population. Beyond narcotics, vulnerable youths of all races were preyed upon by at least one notorious resident who kidnapped and sexually brutalized black children from the townships. More than one young adult flung themselves from upper-level apartments, disoriented and reeling after losing the backing of a regime which had guaranteed them a bright future regardless of their station (Facebook User 2016).

During the transition to independence, Schubart Park's management transferred from the Department of Community Development whose entire mission and sizeable budget was directed toward coddling non-blacks, to the Gauteng Housing Department, to the City of Tshwane, to various subcontracted property management firms. Subsidies were incrementally lifted and rents increased, leading low-income residents far into arrears. Successive management authorities failed to invest sufficiently in upkeep, causing the facility to tumble farther into disrepair (du Plessis 2013, 75; Runciman 2012, 208).

Gradually, the quality of life at Schubies fell far below the expectations of both the original whites *and* the upwardly mobile Africans who found the complex so appealing immediately following liberation. As these populations departed and the quality of amenities decreased, space became available for growing numbers of distressed people including the homeless and mentally ill, under-resourced college students, new arrivals from the rural hinterlands, and sojourners from neighboring countries like Zimbabwe and Mozambique as well as distant lands like Nigeria, Somalia, Bangladesh and the DRC (Brand 2014; de Villiers 2014; du Plessis 2013; Swart 2011; van Marle and de Villiers 2013). By the mid-2000s, only a handful of people from the pre-independence cohort remained at Schubart Park, along with a larger number of transition-era residents.

In 2008, The Housing Company Tshwane began serving eviction notices which revealed accounts that were in shambles (du Plessis 2013, 81–2). Irate residents further argued that conditions had deteriorated so much that the very idea of paying any rent was absurd. Eventually, the city earmarked R200m to remodel the flats (Masemola 2008), giving residents several

months to vacate the complex so that the promised repairs could proceed (Mosimanyana 2008). This sparked massive protests, with residents doubling down that they would not leave until they received title deeds and interim housing (SAPA 2008).

On July 22, 2008 the city council moved decisively to evict tenants from 38 apartments, seemingly targeting members of the Residents Committee which was mobilizing a formidable legal battle and high-profile street demonstrations (Yeatman 2008). The eviction was contracted to Wozani, a shadowy security company run by former Apartheid security officials (Ramutsindela 2002; Salopek 2002). Photographer Daniel Born documented apocalyptic imagery of Wozani's notorious army storming into Schubart Park. African footsoldiers known as "Red Ants" were dressed head-to-toe in crimson riot gear, wielding crowbars and chasing residents with raised sjamboks under the oversight of white officers.

As Wozani advanced, resistors threw bricks and explosives (Yeatman 2008). A fifth-floor apartment went up in flames while rubber bullets and teargas flew. Another fire then engulfed the upper floors of neighboring Kruger Park. "The blaze reminded people of America's 9/11 incident," reported the *Pretoria News*, "with the tall building covered in black smoke and the police and South African Air Force helicopters swarming around it" (Otto 2008b). Several people were airlifted to safety, while others jumped to their deaths to escape the flames. Finally, South Africa's High Court intervened to halt the evictions at Schubart (Venter 2008). However, on grounds of public safety, the smoldering Kruger Park was successfully emptied and sealed, with alternative housing initially found for only 12 people out of a building with more than 400 units (Khumalo 2008).

After failed evictions, a water service disruption stuck the A block for nearly three weeks, forcing residents on upper floors—including Happy's mother Emily—to carry water up long flights of stairs whenever they needed to wash, cook or flush (du Plessis 2013, 52). Residents suspected that service was deliberately cut to make the complex uninhabitable and force them out. Water and electricity failed again in December, prompting new, furious protests in which 34 people (including three minors) were arrested on Christmas and held for several days (Otto 2008a; van Marle and de Villiers 2013).

## A Final Effervescence

By the end of 2008, Apartheid's shining beacon was transfigured into an unsightly monument of continued poverty, inequity and crime in the new South Africa. The towers were festering thorns in the government's side, much like racial mixing in early Marabastad had troubled colonial administrators. Tshwane's denizens feared and avoided the complex in their everyday perambulations because countless news reports of muggings and hijackings in the vicinity. Law enforcement officers were loathe to enter

the complex while emergency personnel simply refused to provide services. "Even if you call the ambulance because you are about to give birth," recounted Shambudzai during her third trimester, "they will tell you that you are mistaken, that nobody currently lives in Schubart!"

In reality, Schubies remained more populated than ever. Many flats housed ten or more adults, often accompanied by their children. I even saw janitorial closets in the parking garage converted into bedrooms. According to a senior Residents' Committee member, the high occupancy rate was deliberate:

> Our strategy was, even though people leave...we put others inside for our own benefit. We're not gonna give them what they wanted, which is; when a unit is empty, they seal it off. And at the end of the day they'll rush to court and claim that they've given people alternative accommodation, [which] they did not do.
>
> (cited in du Plessis 2013, 85–86)

A large contingent of Zimbabwean refugees figured into this final cohort. These new arrivals were predominantly young adults whose parents and grandparents had been traveling to South Africa for generations (Suk 2017). In 2008, an escalation of political and economic turmoil forced them to pursue opportunity abroad (Pasura 2014). Lacking the funds and legal documents needed to enter South Africa legally, they traversed plantations, ranches and game parks on foot, braving dangers including wild animals, soldiers and robbers. Gradually, they worked their way south, earning a few dollars per day doing fieldwork on commercial farms. The lucky ones eventually made it to urban areas like Pretoria, but even in cities their precarious legal status undermined the value of their labor. Recognizing them as foreigners, people often cast them abusive slurs, accusing them of undercutting wages and stealing jobs rightfully belonging to "proper" South Africans.

Xenophobia occasionally erupted into violence which ignored shared histories of colonial oppression and centuries of trade and intermarriage between all peoples of the region. I came to know a group of women who moved into Schubart Park in the wake of one such uprising. They had settled in Atteridgeville after months of arduous travel from Zvishavane in Zimbabwe. Recall, Atteridgeville was the municipal township where Marabastad's final black residents relocated in the 1940s following a night of lynchings sparked by protests over poor living and working conditions. Half a century later, on March 19, 2008, Atteridgeville's elders awoke to terrifying sounds they must have recognized from their youth. An unruly mob sang freedom songs and fired pistols in the air. Moving from door to door, they examined people's identification papers to identify unwanted people. This time, however, the perpetrators were not Apartheid's goons looking for political activists, but black South Africans who summarily

evicted anyone identified as a foreigner by producing asylum papers or failing to speak dominant South African languages. One Zimbabwean woman, Farai, recalled how her housemate resisted. In retaliation the mob locked him inside his dwelling and set it ablaze. Farai recalled him screaming: "help me, I'm dying, I'm dying!" while he burned (2010).

Fllowing the riot, dozens of now-homeless foreigners found temporary accommodation at an abandoned automobile garage in Marabastad. They camped there for several weeks with privacy supplied by partitions made of bedsheets and tires. Portable latrines quickly overflowed into a polluted stream where the women also did laundry and bathed. At the abject margins of society, they were vulnerable to every kind of predation. One was raped, giving birth to a baby she named "Xenophobia." Later she reported being targeted by a European woman who offered to buy the child for 100,000 Rand and South African citizenship.

Serendipitously, the travel-weary sojourners arrived in Marabastad just as Schubart Park's Residents Committee was looking to increase occupancy in the towers to resist eviction. It was an easy decision to move from the parking garage into sun-drenched flats complete with kitchens, private bedrooms and glorious vistas. For possibly the last time, a tired and weary Schubies began working her magic, conveying with her flickering strength certain special spatial advantages and opportunities.

Once again, the positioning at the nation's bosom provided access to the urban core and a trickle of the wealth generated there. The Zimbabwean women started a hair and nail salon in the central business district which became popular with civil servants. Strolling to work through Church Square each morning was pleasant and efficient, not to mention economical. Living centrally obviated the need to pay for a cramped minibus seat and reduced exposure to xenophobia. Pirate landoards charged only about a third of the going rate for rent in nearby central neighborhoods like Sunnyside. Notwithstanding the terrible inconveniences of inhabiting a crumbling skyscraper, the refugees I interviewed were fiercely proud of their accommodation and the possessions they had managed to accumulate—belongings that would have been far more difficult to obtain if they lived in costlier accommodation. There was even an incipient sense of community supported in large part by the Residents Committee which had excellent public relations. In regular community meetings, the Committee gave legal updates on community developments and the battle against evictions. It clearly understood the unique needs of its refugee clientele and worked hard to satisfy them. For instance, I attended one meeting of about 200 residents where the Committee chairperson spoke passionately against xenophobia and highlighted recent complaints of sexual violence. He urged residents to continue reporting such incidents, as the Committee maintained a "task team" to deal with troublemakers.

Schubart Park thus acquired an inclusive flair. Walking through P-Level on a weekend, it was now possible to hear laughing groups of youngsters

smoking cannabis or playing pickup soccer. All the while, Zimbabweans openly and confidently joked around in their native Shona language which they dared not do in other parts of the city. News from home circulated easily as people were always coming and going. Chance encounters and unexpected drop-ins from friends and relatives were common. For more than a century, thousands of migrant workers, goods, minerals, machinery and money have moved between Zimbabwe and South Africa—one of the continent's busiest international borders. By 2008, more than 1.2 million legal trips were made from Zimbabwe into South Africa in addition to countless undocumented crossings (Crush, Chikanda, and Tawodzera 2015). Schubart Park was just two blocks away from the Home Affairs office where foreigners would periodically queue in the thousands to attain or maintain their documents conveying them a tenuous legality. For a time, Schubies became a hub in this web of comings and goings. It was possible, there, to find someone who could ferry one's belongings—or even one's children—to just about any part of the subcontinent. In the days before WhatsApp, Schubart Park also provided networking opportunities with more established compatriots who could share knowledge about job opportunities, asylum papers or NGOs. Updates about police checkpoints and extortion rackets were also eagerly shared, as Zimbabweans were unable to get bank accounts and were forced to carry cash, resulting in their use by both police and criminals as "portable ATMs (Vigneswaran et al. 2010)."

With a final effervescence, Schubies once again became a calm harbor in a tempestuous world. The first cohort of residents reminisced on Facebook that "it was like a big happy family in the beginning when it was just built (Facebook User 2016)." Mai Domingo, a Zimbabwean woman belonging to the final cohort also deployed the kinship analogy:

> Schubart was like home. We met a lot of people in Schubart, and we created this family, our family, even though we were not family. We were so many black people from different places in Zimbabwe, even from different places in Africa, but we met there and created one related family.

The expansive common spaces, the pickup sports games, the mixing and mingling that Schubart Park always engendered through her very architectural form—all these spatial opportunities were once again deployed in the service of Tshwane's depreciated classes. Like a skillful teacher, Schubies gathered her pupils together in a spirit of collaboration. After holidays, with few clients, the women I interviewed pooled their meager income to prepare communal meals. When one of their daughters needed an eye operation, all her flat mates pitched in funds.

This is not to say that Schubart Park was perfect. From the very earliest days, the complex was a difficult place to come of age. Most children living there experienced extraordinarily complex life challenges. This was no



*Figure 10.3* Resting in Schubart Park, 2010. Credit: William Suk.

less true for the final cohort. Poverty and desperation could be grinding. Trauma was pervasive. It was almost impossible to rid one's clothes of the clinging, sickening smell of raw sewage and burning rubbish which saturated the halls. Stigmatized residents were vulnerable in their daily perambulations about the city, in their tenuous legal status, in their finances, and in their exposure to crime and xenophobia.

Nor did Schubies ever provide complete safety from predation. Social problems that were already apparent during Apartheid persisted into the final years. And for all of its professed tolerance, the Committee was ruthless in extracting rent. Some residents attributed merciless beatings to the Committee's "task team" when people failed to pay, and in 2009 a man fell to his death from the fourteenth floor while attempting evasive maneuvers (Bateman 2009). Muggings were common in the damp penumbra of the corridors which were especially perilous for young women.

Even while acknowledging these dangers, the residents I interviewed were deeply attached to the complex and the relationships forged there. Unfortunately, the business ventures, the communal meals, the leisurely walks to the salon each morning through Church Square proved only as durable as the building which potentiated them. By the middle of 2011 service delivery again decompensated and residents reentered the streets. Amidst stormy protests on September 21, two flats in C Block caught fire and the entire complex evacuated. That evening, returning residents were kept outside, while others were trapped within, including children who cared for themselves and younger siblings while parents worked (Magome 2011). That night, and for many nights following, a multitude slept on the sidewalks.

Over several days, small groups retrieved belongings under police escort. Then they scattered. Some returned to Atteridgeville or Mamelodi; others to their countries of origin. New arrangements variously involved higher rents, less space, longer commutes and fewer amenities. Mai Domingo recounted:

> [We] found accommodation in Sunnyside because it was a bit cheaper… the living conditions were very poor. Myself and Rebecca, since we had husbands, we were staying each couple in one room. [Six] other gals were also staying in one bedroom, but we were using one bathroom from first floor to third floor.

Eviction decimated refugees' precarious finances. Living in Schubart Park had provided surplus funds they used to care for loved ones back home. Now, higher rents and transportation costs put extreme pressures on families and caused many people to fall behind on important obligations:

> [Leaving] Schubart Park disturbed a lot of lives. We were all relaxed, we didn't know this thing of paying rent, paying [utility bills]. So now you end up fighting with your man.
>
> There is no money. The money that you were sending to your kids, it's now the money you were supposed to pay rent, to pay electricity. The little that I would get from the salon, and what Baba Domingo was getting from work in the store was fine with us. And we don't send money to kids only, like myself, I will have to send money to my parents, and to Baba Domingo's father as well.

Some residents turned in desperation to endeavors which caused pain to themselves and others:

> You know we were not paying [much] rent in Schubart Park, so moving away also made people do some things to earn a living, like prostitution, drugs, stealing… Do you still remember Tsitsi? We were working together, but all of a sudden she just left everything. She said "the money is not enough, I've decided to do this shoplifting thing. The rent is so expensive." Now she is in and out of prison. The daughter is now staying with the elder sister. They are no longer together with the child's father. It makes me cry sometimes. I don't know how I survived.

As with the evictions from Marabastad half a century earlier, local communities could not withstand extraction from the architecture which contained them:

> The way we were taken out, that's why I always say *Zvinorwadza Schubart* [Schubart is painful]. Some of us never had the chance to say

> goodbye. We don't know where some people went. There are very few friends from Schubart Park that are here now, and we hardly talk. We are far away from each other. Maybe three or four are still close to me. The rest, I don't know.

## Resting in Power

Inspired by Kenneth Burke, Rhodesian anthropologist Hilda Kuper showed that some places are so charged with significance that they influence the course of events unfolding within them (1972). Contemporary theorists follow this thread further, circularly but quite correctly pointing out that places shape the people who create the places which shape them (Rodman 1992).

Indeed, when examined closely and longitudinally, places can seem more akin to *life forms* than to inanimate things. When human beings make places, we breathe souls into concrete and steel.

Through engineering, design and location, we equip architectural creatures with traits and characteristics determining how they will interact with the human ecosystem for generations after we release them into the wild.

At least, this seems true of Schubart Park. The building itself was a key influencer in the lives of the young adults who came of age within her walls. Her physical configuration encouraged them to form collective identities, however troubled and fractious: the airy brightness of the flats, the amenities, the high density living, the way that the complex was set above the streets and the rest of the city. It did not take long for the life histories of individual residents to become intertwined. This centripetal force was so strong that during the transition years, children groomed to be racists laughed and lingered on courtyard benches with the children of liberation fighters.

Even after becoming "synonymous with crime and grime" Schubies' last cohort still found enough security and camaraderie within her enfeebled embrace to forge families, collaborative businesses, and a safe haven from xenophobia. Places are sessile beings. Rooted at the nation's very heart, Schubart Park functioned as a stepping stone for inhabitants born with a dearth of opportunities.

Like all living creatures, places must feed to grow and survive. Humans devote much of our productive energies to maintaining places and our positions within them. Modern buildings like Schubart Park consume enormous amounts of energy and natural resources during their construction. Consumption continues unabated after the cranes and cement trucks depart. Water flows in, month after month, along with electricity and now data. Waste is discharged. Heat is disapated. An endless queue of broken doorknobs and dripping faucets demands constant intervention. When we are unable to nourish our places, the pull of entropy quickly becomes apparent, especially in high-density buildings with complex moving parts.

As government withdrew subsidies for whites, upkeep at Schubart Park faltered and the complex deteriorated. Places can be extraordinarily long-lived, but like all creatures they do eventually die.

We could even say that places, like biological organisms, *reproduce*. This can be seen in how privilege self-perpetuates through successive spatial iterations. South Africa's contemporary suburban security villages derive from midcentury inner-city fortresses like Schubert Park, which in turn can be traced to the *laager formation* which was a key tactic on the early colonial frontier. After the British seized Dutch maritime outposts, the Voortrekkers ventured deep into Africa's interior. Novelist Rider Haggard once sensationally recounted how the trekkers used a *laager formation* in a battle with Mzilikazi who was the major power in Tshwane at the time of white settlement. The pioneers deployed their wagons as war machines, using their mighty hardwood platforms to create nested barricades. At the very center they sequestered the most vulnerable and valuable women and children who were the seeds of the new nation. Schubart Park was a high modern, state-sponsored *laager formation*—an architecture of exclusion which has now been *privatized* in South Africa technologically sophisticated security enclaves complete with restricted access points, four-meter perimeter walls, night vision cameras and seismic sensors.

Across Southern Africa, and indeed the world, cities must wrestle with the tremendous momentum of inequitable geographies.. The glimmer of hope in Schubart Park's saga is that places *can be* transformed and reimagined. The Apartheid state expended enormous resources to inscribe a racist ideology onto the land's physical geography. However, in the end, one of the central strongholds was seized and appropriated by the very same people it was originally designed to exclude. Apartheid planners understood one very important fact: humans gradually acquiesce to the structures which contain us. What they failed to realize is that our structures also create openings for change.

## Epilogue

Today, Schubart Park stands vacant, largely stripped of recoverable metal by scavengers who still occasionally slip into the buildings to ply their hazardous trade. In 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled the evictions were illegal (Venter 2012), paving the way for former residents to return after the facility is restored to proper working condition. By 2013, 457 of 847 registered residents were approved and 193 had already received accommodation. The remainder were still being "vetted" for eligibility (Preez 2013; SAPA 2013). These numbers, however do not account for the majority of Schubart Park's final cohort who, as refugees, did not qualify for assistance.

Interestingly however, when examined longitudinally, the Zvishavane refugees I interviewed had as much of a claim on Pretoria as South African

citizens. They were of mixed Ndebele-Shona heritage because their home town of Zvishavane had come under Mzilikazi's sphere of influence when he was chased out of Pretoria by the Voortrekkers and established the Ndebele kingdom in Zimbabwe. For example, one woman had a grandfather who was born and raised in Atteridgeville and another woman's family still owns the spear used by an ancestor who fought in Mzilikazi's army. In the Setswana language, the word *Tshwane* means "we are the same." When viewed historically, for many refugees, arriving in Pretoria is actually a sort of homecoming.

A final ironic twist involves Happy's mother Emily. Recall that hers was the first black family allowed into Schubart Park by the collapsing Apartheid regime. Emily—a Zimbabwean by birth and South African by marriage—thus paved the way for racial integration, suffering tremendously in the process. Her early years were marked by racial tensions, and she subsequently lost a son to the heroin epidemic which was almost entirely limited to white communities. By the time Schubart park was illegally vacated in 2011, Emily would have been one of the most senior residents. Despite this, she has still not received compensation. Happy Explained:

> My father left South Africa, ANC, to fight for this country. We were literally in exile. I mean, [my family] started this whole thing. Black people lived in Schubart Park because we started it. Until today [my mother] is not given a house because my dad is late, he's passed away. Obviously they are going to look at my mother's ID and see "Zimbabwean born," not knowing the whole story line. She was there from 1992 until 2011 when it all closed down. They have given everyone else houses [except for her] because my mom is not South African.
>
> (Happy 2013)

Now, at least, the whole story line is written down.

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