

Chapter 2: Context

2.1 History of Marabastad:

The history of Marabastad is dominated by the Apartheid system. It is important to mention the history of Marabastad since it strongly influenced its physical layout and furthermore determined why this area is currently in the circumstance that it is found in today. In addition, the history explains how significant Marabastad is, not only in Pretoria but in South Africa, as an area to be treasured and restored.

Marabastad was officially proclaimed a Black township in 1888. Its boundaries were the Apies River in the north, Skinner spruit in the west, Steenhovenspruit in the east and De Korte street in the south. It had 67 stands ranging between 1400 and 2500 square meters. Residents could not own the land but had to rent it from government for 4£ (approximately R40) per year. Many Black¹ workers and work-seekers could not find permanent accommodation in Schoolplaats (Pretoria's only official Black township) and therefore began living in the land occupied by Maraba's village. The name Marabastad either referred to headman Maraba, or to Jeremia Maraba, a contemporary chief constable and interpreter (Van der Waal 1998:5).

The conventions of Pretoria (1881) and London (1884) gave more rights to Indian² and Coloured³ communities in the Transvaal and therefore many people from Indian decent began settling in Pretoria. After complaints from the White⁴ residents the government began to resettle Indians in certain streets, wards or 'bazaars'. If a township was referred to as a *bazaar* it implied that it had acquired a more elevated status than a *location* and in *bazaars* Indians were allowed to trade, own immovable property and build religious buildings. Between 1892 and 1893 an Indian township, the *Coolie Location*, was proclaimed south of Marabastad. Its boundaries were Bazaar Street in the North, Steenhoven Spruit in the West, Struben Street in the South and Von Weilligh Street (today DF Malan) in the East. The area was divided into 380 stands that were much smaller than those in Marabastad, probably to prevent occupiers from sub-letting parts of their land to informal settlers (Van der Waal 1998:6).

¹ According to the Population Registration Act of 1950 people were classified according to their race. The term "Black" referred to the South African population that was not of European descent. As a method of explaining the historical system these classification terms will be used as a reference in this section.

² The term "Indian" referred to the South African population of Indian descent.

³ The term "Coloured" referred to the South African population consisting of a combination of European and African descent.

⁴ The term "White" referred to the South African population of European descent

Similarly, many Coloured people from the Cape Colony and elsewhere started settling in Pretoria and complaints from White residents once again caused the demarcation of a separate township for Coloured people known as *Cape Location* or *Cape Boys Location*. This area was between Bloed and Struben Streets and all Coloureds not living on their White employers properties were ordered to move to this location (Van der Waal 1998:6).

By 1900 Marabastad was unable to accommodate the influx of Black emigrants moving to the city and soon the empty land between Marabastad and the *Coolie Location* became occupied by informal settlements. This area became known as the New Marabastad. Although intended to be temporary, New Marabastad soon acquired a permanent character (Friedman 1994:42).

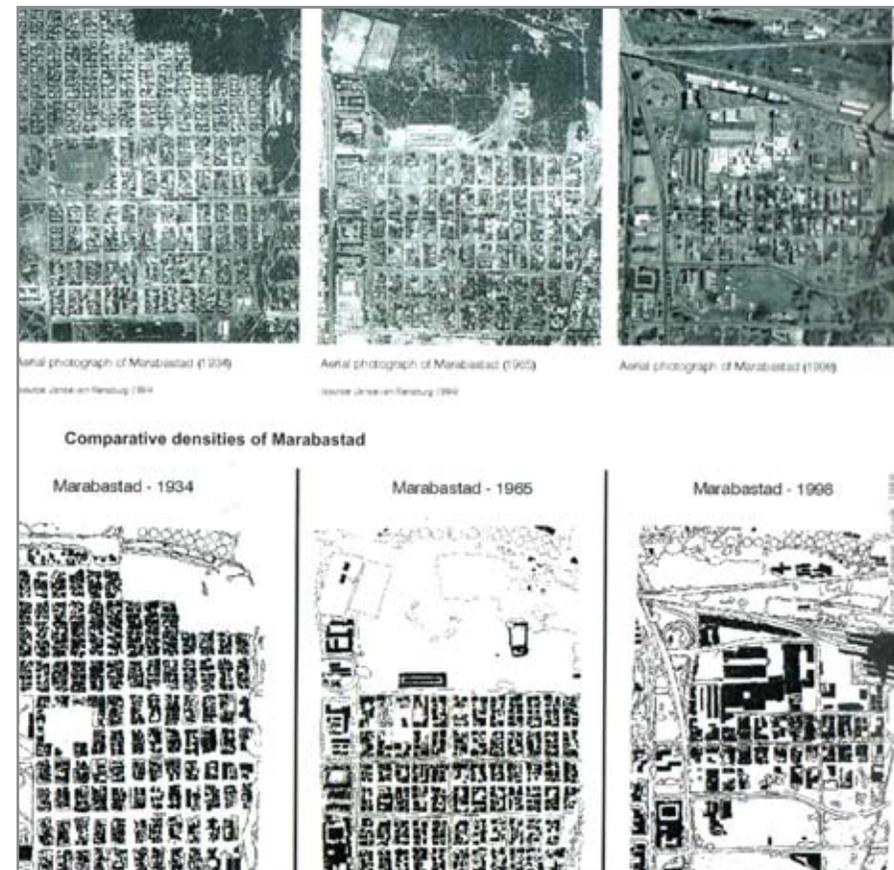


Figure 7. Comparative densities of Marabastad in 1934, 1965 and 1998 (Aziz Tayob Framework 1998)

In 1903 the area known as the *Coolie Location* was resurveyed into 464 stands, measuring 15,24 by 15,24 meters, and renamed the *Asiatic Bazaar*. In 1904 the management of both the old and new Marabastad, the *Asiatic Bazaar* and the *Cape Location* were transferred to the Pretoria City Council. The council started resurveying for purposes of implementing rates and regulations. By 1906 Old Marabastad and New Marabastad had effectively become one township. As a result of the survey done 1166 small stands were created. This meant that the 67 large stands of Old Marabastad had been divided into 665 minute pieces of land and the 412 in New Marabastad divided into 501 stands (Van der Waal 1998:8).

The *Cape Location* soon became too small and in 1905 it was also resurveyed. 80 stands were created of the same size as those in the *Asiatic Bazaar* and in 1907 the population stood at 457. A small portion of land between Bloed and Boom streets and west of Second Avenue was added to the *Cape Location* and between 1923 and 1925 council erected 50 houses on the land.

In 1907 council decided to establish a sewage farm on the land occupied by the 1888-portion of Marabastad (*Old Marabastad*) which involved 600 erven and where the Daspoort Sewage Works can be found today. The residents were resettled to the *New Location*, found to the north-west of the town centre, known as *Bantule* (after 1925) (Van der Waal 1998:8).

The remaining part of Marabastad rapidly became overcrowded since the establishment of the *New Location* did not solve the shortage of living space for Black people in Pretoria. This was further aggravated by the fact that part of the *Schoolplaats* community was relocated to Marabastad in 1934 and it was not possible for the area to expand due to physical boundaries.

When the National Party came to power in 1948 it adopted new principles regarding urban populations, such as effective influx control of 'Non-Europeans', slum removal and effective racially based segregation of townships. The 1950s saw a number of new acts through which the apartheid policies were implemented. The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified people according to their skin colour, descent and language. The Group Areas Act of 1950 proclaimed separate Group Areas for people classified as White, Coloured or Indian. Separate areas for Black people already existed in terms of the 1923 and 1945 Natives (Urban Areas) acts.

These acts led to opposition and aversion towards the government. This was expressed through strikes, boycotts, passive resistance and armed struggle. Political activists were regularly arrested (Van der Waal 1998:12).

From 1940 to 1950 Black people from Marabastad were relocated to Atteridgeville south west of the city centre. In 1950 the larger portion of the former township was deproclaimed and the remaining buildings demolished. Today, the Belle Ombre Station occupies most of the site where the New Marabastad was situated.

By 1959 the township *Claudius* had been proclaimed a Group Area for Indians and in 1960 *Laudium* was established. All Indian residents of the *Asiatic Bazaar* had to move to these two townships. In 1976 the *Asiatic Bazaar* was finally abolished as a residential area. From 1962 to 1965 the Coloured population of the Cape Location was removed to the township of Eersterus and most of the buildings were demolished. This tract of land between Bloed and Struben Street is currently occupied by a bus depot (Van der Waal 1998:13).



Figure 8. Map indicating where previous townships were located (Aerial photograph manipulated by Author, 2009)

2.2 Marabi Culture

The word 'Marabi' described a specifically urban, working class culture which flourished in the slumyards of Johannesburg during the 1930s (Iliffe 1987:128). The name is considered to originate from Marabastad. Marabi also described a style of music that combined the Afrikaans and Coloured traditions of the Cape; local African rhythms and Black American jazz. Marabi music was often played in *shebeens*⁵ and accompanied by dancing. Marabi also implied a certain lifestyle. "‘Marabi love’ was illicit, a ‘marabi girl’ wanted a good time. But marabi meant more. It meant youth and modernity. It meant freedom of the town. It meant freedom of towns not yet in the grip of the state. It meant hope and ambition not yet crushed" (Iliffe 1987:128).

The marabi dance parties became centres of community life and gave the African working classes a new sense of identity. Music was fundamental to the new culture of the urban areas and created the vivacity and the energy of the shebeen parties. This is how Wilson "King Force" Silgee, a famous jazz saxophonist, described Marabi:

Marabi: that was the environment. It was either organ but mostly piano. You get there, you pay your 10 cents. You get your share of whatever concoction there is - and you dance. It used to start from Friday night right through to Sunday evening (Anonymous, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/hands-on-classroom/classroom/pages/projects/grade9/lesson1/unit3.htm>).

According to Friedman (1994:153, 157-8) Marabastad was known for its illegal beer brewing and the accompanying dance parties also known as 'timiti'. Beer brewing was a visible symbol of the struggle between the dominated classes and the ruling classes who imposed police control, raids and arrests for the possession of alcohol. Beer brewing was a metaphor for the economic independence and resilience of the African working class. It ensured that money was redistributed within the community and provided an income for women who often were unable to find employment.

Marabastad was also a community of people from different religious backgrounds living in the same vicinity. The Miriammen Temple in Sixth street is still in use today. Sadly the Ismaili (Aga Khan) mosque in Boom Street is deserted and in a state of neglect. The mosque in Mogul Street, completed in 1941, is still actively used by the Islamic Society of Pretoria.

⁵ Usually a private residence where illegal homemade beer is brewed and sold

These buildings are landmarks which provide anchors for orientation and character. Other significant landmarks in Marabastad include the Orient (1), Empire (2) and Royal (3) Theatres where numerous movies, concerts and events were held. The Royal Theatre, situated on the corner of 5th and Grand Streets burnt down and no physical remnants of it remain.



Figure 9. Map indicating position of landmark buildings in Marabastad (Aerial photograph manipulated by Author, 2009)



Figure 10. Old Orient Theatre (position 1 on map) (Author, 2009)

Figure 11. Old Empire Theatre (position 2 on map) (Author, 2009)

2.3 Marabastad Today:

As seen from the historical section Marabastad was once a thriving multiracial community before it was subjected to the discrimination of apartheid and the numerous laws that ensued. The history of Marabastad is a troubled and intricate one including repeated evictions, forced removals and a recollection of rejection and neglect. The physical decay of the remaining buildings is evident since without proper municipal services, administrative control or future plans, the area was allowed to degenerate into a slum. This was further aggravated by hundreds of hawkers, as well as homeless people, who moved into the area (Van der Waal 1998:3).



Figure 12. Map of study area in Marabastad (Aerial photograph manipulated by Author, 2009)

Fragments of this once lively multicultural community still remain and, ironically, it is because of neglect that this historical node has escaped large scale change and development. The urban fabric of the area between Boom and Blood Street has been preserved. Therefore stands are small resulting in streets that bisect at comfortable walking distances making Marabastad a pedestrian friendly neighbourhood. The commercial activity is magnetic

and lures people from all over the city of Pretoria. However, safety is a major concern for all populations and the high level of crime is a problem that keeps many investors away⁶.



Figure 14. Dilapidated Building (Author, 2009)

Currently, the Belle Ombre Railway station is situated in Marabastad (see Figure 13) making it a major transport node. Furthermore, the proposed Bus Rapid Transport Route (BRT) is to pass through Boom Street. Commuters change between modes of transport and consequentially there is an influx of taxis and buses in the area. According to Dewar (2002:68) transportation interchange points generate large amounts of pedestrians, which in turn create the opportunity for high activity, multi-functional spaces where people can engage in informal social activity.



Figure 13. Belle Ombre Station (Author, 2009)

⁶ Many of the people interviewed in Marabastad alluded to the problem of crime. The banks that were situated in the area have closed and people have to bank in the city centre. There is no police station in Marabastad since the one that was situated in close

The tight street plan and numerous hawkers and pedestrians offer much human activity and vibrancy to the area. In fact it is this physical grid that spatially orientates a person in Marabastad and therefore is imprinted into the mind and memory of a person acquainted with the area. Furthermore, many of the buildings have retained their original facades and one catches a glimpse into the past by viewing these now dilapidated structures. The streets in Marabastad have continuous collonades (see Figure 16) which can also be described as verandas or

These include: poverty, crime, lack of services, lack of community involvement and support, uncontrolled hawking, squatting, land claims, unemployment and lack of housing. The author realises that this research dissertation is not able to solve all of these complex social and economic problems but strives to encourage a cohesive community that may in turn have a positive effect on these aspects.



Figure 15. Mielie Sellers (Author, 2009)



Figure 16. Collonades (Author, 2009)

'stoeps' along the shop fronts. This is especially evident in Boom Street and these walkways act as transitional spaces, a filter between public and private domains. These spaces or thresholds are where children play, traders display their goods and much daily activity occurs.

Before the area can attain its rightful importance in the city of Pretoria it will need to address the numerous social and economical challenges it is currently facing.



Figure 20. Sketch of the Miriammen Temple (Author, 2009)



Figure 17. Tyre Sellers (Author, 2009)



Figure 18. Car Washers (Author, 2009)

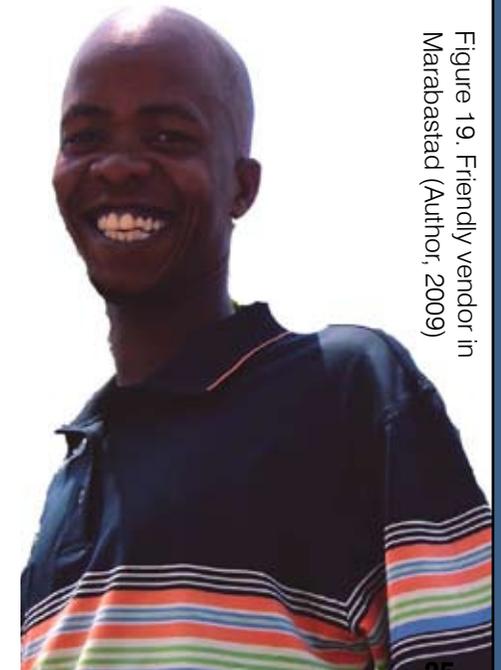


Figure 19. Friendly vendor in Marabastad (Author, 2009)

2.4 City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality Development Proposals:

Fortunately there are positive prospects for the future of Marabastad and steps are currently underway to facilitate the urban regeneration of the area.⁷ The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) is actively involved in the upgrading of Marabastad and has carried out extensive and enthusiastic public participation (LOSP 1997). Through the development of the Tshwane Open Space Framework (TOSF) certain guidelines will be followed regarding the open space within Marabastad (Figure 21). The TOSF was developed by the City's Environmental Management Division and aims to address the sustainable utilisation and integration of open spaces within a context of rapid population growth, urban sprawl, poverty and dwindling financial resources (TOSF Executive Summary 2006:1).

Boom Street has been identified as an important historic boulevard (Red Way) and council has proposed that the parking lot in to the west of the mosque in Mogul Street be transformed into a public square, named Maraba Square (Red Node). (See figure 22 for classification system).

On a socio-economic level there are proposals that include community outreach programmes, cultural exchanges, fund-raising, social upliftment programmes, community festivals and initiatives involving the broader urban society. Additionally there are marketing, publicity and awareness-campaigns to re-instate Marabastad as a cultural treasure of the city (Aziz Tayob Architects 2002:17).

The CTMM is currently constructing a Jazz Park on the open land north of where Bloed Street is curved. The project was designed by *Responsive Environmental Design* and consists of grass berms forming an amphitheatre; a stage where outdoor jazz performances can be held; meeting spaces and areas for recreation (see page 56).

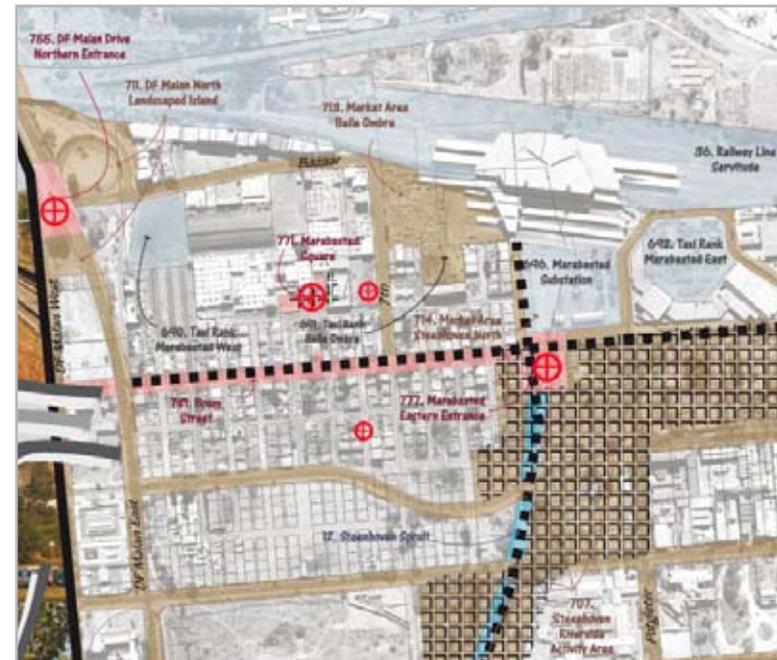


Figure 21. Map indicating red nodes as proposed by Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (TOSF, manipulated by Author, 2009)

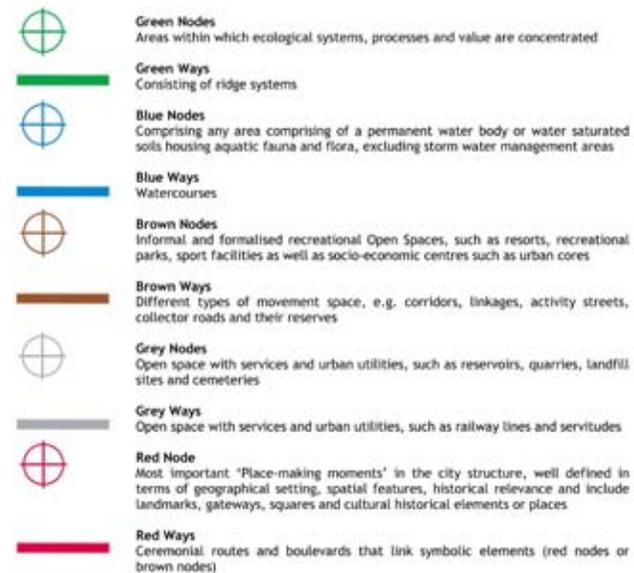


Figure 22. Legend for Tshwane Open Space Framework (Author, 2009)

⁷ In an interview with Laura Lourens from the Tshwane City Council she stated that high mast lights, litter bins, water drinking fountains, trees and benches were being implemented as part of the Marabastad Project.