

Outcast Cape Town

John Western

Foreword by
Robert Coles

For

Ernie and Catherine
Joey and Yvonne
on the Cape Flats

Pat and Val
now in Australia

The Society of Friends' Cape Town meeting

and in memory of
Victor Wessels

of Minnesota Press, 1981.

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Colored people—Relocation—
y—20th century. I. Title.

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Permanence of

pe Town in the
74.

Line

old Coloured boy in Cape
an apartheid tragedy almost
a's history.

der a train at a suburban sta-
his white girlfriend was preg-
her, because the Mixed Mar-
ge across the colour line.

ie money he had—30 rand—to
or the baby. He asked her in a
baby after him if it was a boy.
money and used it to pay for
tion could be obtained because

commit suicide by cutting her
was unaware that her boyfriend
l of his death after he failed to
se her to a cinema.

rd, 17, said afterwards: "I did
l was Coloured. The first I knew
old me. It would not have made
If only he had known that. We
o another country and got mar-
life away from apartheid."

not being revealed, because his
for white existence. The

They have five children, and the family lived as whites in a white suburb. They could not send the children to school, because their birth certificates classified them as Coloured and they would have been refused admission to a white school. This would have begun events that would have led to their exposure, their expulsion from the white suburb, and the loss of their white friends.

Whenever there was a knock at the door during the mornings, she would hide the children at the back of the house, in case it was a school inspector. "We are so frightened," the mother said. "Everytime there is a knock on the door we think they have come to arrest us." (They are contravening the Immorality Act by cohabiting.)

The mother said there were frequent family rows as a result of the strain under which they lived. "The final and fatal row came on the morning my son died. In a moment of anger, I threatened to telephone Sonya's parents and tell them he was Coloured. My son walked out of the house and I never saw him alive again. I feel so guilty."

She also tried to take her life, unsuccessfully. The son, in dying, bequeathed another problem. Because he was Coloured, he could not be buried in a white cemetery—friends would have asked why he was buried in a Coloured cemetery and the family secret would have been revealed. So he was cremated and the ashes put in an urn.

"I have hidden my son's ashes in the house," the mother said, "so that our friends won't ask embarrassing questions."

Sonya said her parents had forbidden her to see her boyfriend's family again. "I don't know much about politics," she said, "but if only he had told me. If only these laws that caused all this had not existed."

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Foreword

Robert Coles

I first met John Western in Cape Town, a city whose mixture of natural beauty (I know no place anywhere quite so dramatically appealing) and terrible human tragedy is the subject of this remarkable and important inquiry. The year was 1974; I had come to the city at the invitation of the students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa's oldest educational institution. During my stay in the city, I began to hear, naturally, of the various racially connected injustices that, in sum, are South Africa's exceedingly heavy burden— heavy to the point that one wonders how long it will be until an awful Armageddon is faced by the millions of human beings who live in cities such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Port Elizabeth, not to mention the countless towns and villages of South Africa. Among the students I met during that rainy August I spent in Cape Town was a rangy and obviously bright and discerning Englishman who struck me as being brilliantly informed, not only about the people of South Africa and its history and cultural life, but about my own country as well, especially about the difficulties America's blacks and Indians have faced as they have tried to obtain an all too elusive political and economic equity with their powerful, white fellow citizens.

Since 1974 I have stayed in touch with John Western and his South African wife, Wendy Western; I have watched a research project get done, a couple realize how hard it would be for them morally to live in South Africa, and two "foreigners" take up residence in the United States and contribute significantly to its educational assets. I have also watched this book gradually take shape: the careful and knowing observations, the interviews, the statistical data

pher, a member of a profession not
merican public. He is interested in the
the human landscape—in this book,
s where, and why? Who lives how,
re and ended up living there, and,
of sociology, history, anthropology,
ology, economics, and politics, since
the way people live. But the social
ures of *place*: the neighborhood or
vince as something to be examined
on like John Western, the lines on a
ditions of plunder, schemes, sleights-
quiescences, victories and defeats,
of various principalities and powers
like those lines no abstract exercise in
n and women and children, so very
hard, concrete reality.

s Cape Town is, of course, the matter
sly, thoughtfully, and worriedly. The
but he is also a person of compassion
s a living nightmare when he sees one.
n brutality, greed, and selfishness. He
fering and pain, to the spectacle of
ousing, inadequate sanitation, and job-
ile a minority does right well for itself,
whelming military power. His reaction,
self-righteousness. This is a book about
or who understands—with the ancient
War and Peace, with the George Eliot of
kner of the American South, and with
frica—that history is not made in dark,
ded by Satan and a few of his mortal
bly complex affair. John Western under-
t, and unpredictable circumstance play
le's, and continents's history (hence, the
or irony and ambiguity among those who
ties work).

for many Americans to turn the present-

over there. They were born into this mess, and so were we!" He was pointing at some white people, parents and their children, sitting on a park bench in Johannesburg; he was also showing an exceptional capability, a willingness to take a long, wry, and broad-minded view of how things work in a given history. Not that the youth lacked moral or political indignation; he was no servile product of a repressive regime, handing to the white master sweet pieties in exchange for a pat on the head and a stick of candy. He was a tough survivor of Soweto's riots letting an American sympathizer know that pity can be cheap and empathy meaningless to someone who has to ready himself for a long, tough fight *and* that his is a fight (so I have heard from many such "children") not by any means confined to the Republic of South Africa. I wanted to hand that "child" a few sympathetic words, but he had no use for the wordy self-justifications or the sly self-exaltations of my kind.

I rather think that "boy" would have enjoyed a bit more the line of inquiry and argument pursued in the following pages—straight-forward, unapologetic, clearheaded, and morally alert, yet unsentimental. When the reader has finished this book, he/she will understand how South Africa's outcasts live, at least those part of one important city: Cape Town. Cape Town's coloureds are accidents of history, no doubt! One can only hope and pray that there is time enough for those who probably will never read this book—South Africa's impoverished, politically disenfranchised, ever so vulnerable "coloured" and "black" people, and its whites—to come to their collective senses, lest one awful, murderous series of confrontations furnish us with yet another example of the cursed nature of life so many men and women simply must take for granted, it seems, "world without end." Meanwhile, we have a factual sermon of sorts, a study done by a man who writes like an experienced and astute essayist and thinks in the tradition of wise and original-minded social inquiry. His is no small or common gift; it is one to be acknowledged with gratitude. We ought to read the following pages attentively and celebrate them among our colleagues and friends as an encouraging sign for the intellectual life of a profession, of a community of readers—though not, alas, a sign that the question under discussion will soon be academic.

Robert Coles
Harvard University

Prologue

The phrase "political joy" may strike many readers as close to oxymoronic. Yet to millions of South Africans, this was their experience of the election of April 27 and 28, 1994. They believe, as I do, that South Africa really has turned a corner. However, exploitation, inhumanity, and arrogance have not been banished as if by a magic wand from the beloved country. Far from striding out confidently upon the broad sunlit uplands of democratic liberation, South Africa will for many years be limping toward whatever better future it may envision as its goal, hobbled (though less securely than before) by the ball-and-chain of apartheid. South Africans have only just begun to create their new "rainbow nation". The particular portion of this their collective endeavor at which it is my business to look here is the country's changing urban geography. Why is it that I suspect South Africa's urban areas are in fact confronting a less than millennial future? Why is it that the "awful legacy of apartheid"¹ will long remain?

These questions may be addressed in the first instance by investigating how this awful legacy came to be. Such is the topic of *Outcast Cape Town*. The reader will come to appreciate that the roots of apartheid may be traced back to Cape Town's establishment in the mid-seventeenth century, founded as part of that same great Dutch maritime trading enterprise that had founded New Amsterdam just a score of years earlier. Yet apartheid was not inevitable. Processes seen all over the world—European commercial expansion, conquest of native peoples, European appropriation of their lands, trans-oceanic slavery, miscegenation, nineteenth-century competitive imperialisms, colonial settlers' demands for political independence from the mother

OLOGUE

itch colonial empire brought differ-
ults, in what have become variously
Brazil, or Sri Lanka, or Indonesia, or
ilar South African combination gave
ex-colonial, racially discriminatory
African variant, however, was super-
ment of worldwide European decol-
to mere coincidence—a stringently
ssification. Its name, simply enough
bring infamy upon this otherwise rel-
d of the world”: *apartheid*.
what apartheid’s imposition meant for
e time this book was first published in
quarter century during which to trans-
a colonial city. Although racial differ-
inescapably, a major determinant of
7, the city was still in 1948 one of the
in sub-Saharan Africa. It is my con-
erb city was then remade in the image
the forty-year period during which
rulers of South Africa. Given the city’s
intercontinental trade and slavery—of
majority of Capetonians have been nei-
mixed-race” persons designated “Cape
rictly to impose a legal system of water-
ial” categories upon a million or more
nd culture makes them impossible to
n it be done?

ough in the sense of approximation and
3. After all the mapping and documenta-
the regressive transformation of Cape
also to apartheid’s human costs. You will
alled Coloured Capetonians in this book,
one of apartheid’s central laws: the Group
ented carefully conceived urban plans de-
n White control. In Cape Town it so hap-
ple in the way of these plans were those
ed. And the neighborhood which provided
Cape Town was



Catherine, a Coloured resident of Mowbray, at her wedding in 1946.



• • •

vernment finally in power in this
to pick up the pieces in Cape Town
frica where heretofore government
tly in order to segregate the races.
's accession represents a revolution?
al legacy of apartheid" will be swept
nents? Yet, a major consideration in
eable urban future is the degree to
gress' assumption of power is a revo-
matter for dispute among political
t does the ANC want to *do* with the
With roots in late nineteenth century
ianism, with its Freedom Charter for
o 1950s-style British welfare socialist
-reiterated article of faith of nonracial
ical revolutionary force. Indeed, over
rom Mandela's release (and indeed be-
lay 1994 of a government led by him,
s long-held projects—such as national-
mines—and then upon being elected
n no political party as Minister of Fi-
Pan-Africanist Congress come to power
Black appeal and its ideological dis-
Africans as mere "settlers"—and there-
ht have signaled possibilities of more
Pan-Africanist Congress, however, long
ation movement in South Africa, gained
a risible 1.2% of the vote in the 1994

on truly radical change—as the ANC is
f constrained by the limited resources at
African economy bear the cost of whole-
ge cities? The ANC-led government has
nlimited financial, natural, or human re-
this is a moderately sized postcolonial
gain on middle-income status in an oth-

ployment. Moreover, the phrase "taken as a whole" papers over the deep divide within the country between Third World majority and First World minority, a divide so sedulously fostered for so long along "racial" fault-lines that by one measure (the Gini coefficient) South Africa had the highest income inequality of any country in the world. To actively dismantle the apartheid city which is so evidently and intendedly reflective and indeed constitutive of this inequality would cost a great deal. The money it would take to pursue social engineering significant enough to somehow rescramble the racial and/or ethnic groups (as formerly defined) seems to make such a prospect utterly remote. A frontal ideologically driven assault on the accreted fabric of the present city—actually knocking large parts of the apartheid city down, or pursuing extensive remodeling—would mean the destruction of shelter in a time of ever-continuing severe housing shortage. And this in a country which is not rich.

No, a more realistic government policy would be to pour resources into low-income, basic public housing. Thus the city would be changed only in areas of new construction, mostly on its periphery. This is indeed one of the main ways in which over four decades the apartheid city was achieved, but it was an enormously demanding and ongoing diversion of energies for the Afrikaner Nationalist governments. To them it was an ideological and strategic commitment of the highest order, for in it they saw one of the hopes for their survival. As a numerical minority, they felt they had to keep the cities mainly White and to put the Black African majority at arm's length, safely under surveillance in controllable, custom-built peripheral townships. Yet even the Nationalists with all their planned Sowetos and Mdantsanes could hardly keep up with the Black demographic realities of rural-urban migration and absolute population increase. At immense cost, they as it were ran as fast as they could, only to stay in the same place.

It seems unlikely that such expensive schemes for low-income public housing will loom so high on the ANC-led government's agenda. Whether it be the erosion of the council housing idea in Thatcherite Britain in the 1980s or the collapse at the end of that decade of "actually existing socialism" in Eastern Europe and then in the Soviet Union, state-provided completed housing seems at least for the moment to have globally gone into partial eclipse. Communist ANC leader and 1994 Minister of Housing Joe Slovo's last efforts were to

electrical provision, and the furnish-
ally limited educational facilities. In-
C-led government appear to have as
t in housing. In early 1995 Minister
utlining the priorities of the govern-
tion and Development Programme,
olute priority" because of its "enor-
st of the economy. He also said, how-
that the government is not in the
rlier, in the first days of the new gov-
of the Building Industries Federation
dicted some 100,000 houses would be
e sixteen months that had elapsed by
ouses were built with state assistance.
ed mortgages, by November 1995 not
000 low-income home loans had been

costs, any attempt to truly undo apart-
cy could incur social and political costs
might quite likely overwhelm the ben-
immediately encountered could prove
African people. Suppose, for example,
als of Whites from neighborhoods in
Group Areas Act, they had supplanted
t White. In many cases this would not
duals who first profited from such resi-
o encourage Whites who possessed skills
South African economic development to
untry. Nor would such urban reordering
e. In some areas Coloureds were obliged
r Indians to supplant Black Africans; and
visions even among Black Africans. The
able of being exacerbated is very long-
passions aroused by such groups' claims
ed the term "ethnic cleansing" in the last
experience of another country just eight
frica, a country cobbled together by out-
as. One fears then, for the perhaps fragile

ment seems unlikely, whether it be either to undo the apartheid legacy in existing urban space or to be directly engaged in the production of a new urban space of mass housing schemes. This being so, I am logically led to agree with David Smith's striking comment of four years ago: "The post-apartheid city is already here."⁴ What does this city look like, and in what ways is it different from its regimented predecessor?

• • •

The villain of *Outcast Cape Town* is the Group Areas Act. It was repealed in 1991. Before we ask how much Cape Town is changing as a result, there is another repeal to bear in mind: that of the Pass Law (properly, the "Urban Areas Act"). Because the focus of *Outcast Cape Town* was on Coloured people, this latter act, being directed at Black Africans, did not loom so large in the book's total narrative. But it is the repeal in 1986 of the Pass Law, and the nonimplementation of subsequent associated administrative controls, plus the abandonment in 1988 of the Coloured Labour Preference Area regulations, that have brought the greatest change to Cape Town. "Unprotected" by these measures, metropolitan Cape Town is now being rapidly Africanized, something foreseen on p. 323 of *Outcast Cape Town*.

The repeal of the Pass Law is central to recent changes in the other South African metropolitan areas also. The series of Urban Areas Acts was an attempt to limit the number of Black Africans coming into the cities in a country in which Whites were decidedly outnumbered by Blacks. The proportion of Whites to Black Africans in South Africa continues to diminish—self-evidently the most basic of reasons behind the eventual turn by the Afrikaner Nationalists to a negotiated settlement. When *Outcast Cape Town* was originally being researched, the proportion of Whites to Black Africans in the country was 1 to 5.2; now it is 1 to 6. More dramatically, the total number of Black Africans in South Africa has in the past twenty years risen from 19.5 million to 40 million. As Dewar succinctly put it, "The dominant demographic tendencies are faster, younger, and poorer."⁵ Such demographic circumstances play their role in South Africa's becoming a labor-surplus economy, the corollary of which is that the unemployment rate among the economically active Black African urban population may be rising as high as 45%. Yet conditions in the rural areas are frequently so miserable that in the absence of Pass Law controls,

PROLOGUE

t published, may now have a popula-
Black Africans. Another statistic: from
population of metropolitan Cape Town
the newcomers Xhosa people from the
ern Cape. What this means on the
ian Malan:

scrapped . . . it was as if a distant dam had
te and hopeful humanity to come flooding
t across the Cape Flats. They came at the
y, and built homes with their bare hands,
bits and pieces of trash rescued from land-
ep out the rain. Within two years, the sand
mous sea of shacks and shanties, as densely
opulated by fantastic characters—bootleg-
rians, gun dealers and marijuana czars, plus
people”⁶

utterly outrun any capacity to provide
her by public or private sectors. There-
ng is becoming as much a signature of
as it is of the urban landscape of other
J. Davies, doyen of South African urban



Orderly Urbanisation: the new housing development of Khayelitsha in August 1985, immediately prior to occupation.



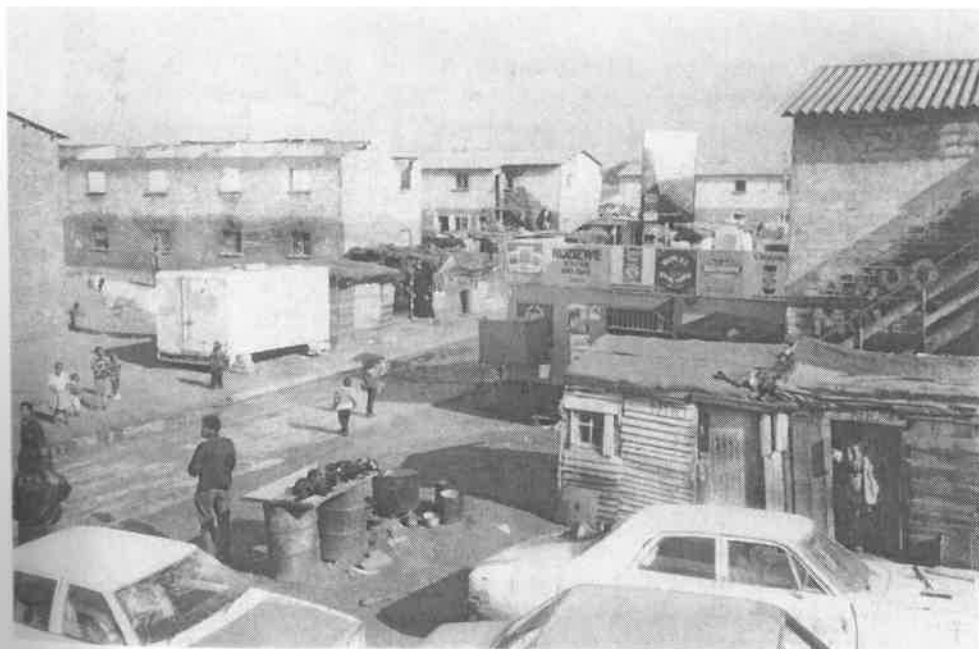


1996, revealing its characteristic mix of order and disorder. It was photographed in August 1985—with its orderly formally constructed houses—has been overwhelmed by the provision of electricity now augmenting the original development.

situation: “A controlled core city and an informal periphery.”⁷

However, been restricted to the metropolitan area themselves in a second location. *Within* the informal housing has been springing up on often specifically designed to have served between the racial groups as then defined. In an interstitial parcel of land within the city.

Thus shack conglomerations, limited in the peripheral areas, may appear either in the suburban areas, in Milnerton, Cape Town (near the Rondebosch Common), or in small clusters (as in the ranks of the township’s former



Shack infills in Langa. The shacks are officially numbered (N109, N110), are not “illegal,” and have access by right to facilities such as running water, toilets, and cooking facilities in the immediately adjacent barrack sub-unit. The man at center left is selling sheep’s heads for soup-making.

White residential areas. Unthinkable to Capetonians in those years that, say, Rondebosch Common might experience a “land invasion” and become blighted by informal housing.

Is it so unthinkable now? Certainly, it is politically undesirable for the present government to be perceived as bullying poor Black people such as those forced by circumstance to build and occupy shack dwellings. The new situation is thereby rendered rather more complex than that of the apartheid era. What is now likely to eventuate is a patient negotiation among the various interests: government, local residents’ associations from the formal housing zones, representatives of the informal settlers, city officials, and landowners (if germane). It would, conversely, be quite incorrect to assume that the present government would *necessarily* be enthusiastically predisposed to take the part of the informal settlers. The ANC’s primary constituency has

ation, they're liable to be left alone
time. Such "land invasions" appear
e of the greatest uncertainty over
nd 1991. There was a real fear for
djoining the city center at that time,
d.

g peripheral or interstitial, a third
ct on the overall landscape of South
e, "incumbent upgrading," is associ-
roduced into township housing for-
state. In 1983 "The Great Sale," a
off, was instituted, and by 1989 just
can government housing was in indi-
ents, who as renters in the past were
lditions or adornments officially torn
se same homes. As a result, the previ-
uth African townships has been partly
elf" diversity.

ree prior developments, a change that
while apartheid was on the law books.
e "grey areas" (because neither Black
Cape Town can now be seen so evi-
-water-mark of urban apartheid—that
may have thought it more or less had
s sewn up the way it wanted, with the
n District Six being expelled in 1982—
esburg a "White" area named Hillbrow
as a racially ambiguous zone. Eagerly
ped-for nonracial future, Hillbrow was
cursor of like zones in Durban, Cape
rmaritzburg, among others. In compar-
gimentation, the operation of the "free
n progressive, in its ability to conjure
sing supply and demand. "Greying" oc-
ges of downtowns, and particularly where
e for the suburbs, opening vacant slots
r-income Blacks (be they Indians, Col-
ight move. In 1988 a South African gov-
n apartheid nonetheless



Upper Ashley Street,
now gentrified as
Blinde Street, among
the hummocky, rubble
strewn empty spaces of
the former District Six.
This was one of a hand-
ful of streets not razed
to the ground.

As the reader will find in Chapter 6, such was the District's sym-
bolism that after the enforced removal of the bulk of its population in
the early 1970s it proved exceedingly difficult to induce any non-
government investment there whatsoever. Indeed, the parallel with a
never-to-rise-again Carthage which I made by introducing the image
of tainted, *salted* earth (p. 153) seems to have become common coin
in any discussions of the square kilometer or more which is District
Six. The present resultant underutilization of extensive tracts of this
inner-city territory makes it, surely, an opportunity for a democratic
South Africa to show that times really have changed—as shall be seen
in the Epilogue

ways, now more informally perhaps, i. At least for the foreseeable future, er subordinate groups will find their talist real-estate market, into favored, ial tracts. I anticipate no vast exodus, ned order. The future of South African out that of Nairobi. Recent studies of em to indicate this.⁸ Such a future has icialized apartheid."

back to the post-Pass Laws reality. As a me in June of 1996, "John, the differ- last here and today is that half the East- the Western Cape." Certainly, the Cape canizing—but it's not Black African yet. division of the Western Cape in which africans are still *third* in number behind no prospect of overhauling them in the bers of Western Cape citizens continue al identity in terms of apartheid's quadri- the regional government of the Western ANC one. This raises the possibility of government policies. Such obstruction, ntinuity in Cape Town-Pretoria relations *Outcast Cape Town* demonstrates (pp. 121- n dragged its feet in implementing Group ia.

ured majority of the Western Cape voted Party: "the election Mandela lost" (as tively dubbed it).⁹ How unthinkable: they ppressors, concocters of the insulting Im- for the creators of the Group Areas Act, effects in their own lovely city are mani- n's burden of the highest homicide rate in eds went ahead and voted largely for F. W. resumably hoping his party would be more Town's historic Coloured-White character

that election I first arrived in Cape Town. o think the situation was pretty clear: an government was oppressing its darker fellow

tween Whites and those who were not White, and documents the injustice of it. Now the Afrikaner Nationalist apartheid regime has, wondrously, disappeared. In the democratic South Africa that has taken its place, however, all is not sweetness and light. Divisions among South African Blacks (i.e., "non-Whites") have assumed major political and social importance. To have paid overmuch attention to such divisions during the apartheid era seemed perilously close to playing along with the manipulative game of the apartheid regime. Its divide-and-rule strategy used such differences for its own purposes. Surely, to concentrate on them at that period served to reinscribe them—and thus ran counter to the cause of liberation? But now I am struck, all these years later, by how close to silent *Outcast Cape Town* is on a fundamental division among the Blacks of South Africa: that between Coloureds and Black Africans. To this I shall return in the Epilogue, for it is central to an understanding of Cape Town today. First, however, the reader should encounter what apartheid did to Cape Town.

Notes to the Prologue

1. Susan Parnell and Gordon Pirie, "Johannesburg," in Anthony Lemon, ed., *Homes Apart: South Africa's Segregated Cities*, 129–45, (London: Paul Chapman, 1991, p. 138).
2. At the time of the enactment of the Population Registration Act in 1950, this was the total number of Coloured persons in a national population of about 12.5 million (Table 2, p. 59). By 1995 there were 3.5 million Coloured South Africans.
3. Slovo, a hero of antiapartheid resistance whose wife, writer Ruth First, was assassinated by a letter bomb in 1982, died at New Year 1995. He was buried with honor in Soweto.
4. David M. Smith, ed., *The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 314.
5. David Dewar, "Urbanization and the South African City: A Manifesto for Change," in David M. Smith, ed., *Apartheid City and Beyond*, p. 243.
6. Rian Malan, in David Lurie, *Life in the Liberated Zone*, Manchester, Eng.: Cornerhouse Publications, 1994, p. 6.
7. Ronald J. Davies, "Durban," in Anthony Lemon, ed., *Homes Apart*, pp. 76–77.
8. David Simon, "Windhoek," and Neil Dewar, "Harare: a Window on the Future for the South African City," both in Anthony Lemon, ed., *Homes Apart*, pp. 174–190 and 191–204, respectively.
9. William Finnegan, "The Election Mandela Lost," *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1994. The eye-catching title of this piece was furnished, Finnegan tells me, by an editor at the magazine.