

“We are going to turn this place into a place!”
Affective politics and everyday life in a pavement
occupation in Cape Town

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JCKJIN001

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Abstract

This empirically- based research contributes to a vibrant debate on the role of occupations in city-making in the Global South. Much scholarly debate, however, fails to engage with the embodied nature of resistance to power, nor how cities are transformed through affective encounters of the everyday in what might look like contingent and precarious spaces.

While most of the research on occupation in Cape Town have focused on land occupation in peripheral areas, a small, but growing area of research focuses on the occupation of existing buildings of the inner and central areas. However, scant attention has been given to the occupation of public space in the inner city to date. This case suggests some, emerging ways in which this Southern City is transforming through informal inhabitation of interstitial spaces. It does so at a time when the appearance of tents and makeshift shelters under bridges, along unfinished highways and pavements are initially associated, initially with the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet the case study from which thesis departs is an unusual one: It began as an occupation of an abandoned building, but became a long-term land occupation outside it, after the group's eviction. Furthermore, it pre-dated the pandemic by several months and was part of an organised social movement insisting on the right to live close to the economic heart of the city and the social privileges this implies.

Based on qualitative research over a five-month period, (including in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and photography) this case study shows how the occupiers maintained a space that held not only lives but heterogeneous imaginaries, experimental practices. The micro-politics emergent from this site, forged through resisting efforts to regulate and displace them, is characterised, (inter-alia) by the insistence of being hom(ed) and homemaking – as opposed to “home-less”. In suggesting that an attentiveness to the everyday, affective politics of occupations moves beyond conventional readings of the occupations as a contestation between citizens and state, it will interest those engaged in social movements, occupations, and critical urban scholarship in the Global South.

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Abbreviations

BNG	Breaking New Ground
CAN	Community Action Network
CPOA	Cape Peninsula Organisation for the Aged
CID	Central Improvement District
CTP	Cape Town Partnership
NRT	Non-representational Theory
OIS	Observatory Informal Settlement
PIE	Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission

Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1 Map showing location of occupation in neighbourhood of Observatory and its proximity to the city centre (Source: Author using Apple Maps).....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Figure 2 This section of the (mostly) tented Occupation lines an ossuary of tombstones which are all that remains of a much larger graveyard removed decades ago (source: Author, December 2020).....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Figure 3 Map of research site (source: Author using Google Earth, December 2021)</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Figure 4 Arcadia Place old age home before its demolition (source: (Levy & Hendricks, 2019)</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Figure 5 Activists sleeping on mattresses outside Arcadia Place following their eviction from Arcadia Place. (Source: Hendriks, 2019)</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Figure 6 The resident of this home was asked to step out of shot to maintain his anonymity (source: Author, October 2021)</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Figure 7 The derelict Conradie Hospital in 2019 (source: News24, 2019).....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Figure 8 A billboard outside the buiding site advertising the "mixed use, mixed income" housing, retail and office development (source: Author, April 2021)</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Figure 9 A cardboard sign outside T's home advertising his services and introducing himself to the neighbourhood (source: Author, April 2021)</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Figure 10 A children's motorbike is propped against an empty water tank in V's yard (source: author, April 2021).....</i>	<i>53</i>

Figure 11 K's "rat hole" is a discarded wire chicken coop (source: Author, April 2021)	62
Figure 12 The grassy verge in front of Arcadia Place before it was occupied. (source: Google, 2021)	77
Figure 13 A continuation of the verge on the next block (source: Author, April 2021)	78
Figure 14 A tree grew out through the top of this tent into which it had been incorporated (source: Author, April 2021)	79
Figure 15 The exterior netting of the Occupation runs behind a post box to maintain accessibility from the outside (source: Author, April 2021)	86
Figure 16 Black plastic sheeting covered this brightly coloured "hoki" making it less noticeable from the street. (Source: author, April 2021)	89
Figure 17 A makeshift shelter on the pavement, Observatory (source: Author, March 2021)	94
Figure 18 Makeshift shelters in front of hospital parking lot, Observatory (source: Author, March 2021)	95
Figure 19 The wooden pallet exterior barrier in early 2020 (source: (Broughton, Groundup 2020).....	110
Figure 20 The Occupation in February/March 2020. (source: supplied from resident's collection).....	110
Figure 21 Shade cloth was erected along the perimeter of the Occupation (source: Author, June 2021)	111
Figure 22 Seen from inside a yard. Shade cloth is held up on wooden poles at the height of the roof to shield this yard from the outside (source: Author, October 2021)	112
Figure 23 Sitting inside one of the yards facing the street, with the cold wind whipping my face, I could see people walking by just on the other side of the cloth, like ghosts (Source: Author, April 2021).....	113
Figure 24 The Occupation from across the Main Road, on a rainy evening (source: Author, May 2021)	115
Figure 25 The entry into this yard can be closed with a fixture made from a salvaged tent pole, (source: Author, June 2021).	120
Figure 26 A rolled up doorway to the right of the entrance to this home could be pulled shut when needed (source: Author, April 2021)	122
Figure 27 A metal sheet nailed across this glass-paned doorway prevented anyone from looking inside (source: Author, April 2021).....	123
Figure 28 The bookstand which sold books and music CD disks which would appeal to customers were students from nearby residences or health workers from the nearby hospital (source: Author, October 2021)	127
Figure 29 The yard-space, including tent and garden seen from the pavement outside (source: Author, April 2021)	129
Figure 30 The view from inside K's yard (Source: Author, April 2021)	130
Figure 31 early sketch map of the Occupation (source: Author, March 2021).....	131

Table of Contents

“WE ARE GOING TO TURN THIS PLACE INTO A PLACE!” AFFECTIVE POLITICS AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN A PAVEMENT OCCUPATION IN CAPE TOWN

Plagiarism Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abbreviations	v
Table of Figures.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Affect and abandonment in occupations of the Global South	10
1.1 “affect”, politics and city-making in the Global South.....	11
1.2 Occupation and embodiment: towards an ‘affective right to the city’	13
1.3 Abandoned urban spaces in the Global South	17
Chapter 2: Methods and issues of reflexivity	23
2.1 Situating this occupation in a neighbourhood and a city	23
2.2 Data collection	29
2.3 Ethical considerations.....	35
2.4 Reflections on positionality	36
Chapter 3: Stories of getting to Observatory.....	40
3.1 A route across the city to this occupation	41
3.2 Loss, redemption, and occupation	48
3.3 From the “Temporaries” to “Jamaica”	57
3.4 “We are tired of sitting at our parents’ backyard”	62
Chapter 4: Enduring, resisting, and making home in a contested space	72
4.1 An official response to “land invasions”	73
4.2 From a housing to a land occupation	74
4.3 “We won’t get on the bus”: pandemic, home-making and resistance.....	81

4.4	An insurgent settlement in the making	87
4.5	Standing on our own: resistance as homemaking	91
4.6	“Being here” as protest	102
Chapter 5: Turning this place into a place: embodied practices of the everyday		107
5.1	Between the inside and the outside: Barriers, openings, closures.....	108
5.2	Openings and closures	118
5.3	Spaces of encounter	124
5.4	Residues and ruins	130
Chapter 6: Resisting, holding, enduring, and turning a pavement into a place		134
6.1	Intuiting, detaching, adapting: Everyday forms of endurance	136
6.2	Going from “inside” to “outside (occupation)”: complexifying the “space of appearance”	138
6.3	What the inside holds	142
6.4	Producing a pavement (otherwise)	144
6.4	“Homed”, not “homeless”: a resistant politics from here	149
Conclusion		154
References		156

“We are going to turn this place into a place!” Affective politics and everyday life in a pavement occupation in Cape town

Introduction

We're being put under as a black people. Until when? Until Jesus come? When is he gonna come to rescue us from this bondage? There's flies in our eyes we can't see shit. Sorry for my words. Sorry, but I'm just telling you about my plight...what I'm feeling inside. My plight as a black person.¹

The question, “Until when?” hung, suspended, in the air. Seated in his neighbour’s yard, his words barely audible over the barrage of traffic noise, “L”, a resident of the pavement occupation that is the focus of this research - did not seem to expect an immediate answer. The visceral “feeling” he evoked filled the space between us and connected this place to the wounds of dispossession that went back to the apartheid and colonial past. The “flies” he referred to were both metaphorical and real – an aspect of his daily life in a place with no running water or toilet. his thesis engages visceral intensities, and with everyday life. It aims to feel a way forward through the blindness L evoked, towards something else, aware of how people feel their way forward from specific localities. In so doing, it engages with a critical urbanism emerging from ‘here’.

There is a rich body of literature on occupations which recognises their role in bottom-up urban transformation in both scholarship from Southern contexts (Holston 2009, 2021; Paterniani, 2018; Vadudevan, 2014, 2015a, 2015b) and the Global North (Harvey, 2020). Much scholarly debate, however, fails to engage with the embodied nature of resistance to power from these sites, nor how cities are transformed through affective encounters of the everyday in what might look like contingent and precarious spaces.

¹ Personal interview with L, 9 April 2021. All respondents’ names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

While most of the research on occupation in South Africa have focused on land occupation in peripheral areas (Lawhon et al., 2018), a small, but growing area of research focuses on the occupation of existing buildings of the inner city mostly in the cities of Johannesburg (Hoogendoorn & Giddy, 2017; Wilhelm-Solomon, 2018, 2020). In the city of Cape Town, a small body of work has focused on occupations of existing buildings of the inner city (Ciriola et al., 2021; Herold & DeBarros, 2020), however, scant attention has been given to the occupation of public space in the inner city to date.

Based on a case study of a long-term occupation taking place along a pavement in a central neighbourhood of Cape Town, this thesis delves into the intersection of occupation as long-term protest and as a precarious, everyday process of place-making. While other researchers have approached a micro-level analysis of everyday politics in occupations in order to focus on the intersection between occupations and social movements (Herold & DeBarros, 2021) I argue that the logics, and imaginaries associated with the housing movement which led the occupation are intrinsic to understanding the messy, on-the-ground affective politics emergent from this place, but that this everyday politics cannot be summarised to it. To do so would be to neaten the edges of the messy, and sometimes paradoxical assemblage of lives, practices and experiences that cumulatively transform this place.

A further objective of this research is to understand how these occupiers resisted seemingly intractable forces of social and political exclusion (or "abandonment") from this site and what kind of politics did they forge in the process of this constant, everyday contestation? This research aims to pose questions about what constitutes 'abandoned' space in highly unequal Southern cities such as Cape Town. In the available literature, much of from the Global North, abandoned urban spaces, are variously referred to as "*terrain vagues*," (De Solá-Morales, 1995) or "interstitial" spaces (Hugo & Du Plessis, 2020; Marinic & Qureshi, 2017). I situate this research within an urban literature that

engages with abandoned urban spaces not as static, but mobile, or in a state of becoming (Talocci, 2011). I draw from scholarship of the Global South, which suggests abandonment can be thought more through processes and forces of imperial dispossession than specific localities (Stoler (2013; 2016)). Furthermore, that what appear “uninhabitable” (Simone, 2018) rather than “uninhabited” sites might be engaged to ask, who or what may be considered “abandoned” from these localities?

I use the concept of the “everyday” to suggest that political struggle for an alternative social order is not separate from the everyday material and social practices required to persist in an occupation. This concept relates to Lefebvre’s dialectic understanding of everyday life which is at the intersection of the sector people control and what they do not. It relates also to the conflict between diverse and specific rhythms and routines of the body and social rhythms (Lefebvre, 1947; Lefebvre and Régulier, 1985). I understand “the everyday” to encompass both this dialectic between what people control and what they do not and as the practices, rhythms, routines, strategies, and experiences on which lives are based. This thesis engages with the forging of an affective politics of the everyday as a means of assembling the lives of those living there in a process of enduring and making a place.

“Affect” is an overarching conceptual and methodological tool used in this thesis. I understand it not only to refer to immediate sensory intensities (such as emotions), but also to the nexus of memories and senses of belonging people brought with them and drew from as they persisted. In guiding this approach, I draw from Thrift (2004, 2008) and Massumi (2015). The concept of “affective politics” is a term borrowed from Thrift (2007, p.187) which he used to refer to the political uses to which affect is put and which are shaped by contemporary forms of biopower. However, I understand the interplay between politics and “affect” in a generative, constantly doubling, changing sense employed by Massumi (2015, p.7-8) argues, that “affect” is proto—political in that he

suggests, "it concerns the first stirrings of the political, flush with the felt intensities of life". Politics, which relates to relations, events and change and "affect" is a concept intimately bound up with process and change. Therefore, to pay attention to the intensities of affect in this place, to relations and to change, is to pay attention to politics.

I borrow the following framing of "resistance" in the context of occupation and social movements, from Herold and DeBarros (2020, p. 124 as "practices of individuals and groups who attempt to stay put in the face of exclusionary, neoliberalizing forces". I pause, however, to consider two other senses of this term as it is commonly understood and which, I argue, must both be applied to this context. On one hand, resistance is, "the use of force or violence to oppose something;" on the other, "the ability *not to be affected* by something, especially adversity". In this notion of resistance as both a force against and its antithesis, the ability not to be affected by adversity are both vital aspects of an approach through the lens of "affect", going to Spinoza's understanding of "affect" as the power to affect and be affected.

The concept of "Abandonment" has broad signification and is commonly used to refer both to the dereliction of for instance, buildings but also as 'the act of leaving or stopping someone or something, usually forever'² In this thesis, I refer to both its biopolitical uses in the scholarly literature, but also use it in the broad sense to insist on "abandonment" and its resistance are not summarised to state-citizen encounters around housing contestation alone, as the opening quote suggests, but invites a wider, more speculative approach to the possibilities ushered in by these contestations.

² This definition comes from the Cambridge English Dictionary.

1.2 *The research site and objectives*

In paying attention to the micro-level, this research aims to tune what Thrift (2004) describes as "...the little, the messy and the jerry-rigged" (p.75) and in seeking to contribute to more textured, grounded accounts of ordinary life in African cities (Pieterse, 2011), this research is situated in a single block in a single neighbourhood. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork completed over seven-month period in and around the site of an occupation, organised by a housing movement called "*Singabalapha*" (We Belong Here) that is taking place (at the time of writing) along a pavement on a busy main road. The site is six kilometres from the centre of Cape Town in a predominantly middle-class suburb. Although this occupation has been known by different names at different times, I have chosen to use the most used name used most and over the longest duration, simply, "the Occupation"³. This is a name often (but not exclusively) used by its residents. I entered the field with the following research questions:

- (1) What memories and past connections do occupiers have to other homes and places which senses of belonging, memories, ideas, and teachings do they draw from and activate as they endure in this long-term occupation?
- (2) What bodily experiences, and struggles are particular to this place and the process of occupying it? How does these shifts and change over time? What characterises the affective atmospheres created between, in and across different spaces of the Occupation and between its interior and its exterior (facing the street)?
- (3) What everyday strategies do occupation's residents use to access water, electricity, and toilets etc. in a place where there is no formal provision of basic amenities? How do these strategies and the routines that result from them affect them?

³ For example, some referred to it by the name of the social movement who organised the occupation, *Singabalapha*, also, by late 2021 some its residents referred to it as the Observatory Informal Settlement), reflecting different moments in its history but also depending on whether the locality or the movement was being referred to and by whom.

- (4) How are spaces in or around the research site transformed in intended or unintended ways through occupation?
- (5) What are the effects of interactions between the occupiers and City authorities or other agents of the state over time? How do these shape this occupation?

I turn next to a brief introduction to the wider context of this research.

1.3 Informality and exclusion in Cape Town

This research, moreover, took place against a backdrop of increased distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown. While formal estimates were unavailable at the time of writing, during this period, there were hundreds, if not thousands of micro- incursions of makeshift dwellings into central areas of a city. In this state of flux and uncertainty, attempts by authorities to regulate informality using the means ordinarily at their disposal, are, to a degree, confounded. This set of circumstances introduced a state of exception in terms of enforcement and in terms of the law. Although the exact numbers of people un-homed by the crisis have not been established, the pandemic exacerbated existing homelessness⁴ swelling the existing millions of poor people, many of them without formal employment⁵, whose only hope of obtaining a formal home was through the state.

⁴ No independent statistics of the numbers left homeless by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown were available at the time of writing. However, in 2020 the number of homeless people in Cape Town was estimated at 14 000 (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

⁵ National unemployment rates hit a record high of over 34% at the end of 2021 (Statistics SA). Between April and June 2020 alone 2.2 million job losses were recorded nationally. A donor-funded, National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) report, which investigates the socioeconomic impacts of the national lockdown, also found that in June last year 37% of households had run out of money for food (<https://cramsurvey.org/about/>).

While the pandemic context is not my analytical focus, it does form a vital aspect to the context. I draw from this case study to ask how, during this break in 'normalcy', what new forms of collective life and ways of ways of inhabiting the city might be emerging? This case study allows for a more complex way into this question because this occupation pre-dated the onset of the pandemic by several months and, unlike the many informal, makeshift inhabitations in interstices of the city over this period defined as unorganised "incursions" by authorities, this was a protest action, led by an organised social movement.

Although informality as a mode of using and inhabiting the city is often considered a defining characteristic of cities in the Global South and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the City of Cape Town, marked by acute social inequality is also characterised by patterns of exclusion in which informal housing largely occurs on the peripheries of the city. Despite pressure from national government to enforce greater spatial integration and reverse patterns of exclusion inherited from apartheid, the city remains marked by these fragmented and exclusionary patterns (Brown-Luthango, 2020). Moreover, its inner city is the locus of a greater enforcement action against obvious informal incursions.

While a full discussion of this exclusionary spatial politics falls outside the scope and focus of this thesis, it is important for the purposes of this case study, to note that a policy of inner city "revitalisation" to combat what was seen as the threat of urban decay in the 1990s (Rogerson, 2018) resulted in the growth of city improvement districts run by public-private partnerships which are linked to neoliberal urban governance (Miraftab, 2007). The disciplining practices of the Cape Town Partnership (CTP) include controlling the homeless, informal traders and parking attendants within the city centre. The Central Improvement Districts (CIDs), Miraftab goes on to point out, "Create special zones within the city that receive additional privately funded public services which

enforce the city's by-laws regulating the uses and users of public space" (ibid, p.603). In an era marked by a neoliberal, capital-driven urban agenda, how the various spaces within the city are understood as 'abandoned' or 'valuable' holds significance both for holds power and controls value in those spaces. In South Africa, the value or usefulness of these spaces is overlaid with the added complexity of the durability of racialised patterns of spatial inequality which have outlasted the system of apartheid and further complexified by the dynamics of urban gentrification which followed.

1.4 Plan of the thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. It begins with a critical review of the relevant literature. This includes a body of literature, much of it from cities of the Global North which focuses on urban "dead zones" ("lost spaces", "interstices" and marginalia), and their relationship to urban transformation, with an emphasis on their role in contexts marked by a break in normalcy. I suggest that in comparison, much literature from cities of the Global South has approached the theme of special abandonment less from a perspective of specific location, than their significance as processes of dispossession (Stoler, 2013; 2016). Situate this research within a critical literature on occupations with a specific emphasis on the embodied right to the city (Vasudevan, 2015a, 2015b, Duff, 2017) as well as amongst a growing body of work which focuses on inner city occupations in South Africa in which the affective nature of experience is a central focus (Cirolia et al., 2021; Herold & Debarros, 2021, Wilhelm-Solomon, 2020a, 2020b).

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology followed in this research to answer my research questions. These methods include in-depth, unstructured interviews, mapping, and photography. I discuss the iterative process of adapting these planned methods to the changing circumstances I encountered, as well as ethical considerations and questions related to positionality in this research process. The second part of this chapter

introduces the study area and provides a brief introduction to contextualise the occupation which forms the research focus.

The body of the thesis presents the findings and relates them to my analytical framing of this occupation as an embodied struggle that created and maintained a protest space a “space of appearance” (Butler, 2011) but also a long-term place where everyday lives were assembled. I explore the challenges people faced as they strategized, adapted and endured, making a tenuous space of home with the constant threat of police harassment and eviction. Chapter 3 introduces the research participants and their trajectories of getting to this occupation as well as the memories and teachings of parents and grandparents they carry with them. Chapter 4 explores the contestations which shaped the unfolding occupation and which, in turn, the occupation shaped its surroundings. These progress from encounters of the everyday, encounters in the neighbourhood, to wider encounters with agents of the state and City. Chapter 5 engages with the embodied, everyday experiences and struggle of Occupation residents in a context where they were continuously exposed physically, emotionally, sensorially. It pays specific attention to how residents created and thought about their occupation through an inside and an outside as a response to this constant exposure.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses these findings in relation to the literature I draw upon. I argue that through their daily lives persisting in occupation, its residents transformed this space, enlivening and extending the possibilities that existed within it as a way of feeling their way forward. In so doing for instance, they challenged and transformed hegemonic notions of what a pavement or a verge along a pavement could or should be used for. However, their challenge to the status quo went beyond space and its uses, to resist powerful forces which sought to retain them as surplus people who could be abandoned by the state.

Chapter 1: Affect and abandonment in occupations of the Global South

Occupations are often framed through the insurgent ways in which people living in them can establish urban alternatives through them and to building the city from the bottom up in the literature (both in Southern and Northern scholarship) on how occupations and social mobilisations intersect (Ballard, 2015; Bayat, 2000; Vasudevan, 2015b). This thesis enters a growing critical reflection on how people assemble collectively through *embodied* protest at these sites and how through doing so, they transform cities (Butler, 2011; Duff, 2017). Intersecting with an insistence on the particularity of these spaces (Duff, 2017), I am interested in the particularities of abandoned sites and what persisting in a space which may be framed, either by the occupiers or someone else – as “abandoned” means for the possibilities emerging from these sites.

From a Southern scholarship, abandonment is frequently read less from specific, fixed localities, than as part of broader political, historical, imperial processes of the abandonment of people (Simone, 2018; Stoler, 2016). This has the advantage of enabling us to approach the question of “abandonment” less as a locality, and more as a question about who or what is abandoned and what historical processes are being challenged through occupation.

In this chapter I situate key concepts, such as “affect” and “abandonment” within the critical literature. I unpack some of the ways in which the relationship between affect and politics has been understood both by academics in the Global North and by scholars working in Southern cities and the possibilities that the lens that privileges bodies, intensities and politics offers for spatial and political transformation.

I then situate my reading of abandoned urban space within a rich literature on *'terrain*

vagues’ from cities of both the global North and South. Next, I situate critical debates on embodiment and occupation against a broad literature on occupation as a ‘right to the city,’ before turning to affective approaches to occupations in South African cities.

1.1 *“affect”, politics and city-making in the Global South*

While there is a growing body of urban literature that responds to Thrift’s call to approach cities through their affective registers in the Global North (see for example, McFarlane, 2011), Pieterse (2011), suggests that more research is needed to understand how the “affective turn” shifts an understanding of political and collective life particularly in cities of the Global South. Moreover, the contribution of feminist voices to the literature on non-representational geographies has been relatively limited to date, with the notable exception of scholars such as Colls (2012), and Dewsbury (2009, 2010) from whose methodological ideas I draw here.

Before considering the debate around the connection between affect and politics in the critical literature, it is important to note that defining the concept of affect is challenging and (oftentimes) elusive. One reason is that the concept itself takes multiple forms, and *all* must be embraced to understand it argues Massumi, (2015). Drawing on Spinoza, Massumi defines affect as the ability to affect or to be affected (2015). Scholars frequently distinguish affect from emotion or feelings which, Thrift (2008) for instance says are personal and Massumi points out are only a partial expression of the full depth of affect (2015). Rather, Anderson, (2006) argues, affect is impersonal, circulating in the space between the subject and object of interpretation and it is for this reason that affect provides a generative way to engage with urban space and its uses.

Massumi (2015) notes that affect is about the experience of change, the transitions that bodies go through. He notes, “This gives the body’s movements a kind of depth that

remains across all transitions - accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in tendency" (Massumi, 2015, p. 18). This idea of the depth which remains across all transitions, and which is related to the role, for instance, of memory, is crucial to the approach I follow in this thesis. Massumi suggests the following in relation to the body:

A body is defined by what capacities it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly. A body's ability to affect or be affected – its charge of affect – isn't something fixed (Massumi, 2015, p. 17).

The idea that affect can be understood as a form of thinking (Thrift, 2004; 2007) is compelling because it allows for affect to be approached as agency - as a means by which people transform the world and relations within it. Extending this idea, Massumi (2015) suggests that affect, cannot be stilled to be apprehended, but rather is "engaged in thinking, in expressing, in "taking the plunge" (p. 7). Thus, in thinking, writing, and engaging in research through the "affective" is to take this plunge.

According to Thrift (2007, p. 187), "An affective conception of politics recognises the political uses to which affect is put". Here, Thrift refers to modes of power in the Global north, foregrounding the conditions under which affect emerged as a key object of analysis, one that is employed to engage and reflect on contemporary forms of biopower and biopolitics. Southern scholars such as Simone and Pieterse (2017) are influenced, for instance, by Protevi's (2009) idea of "bodies politic" seen as an unfolding of a history of bodily experience. They use it to describe how residents of urban districts of Asia and Africa negotiate through multiple often parallel encounters in places where they suggest, "it is hard to tell exactly what could hurt or help you,"(ibid, p.65).

"Ordinary affects", the term Kathleen Stewart employs to speak both to our intimate lives and public life; engages with the workings of the ordinary, and the workings of power. Emphasising the potentiality, circulation, movement and flow of ordinary affects,

Stewart gives the following description of them:

... an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes and disjunctures. They are a kind of contact zone where the overdeterminations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place (Stewart, 2007, p.3).

Similarly, Massumi suggests that affect is politically oriented from the get-go," (2015, p.7). However, he suggests that while affect is inherently political because it is about process and change, moving into the register of the political, which is, "the arena of social order and re-orderings, of settlement and resistance, of clampdowns and uprisings|" is not automatic, but must be brought out.

I turn in the next section, to explore the critical debate around the role of embodiment and occupation and the possibilities this perspective offers for our understanding of spatial transformation in Southern context.

1.2 Occupation and embodiment: towards an 'affective right to the city'

I situate this thesis in relation to a broad literature on urban occupations which takes as starting point, Lefebvre's "right to the city" as an '*ouvre*', a right which is not conferred through systems of power but invented through material and relational use of urban space (Merrifield, 2011; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006; Vasudevan, 2015a; 2015b). Vasudevan argues that occupation is "a political process that prefigures and materializes the social order which it seeks to enact" (2015, p. 318). While Vasudevan responds both to the affective nature of occupations, as well as their everyday politics, other researchers argue that this approach fails to consider how an embodied occupation of space produces the city.

While Duff's research is aimed specifically at articulating the embodied struggle for

place in the case of “urban assemblies of the homeless” (2017, p.520), and conditions of precariousness. When applied to the context of cities of the Global South where conditions of precarity are widespread and for the majority, represent the norm, some of Duff’s insights may retain resonance. Rather than applying simply to assemblies of the homeless, can they be applied equally to organised forms of occupation? The dichotomy between “homelessness” as unorganised occupation and organised occupation is a central tension this thesis will explore. I therefore draw on Duff’s argument to suggest that those who occupy urban space make use of the material environment to mediate the performance of their right to the city, places emphasis not on what the right to the city means in general terms, but what it *does* in specific contexts. (ibid p. 519). The materialisation of the affective right to the city, its “corporeal coming into being” is a lived, embodied occupation of space that, extends a right to the city through embodied presence (ibid, p. 517).

Much of critical literature on affective and embodiment in relation to the right to the city builds on Butler’s reworking of Hanna Arendt’s (2013) “*spaces of appearance*” which are spaces where visibility generates power and which all political action requires Arendt argues. Butler extends this argument to engage with the material and bodily supports that are needed for protest action. Referring in a global sense to public demonstrations, Butler suggests that to understand the power and effect of these in our time we must “rethink the space of appearance” and to do so she suggests,

... we will need to understand the bodily dimensions of action, what the body requires, and what the body can do, especially when we must think about bodies together, and what holds them there, their conditions of persistence and power (Butler, 2011).

Butler’s emphasis on the role of power in collective action and in simply staying put, as a way of holding together and holding on is relevant to my research because it signposts and articulates the connection between persistence and power. Protests are enacted by

assemblies, but bodies are themselves the object of the many demonstrations, worldwide, which Butler (2011) suggests mobilising around the condition of precarity. Moreover, material supports are not only part of action but also what is being fought over in embodied ways. This is especially true in political struggles focused on basics such as food, employment or access to institutions or mobility.

Critical approaches to which I refer above draw mainly from research in cities of the Global North but have influenced how Southern scholarship grapples with what occupations of urban space mean in diverse contexts. In Kinshasa, for example De Boeck and Baloji (2016), describe a city that constantly turns itself into a stage and where the entire city becomes a vast 'occupy movement' thus upending Butler's notion of performativity and the 'right to appear' which in Kinshasa is the exception, but the rule.

1.2.1 Occupations, affect and city-making from below in South African cities

There is large existing literature on occupations in South Africa, most of which has focused on land occupations, however, more recently, the occupation of buildings has received more critical attention. In the South African context, occupations, whether seen as quiet encroachment of the ordinary (Bayat, 1997) or forms of 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 2009a; 2009b; 2021) are frequently recognised as a way of city-making from the bottom up.⁶ However, research that considers the "affective" dimensions of everyday life in occupations in South Africa's inner cities, has been limited. A notable exception is Wilhelm-Solomon's work on so-called "dark buildings" or 'unlawfully appropriated' buildings in inner-city Johannesburg (2016; 2017, 2020). While the contexts Wilhelm-Solomon writes about are substantively different from the context in

which his research takes place, it offers specific insights into how we might go about thinking about how affect and individual agency intersect. For example, Wilhelm-Solomon's (2020) concept of "affective regenerations" is a vocabulary that for how individual agency operates within occupations and how *individual* experiences, hopes, projections and dreams of those taking part in occupations relate to larger-scale systems and processes to which they are subjected. These, Wilhelm-Solomon points out,

...involve both passive processes through which urban dwellers are subjected to wider movements of urban change and also how they seek to shape their personal and social renewal in response to these processes (Wilhelm-Solomon, 2020, p.31).

It is important to note that occupations in Cape Town, have not followed the same pattern as in other large cities such as Durban and Johannesburg. The central city did not follow the same patterns of market decline as in these other centres, where larger scale occupations of central parts of the city were the result. Occupation in Cape Town's inner city were, until recently, relatively few in comparison to other large South African cities, (Cirolia et al. ,2021). Most critical attention has focused recently on the occupation of existing buildings of the inner city (Cirolia et al., 2021; Herold & DeBarros, 2021). However, relatively little research so far into the intersection of everyday life and politics of these occupations. Delving into the affective experiences of those enduring in a long-term building occupation in Cape Town, Herold and DeBarros (2020) use their these findings to reflect on the influence of often negative experiences of enduring in proximate conditions on individuals and also on social movements leading these occupations.

Cirolia et al., (2021) considering the case of an occupied, previously semi- vacant, state-owned hospital near the Cape Town city centre by residents facing eviction. Building on "bottom-up" practices of urban development such as 'peripheral urbanisation' (Caldeira, 2017) this work engages specifically with the affective experiences of occupation. It

suggests specifically, that 'retro-fit city-making' practices, are not merely survivalist, but also about care and meaning-making. Furthermore, they argue that in the process of making new homes for themselves in the occupied building, these are infused with meaning, as residents rebuild bridges between past, present, and future. Research such as this makes the particularity of place central to its focus. In considering questions related to what it means to occupy particular city spaces, which might be described as "interstices", "marginalia" or "dead zones", Next, I turn to the literature on "abandoned urban spaces.

1.3 *Abandoned urban spaces in the Global South*

Catalan architect, De Solá-Morales (1995) coined the term, "*terrain vague*" referring to the marginal seams and edge spaces which fascinate us and "indicate what cities are and what our experience of them is". Born as remainders, Deleuze and Guattari (2004) suggest these urban spaces are uncoded. In a rich body of literature on what are otherwise termed 'urban voids' (Talocci, 2011), 'marginalia' (Gandy, 2013), or 'interstitial' spaces (Hugo & Du Plessis, 2020; Marinic & Qureshi, 2017) these spaces are frequently framed through how the city can benefit from them, either regenerated retrofitted (Zara, 2016) or from marginalia as "wasteland" spaces where unique co- habitations between animals, plants, and humans flourish (Gandy, 2013).

Despite being relatively dated, Doron's (2000) work on "dead zones" and the "architecture of transgression" retains a freshness and relevance. Mostly drawn from examples in European and North American cities, Doron goes 'in search of the dead zone' and posits that in fact, these spaces are convenient constructs of a planning discourse interested in defining a remainder, or other to planned, industrial landscapes. Doron (argues that "dead zones" are anything but "lost" or "dead" but that the very act of framing them as such is inherently a "colonialist", a convenience used by planners

and architects who fail to explain what they mean by this. An aspect of Doron's argument crucial to this thesis is how marginalised communities such as street vendors, protestors and squatters transgress existing architectures and planning constraints, arguing, "...these communities truly produce the space, transgress the space and with it show the allusiveness of architecture and planning" (Doron, 2000, p.253).

In cities of the Global South however, where urban development has not followed from a base of industrial growth, such transformation of streets, buildings and other sites through informal use and inhabitation may not seem remarkable enough to be called transgressive, but which are ordinary. One does not have to look far for examples: De Boeck and Baloji (2016), describe Kinshasa as a city that becomes a vast 'occupy movement' above). By contrast, in the city of Cape Town efforts to keep informality out of the central parts of the city and on the peripheries has been achieved through anti-crime and grime public-private policing of the street under a neoliberal city governance that bids for "World Class" status (Miraftab, 2007).

Taking a different angle on what abandonment means in Southern contexts, a growing literature focuses on "ruination" as a historical force or what Stoler (2013, 2016) refers to as "imperial formation" or, a process with material effects on places and lives. Thus, ruined spaces are anything but static, but places in the making. These ruined spaces are frequently seen as places from which to write about the city. For instance, Simone (2018), who, like Stoler (2013), draws on McKittrick's (2013) work on plantation geographies of the Caribbean, to argue that the "uninhabitable" carries an association with what he terms, "lands of no-one" (p.93). These then, are places to be settled, occupied, colonised. By moving the emphasises from what is empty or uninhabited, he argues, much of the world's urban districts come to seem 'uninhabitable'. What makes them uninhabitable (aside from conditions of toxicity and violence), is a way of thinking from them that challenges what it means to viably inhabit a place (Simone, 2018). For

Simone, the 'uninhabitable' emerges from the broken lives and broken infrastructures of what Simone terms a "district" (p 10). I draw from some of the vocabulary that Simone provides in this thesis as generative ways to begin to describe the practices which shape abandoned urban spaces and the varied roles they might play in highly unequal cities, such as Cape Town, particularly during this period of crisis or break in normalcy. The question of how occupations of abandoned sites interact in a time of economic or social crisis, is one this thesis explores.

Tonkiss (2013) suggests that in periods of crisis, or a break in normalcy, urban interventions that work on different temporal scales and according to different logics are tolerated by the state and market (even sometimes tacitly encouraged). While drawing from examples of European cities post the 2008 global recession, Tonkiss offers intriguing insights. She cites examples of 'makeshift' practices which take place over time in occupied buildings suggesting that in particular "makeshift" practices which are characterised by being regular, painstaking, and open to contingency (such as food gardens) are able to find anchor when ordinarily these types of interventions are at odds with logics of urban 'development' through accumulation and exclusion.

Writing from Istanbul, a global city and battlefield of diverse and clashing interests, Talocci's, (2011) semiotic reading of urban voids and resistance from them which offers a dynamic understanding of the open and inclusive nature of these spaces. These spaces (which can be entire neighbourhoods), escape enclosure, either by being 'left outside' or 'taken outside' the mainstream global city argues Talocci (2011). In Talocci's semiotic reading the city is composed of connected "archipelagos" such as gated communities and other zones of gentrification, but offers up excluded urban voids which are "receptacles of otherness and diversity." Talocci emphasises the 'double-sidedness' of urban voids which, he suggests are 'heterotopias'¹³ in the deepest sense in that they develop outside the rest of the city but are connected to it, intrinsically open. Moreover,

he emphasises a certain mobility in how these voids operate within cities. They can escape capture by the mainstream archipelago for some time, but once they become visible and recognisable, they can disappear, only to reappear again in a different form, somewhere else (Talocci, 2011, p.2). I turn in the next section from abandonment, framed through the lens of locality or historical process, to consider how the abandonment of people is framed in post-colonial context, particularly in South Africa.

1.3.1 Abandonment: people and places

"Abandonment" is at the heart of the questions this thesis addresses and relates both to places and to people. This concept of 'abandonment' has deep roots in Western culture going back to Greco-Roman times. While full discussion of these material, political and juridical aspects of abandonment fall outside the scope of this thesis, Leshem (2017) notes that abandonment is a key structural feature of the neoliberal state, a product of the dismantling of protections against the inequalities of market forces. Moreover, when seen as a biopolitical construct, abandonment illuminates the margins of late modernism as Mbembe (2019) suggests, writing about the necropolitical violence that is left when sovereign protections of a hollowed-out democracy are withdrawn. In late liberalism, suggests, forms of social abandonment are rationalised in terms of how value is attributed to certain groups or individuals. This, according to Povinelli (2011) is done to distinguish between those who can be functional to the 'order of value' and those who may be considered 'surplus' and therefore may be left to die. Crucially, for the purposes of this research, Povinelli suggests that practices that resist these 'economies of abandonment' include "the persistence of living," and endurance. Through these mechanisms, marginal social groups and abandoned people nurture social projects for living "otherwise."

In the immediate context of this research, one shaped by the global pandemic which

ushered in certain forms of a break in normalcy, Agamben's (1998) influential post-Foucauldian notion of biopower helps engage with the notion of abandonment in relation to these events and responses to them. Agamben extends Foucault's (2007) notion that those with juridical power (sovereign rule) have power over life. Within a state of emergency, he suggests, "states of exception" exist, where ordinary constitutional rights may be diminished, removed, or superseded in the process through which a state claims this extension of power. These "states of exception" produce "spaces of exception", which Agamben (1998) understands as a topographical space produced when sovereign power invokes the law to suspend the law. In this performative act, a boundary is created between those politically qualified to have life, and those qualified to merely exist, thus wilfully exposed and abandoned to violence and death (ibid, 1998).

There is much critical debate over Agamben's idea that *homo sacer* (a person reduced to the status of bare life) emerges at the moment that sovereign power suspends the law, whose absence falls over a "zone of abandonment". Writing from a South African context, Selmeczi (2014), who criticises Agamben for foreclosing the possibility to meaningfully think resistance to this form of politics, instead suggests, that abandonment is a salient feature of the post-apartheid state. She suggests that the idea of universal provision of basic services was discarded in favour of hard-core neoliberalism post 1994. The power that aimed at fostering the life of the population through working with the effects of reality that were supposed to tend towards the well-being of all, in its present, neoliberal form produces spaces of abandonment populated by lives which are not to be maintained (Selmeczi, 2010, pp.2-3). Furthermore, she suggests that in an era of splintered urbanism, where a growth-led developmentalist model has failed, those people who are deemed surplus to the circulation of finance and value in cities (such as Cape Town) competing for "World Class" status, are relegated to spaces of marginalisation (Selmeczi, 2010). This last point is critical to an

understanding of how forces work both to marginalise people as well as how resistance to abandonment arises.

In the post-colonial turned neoliberal South African city, the policy context for informal settlements is "urban containment." Given their free rights as citizens to be as mobile as the rest, the aim is to dislocate the urban poor as the state attempts to create a desirable milieu for the market (Selmeczi, 2014; Huchzermeyer, 2010, p. 233). Thus, the spatial order of apartheid having outlived the demise of a political ideology, the ultimate question of urban development turned to how to contain the undesirable movement of people who, given their rights as free citizens of the democratic SA are supposed to be as mobile as the rest (Levenson, 2012; Selmeczi, 2014).

In conclusion, despite a call by scholars for greater attention to how the "affective turn" shifts an understanding of political and collective life particularly in cities of the Global South (Pieterse, 2011) there has been limited scholarly attention, especially from a feminist perspective to how politics emerges within what may appear precarious and contingent spaces people occupy. This chapter considered a precise literature on the role of affect and embodiment in the lived expression of political life as well as a broader literature on affect, embodiment and occupations. In critical debate on the role of embodiment in extending the 'right to the city' through, for instance, protest, and how space is produced through these efforts, examples are largely drawn from occupations in the context of alter-globalisation movements. Meanwhile, a review of the literature on "dead zones" or "marginalia" which are the site of makeshift occupations of the kind under consideration in my case study, points to a shift in perspective by Southern scholars, away from considering the characteristics and potentialities specific sites as remaindered others of the industrial city, to thinking "abandonment" as an imperial force (Stoler, 2013, 2016) or reconceptualising "the uninhabitable" as a way of thinking that challenges what it means to viably inhabit a place (Simone, 2018).

Chapter 2: Methods and issues of reflexivity

Inspired by aspects of the literature explored in the previous chapter that specifically explores the border zone between subjective and the material and the possibilities for urban transformation from below, I focused on the case of a single occupation taking place along a main road in the neighbourhood of Observatory. A focus on a single case allowed for thick, detailed data collection of micro-context. Time constraint was an additional factor influencing the choice of a single, micro-context. A focus on the everyday routines and practices in this one place could provide deep, layered data over time, rather than a superficial focus on multiple sites. I drew on a combination of methods which privilege the capture of dense and sensorial registers, as well as forms of grounded research which privilege what emerges from empirical data rather than imposing theory from above (Zamani & Babaei, 2021).

2.1 *Situating this occupation in a neighbourhood and a city*

If one drives, or walks, along the Main Road that runs from the central city through the neighbourhoods of Salt River and Woodstock, then Observatory, just before turning onto the National (N2) highway that leads towards the airport and outskirts of the city one passes the research site, an occupation along the pavement. It is in Observatory, a middle-class, residential neighbourhood within which the Occupation which is situated roughly seven kilometres from the centre of Cape Town as the map in Figure 1 reflects. It is one of the residential neighbourhoods (that also include Salt River, Woodstock, and Mowbray) which ring the inner city. Like other areas of relative privilege, the area employs private policing or “anti-crime-and-grime” tactics to displace “undesirable” elements from the streets⁷.

⁷ For a full discussion on these socio-spatial territorial tactics in the City of Cape Town see, for example, (Berg, 2004; Paasche et al., 2014)

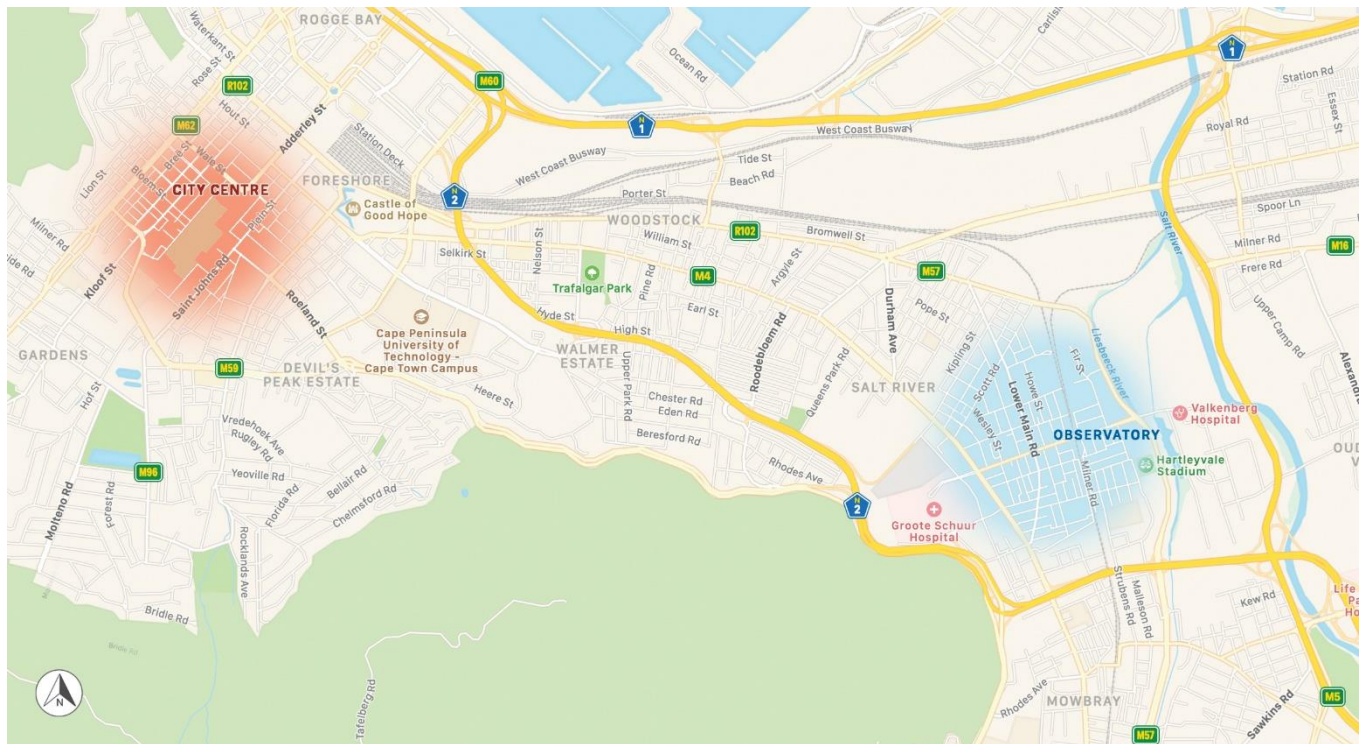


Figure 1 Map showing location of occupation in neighbourhood of Observatory and its proximity to the city centre
(Source: Author using Apple Maps)

The neighbourhood of Observatory has a reputation as “trendy”, “bohemian”. During Apartheid it was designated as ‘whites-only’ but considered *de-facto* as a grey area, meaning it was home to people of all races, including a large student and left-wing population (Peck & Banda, 2014). While below the main road, the largely residential, neighbourhood is characterised by Victorian-era colonial architecture, the area of immediate study has seen an upsurge in the construction of high-rise apartment-style developments catering for single people and students.

There has long been an association between Observatory and “the homeless”. For example, a documentary, *Pavement Aristocrats* set in the neighbourhood follows a

group of homeless people, also referred to as “bergies”⁸ tracing their Khoisan roots and history of colonial dispossession (Vester, 1998). On the other hand, an association between “homelessness” and crime in the area (which links to the anti “crime and grime” policing of the neighbourhood through city improvement district initiatives) is exemplified by a 2017 a study of “homelessness” in the area conducted at what the authors note was the behest of concerned members of the community (Shenck et al., 2017). While the area was full of historical interest the authors note, “Unfortunately, Observatory also has a high crime rate and many homeless people” (Shenck et al., 2017).

In late 2020, when I first visited the site (before formally beginning this research), the Occupation was a mostly tented camp set up along a strip of land that ran parallel to the pavement. This narrow “verge” was between the pavement and the (by then empty, barricaded) property where the Arcadia Place old age home had stood. The line of tents and other structures stretched to the entrance to a small, walled ossuary as shown in Figure 2. This ossuary or “Garden of Remembrance” (which is marked on the map of the research site in Figure 3) contains a collection of tombstones which are all that remains of a much larger graveyard that was cleared in the 1990s to make way for the St Peter’s Square shopping centre next door which bears its name.⁹

⁸ “Bergie” comes from the Afrikaans for “mountain”. Historically the term referred to the homeless people who slept on the slopes of Table Mountain.

⁹ The ossuary contains a collection of a few tombstones as well as the list of names of the 9000 human remains (roughly equivalent to the living population of Observatory today) which were exhumed when the land the graveyard occupied became too valuable to be used by the dead and the church said it could no longer afford its upkeep (Ancestors South Africa, 1997)



Figure 2 This section of the (mostly) tented Occupation lines an ossuary of tombstones which are all that remains of a much larger graveyard removed decades ago (source: Author, December 2020)

To one side of the Occupation is a student residence (shown in yellow on Figure 3). On the other side, is a small shopping centre, St Peter's Square. Inside the centre is a grocery store, car wash, and several small shop units on ground level surrounding a parking lot. To the West, up a gentle incline behind the Occupation, is one of the city's largest public hospitals, one that achieved worldwide fame or being where the world's first heart transplant took place in the 1960s.

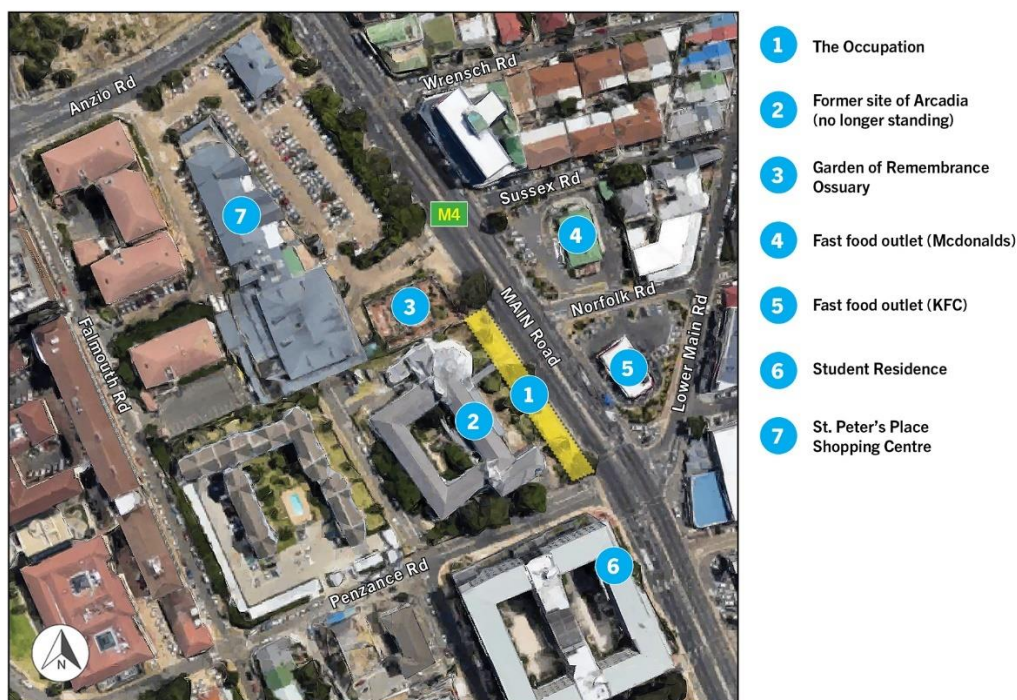


Figure 3 Map of research site (source: Author using Google Earth, December 2021)

On the satellite image shown in Figure 3 Arcadia Place old age home still appears, just behind the site of the Occupation. This three-story building (shown in Figure 4) occupied by some 200 housing activists¹⁰ from the *Singabalapha* social movement in September 2019. According to media reports of the time, the housing activists also welcomed others who were sympathetic to their cause, including those who had formerly been homeless. The Cape Peninsula Organisation of the Aged (CPOA) which owned and ran the home, claimed the building, shown in Figure 4 (which was approximately 70 years old) was unsound and posed health and safety concerns. These were the reasons given for the need to demolish it and rebuild accommodation to house the retirees who had been living there (Edwards, 2019). In the wake of the occupation, there was speculation in the media as to whether the CPOA, which was increasingly cash-strapped, had, in fact intended to follow through with these plans to rebuild the

¹⁰ This number is based on news reports on the eviction and on activists' accounts.

home, or whether it had decided to sell off part of the property which, one media report called, “well placed amid burgeoning developments in a gentrification zone” (Levy & Hendricks, 2019).



Figure 4 Arcadia Place old age home before its demolition (source: (Levy & Hendricks, 2019)

In September 2019 approximately 200 activists from the Singabalapha housing movement occupied the building. According to activists accounts reported in the media, once inside they quickly connected water mains and power points and set about making it habitable by cleaning it. Some ten days later, on 1 October, 2019, private security guards evicted them from the building and dumped their belongings outside on the pavement (see Figure 5) where they spent the night. The next morning a core group decided to stay on, refusing to budge. My research began sixteen months after their eviction from the building. Having briefly summarised the background events to this occupation, I turn to a description of my data collection methods.



Figure 5 Activists sleeping on mattresses outside Arcadia Place following their eviction from Arcadia Place. (Source: Hendriks, 2019)

2.2 Data collection

I was introduced to participants with the help of a gatekeeper who was a leading figure in the social movement that had organised the Occupation. Over time *t*, I gained the trust of people living there and gradually oriented myself within the space. From this point on I no longer needed the assistance of a gatekeeper but used a snowball sampling method to recruit participants. One person would introduce me to the next and I gradually got a sense of who was available and when. I got to know people informally before asking if they would be willing to participate in the research.

I relied on formal, recorded interviews to trace the individual stories of how people arrived at this Occupation, a key element of the research. I also used my field journal to note and reflect on informal conversations with residents, visitors to the site such as friends, passers-by and others who regularly spent time in the space such as people who begged for money on the street corner.

This research was intended to provide several layers of data, each at different periods of time. This was intended to capture the changes to this space over time. Each layer was to deepen the observations, conversations and mapping of the space made during the previous one. Due to the constraints imposed by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (see below), I was not able to space my visits apart as widely as initially planned.

In phase 1, (March, April 2021) I began by conducting base-line mapping and household primary surveys including photographs of the site to establish an initial overview of the existing structures and how people used the spaces within it¹¹. I kept a detailed field journal of my observations while 'hanging out', chatting to residents along the pavement or in their yards. During this phase I began conducting initial formal interviews with two interviewees.

During phase 2, (which began in June) I photographed and mapped the outside. A series of continuous photographs were taken standing on the curb of Main Road facing towards the Occupation thus capturing the Main-road facing side of the homes within it, which I refer to as the "outside" or "exterior". "outside". This method was augmented this with sketch maps drawn together with residents I had previously interviewed of their living spaces as well as discussions about the plans they had for to change or improve these spaces. At this time, I conducted most of the formal interviews and continued to observe and discuss with them the connections and strategies they used to access basic amenities in the surrounding area. In June-July 2021, I compiled another photographic montage. This process was augmented with extensive fieldnotes and observations. In addition, I conducted follow-up interviews with most of the original

¹¹ This base-line survey, originally included as an appendix to this document, was removed/redacted due to ethical considerations. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of any information pertaining to number so structures and people living in them in ongoing litigation between the Occupation and the City. It is available upon request from the author (jintyjackson@gmail.com).

participants.

I planned to interview between 8 and 15 residents¹² of the occupation to gain as broad a range of experiences as possible. Although the numbers of residents fluctuated, this represented roughly ten percent of the total number¹³. I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with a total of nine respondents (five women and four men). All were resident in the Occupation except one who was a leader of the *Singabalapha* housing movement¹⁴. All were isiXhosa-speaking and ranged in ages from thirty to seventy years old, however, most respondents were in their forties, from a generation born in the 1970s or 80s during apartheid.

The small sample of participants allowed for the time to build relationships with these individuals and engage in participant observation, spending time with them in their living spaces as well as during their everyday routines. To engage with those living in the Occupation in various social contexts and to gain an understanding of contrasting atmospheres. I planned to spread visits across different times of the day and night, as well as over both weekdays and the weekend. However, the gatekeeper who introduced me to this community requested that I not come by unannounced in the evening as they would not be able to guarantee my safety. For this reason, most of my visits were during the day and skewed towards those residents who were unemployed and therefore with time to spare for interviews.

¹² This number was based on a vague estimate of how the numbers of people living at the site from my initial visits in late 2020.

¹³ There were approximately 70 residents of the Occupation according to a base-line survey I conducted in June 2021 (however, this number included children).

¹⁴ My interviews with this respondent were essential not only in understanding the background and politics of this Occupation, but also her own trajectory to this place in which she spent much of her time.

2.2.1 *Engaging with affect as a methodology*

Massumi (2015, p.7) argues, "affect cannot be stilled to be understood" but that it is engaged at every level, both in thinking, expressing, it is he says, "taking the plunge". If affect cannot be stilled, as a researcher, I had nevertheless to find a way to capture it, engage with it, describe it. In grappling with this problem, , I opted to use a range of methods, which included observation, journaling, and soundscapes (Pisano, 2015) to capture and be able to describe affective atmospheres, and bodily experiences of people living in this space. Following Duff's (2017) suggestion, I triangulated the visual, observational, and reflexive methods to engage with these as thickly as possible.

The noise of traffic however, tended to drown out other sounds on an audio recording. After a few attempts, I abandoned recorded "soundscapes", and used my own body as a recording device (Dewsbury, 2010). I noted somatic, sensory perceptions in my journal concentrating on distinct aspects of sensory experience: auditory, smell, visual and sensorial dimensions of experience. These were augmented using photographs.

When it came to recording people's stories, I was influenced by Blunt & Dowling's (2006) conceptualisation of as geographies of home. These were unstructured conversations in which I was guided by the "Storying" technique (Phillips et al., 2018) approach which aims to surface *connections*, which are both material and allegorical, and both proceeds in the spirit of "tell me a story".

2.3.1 *Ethical considerations*

The period of primary data collection (four months between March and July 2021) was affected by waves of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated national emergency regulations. Therefore, my priority was to ensure that this research did not put

participants' or my own health and safety at risk. In complying with national health and safety guidelines, as well as the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FSREC) of the University of Cape Town (UCT), I conducted interviews in the open air, sanitised pens and other stationary handed to participants, and maintained a distance between us of at least 1.5 metres. The bitter irony in this context where residents lived in precarious, cramped conditions, is that they were often outdoors (if the weather was decent). Thus, complying with these rules was not as challenging as it might have been in many other contexts.

The study complies with privacy and confidentiality requirements. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from UCT Science Faculty Research Ethics Committee (see attached). Information was collected only after obtaining the participants' signed consent. Participants were offered consent forms in English and isiXhosa. The privacy and anonymity of participants was protected by replacing their real names with pseudonyms (using made-up initials) and ensuring images taken did not feature them or other residents of the Occupation. Due to ethical considerations that related to participant's present and potential future vulnerability within a volatile and sensitive politico-legal context, I did not photograph individuals, only built structures and objects at the research site, and did not collect specific, detailed demographic data on individuals, (such as age, etc). It is important to note, however, that in discussions around their signing of these forms, many (but not in all cases) participants told me they preferred not to remain anonymous because they wanted their stories, and the story of this occupation to be known.

All interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed. The language used in these interviews was English. As, in all cases, the respondents' mother tongue was isiXhosa (the predominant language of the Occupation) they were given the choice to use a translator. However, in all cases they opted to speak in English,

explaining they felt comfortable enough in this language.

Health and safety concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic national restrictions on face-to-face meetings, and university research protocol curtailed the time spent in the field conducting face-to-face research. While a longer follow-up period had been planned, (with a return to the field in August 2021), this had to be delayed until a drop in infection rates occurred. Face-to-face meetings could resume in September. In the interim contact was maintained with those participants who were able to do so, using messaging applications such as Whatsapp.¹⁵

Due to the need for social distancing and remaining outdoors during the Covid-19 pandemic, I could not spend time with participants in their homes. This constraint led to greater focus on the exteriors of homes and living spaces than the interiors. In an attempt to counterbalance this, I invited participants, when appropriate, to draw plans of their homes and to sketch out their ideas for how they planned to change or extend these spaces.

2.3.2 Data Processing and analysis

All interviews were initially transcribed verbatim. Following a first phase of inductive reading through and noting of themes that emerged in the resulting transcriptions, I then used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to process the interviews, field notes, and visual imagery to organise the data into further themes. The resultant themes form the basis for my structuring of the body of this thesis.

¹⁵ Those participants who were able and willing to maintain online contact over this period received compensation for their data usage in the form of cellphone vouchers.

2.3.4 Mapping a place in the making

The question as to what forms of city-making from below were emerging from this site was essential to answer. In engaging this site and its unfolding materialities and affective dimensions, the challenge was to orientate myself, spatially, relationally, in a fast transforming and densifying place -in- the making. The occupation appeared on no official maps and did not show up on Google Earth where, at this time, the demolished old age home still appeared. In sketching and mapping the site, I was also aware of that maps can be used for alternative political ends, which was of concern in this precarious, and contested context of an occupation. Mapping is an "intrinsically political act" (Peluso, 1995) It can be used to pinpoint sensitive resources, extend state control, and include or exclude people depending on who does the mapping and for what purpose.

2.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations meant protecting the anonymity of participants. I note that in discussing the issue of anonymity with participants, some indicated that they wished to have their identities and their stories known as part of a politics and a protest that made their claims visible. However, other participants did wish to have their identities protected. For the same reason, I did not photograph individuals, showing only their living spaces and material contents of these. The question arises: photographs emptied of people deny the agency of those individuals who built and live in these spaces? I was inspired by Duff's (2017) research suggests that working with this sense of disjuncture, can allow for a rethinking of what the *presence* of people means in spaces, and directs attention to the actions and effects of these people. A similar example from my research (shown in Figure 6) shows objects such as a skateboard and chair, which reflect and evoke both the personality of their owner and are suggestive of what this individual's quotidian practices might be.



Figure 6 The resident of this home was asked to step out of shot to maintain his anonymity (source: Author, October 2021)

2.4 Reflections on positionality

In late 2020 in an initial phase of scoping sites for this research in makeshift camps which were springing up in Cape Town, I decided to explore the neighbourhood of Observatory where there were numerous examples of this type of inhabitation and which I was already familiar, having grown up in Cape Town. Arriving at this site, the first of its residents I met was outside fixing the exterior netting around the perimeter. Noticing me staring he began a conversation with me and invited me to step inside. Once I stepped through the gap in the netting and took a seat behind it, I was engaged by several residents in lively, opening, challenging conversation about the urban future of this city, their dreams, and their despair about a lack of opportunities for them in this city. This research thus, is intended as an exploration of the questions they posed and is inspired by their ideas.

The line between researcher participation and non-participation blurs with the deepening of familiarity with a place and the people within it. I spent hours with children, letting them notice me and show me their way of noticing (Colls, 2012). I

donated compost from my garden, shared pavement barbeques and a birthday celebration. Early on during this process one of the elders of the Occupation asked, "What will you do with your research? How will your research help us?"¹⁶ When I asked her how she saw this research helping her and other residents of the Occupation, she replied that this research should show the government what is going on. I still do not have an easy answer to her question. However, this is not *my* research but reflects an ongoing collaboration with the residents of this occupation whose ideas, experiences and history inform and inspired it.

My gender influenced the research and the types of spaces in which I spent time. In general, women shared more aspects of their intimate, emotional lives with me as well as experiences of the everyday, inviting me to join group conversations that took place while watching children for instance and, in one case, a children's' birthday party. My conversations with men, tended to engage less with emotions, and more with the intellect and ideas. In the spaces I shared with men (such as sitting out on the street in chairs chatting) I was privy to a realm of conversation that was about word play and, sometimes, simply, fun. From women, I learned more about the darker, more violent fears connected with their lives here and elsewhere. For example, I learned about the strong feminist politics galvanised, by the murder of one of the female members shortly before I began my research. The call for justice for this murder became an integral part of their ongoing protest.

The colour of my skin and my relative class privilege also influenced the research. I arrived at the research site usually by car parking in the next-door shopping centre, able to come and go as I pleased while my interlocuters remained, exposed to storms and rain. There was no chance of blending into this place. I was intensely aware of how my

¹⁶ Fieldnotes, 16 April 2021.

skin colour and privilege were markers that related to the position of others who looked like me in the neighbourhood and beyond whose role and contribution was as “donors” or “helpers” dropping off food and other items. The Occupation was a place where a white, suburbanite rarely ventured except when it was to drop off donations. Layered into this place the themes of race, difference, precarity which were all felt and perceived around the body, including the way I was dressed. For example, I met with frequent comments that my clothing or the bag I carried were “nice”.

At times of emergency and amid such pressing material needs it was hard to negotiate the path between the ethics of research governing what I could ethically “give” to research participants and what was needed in the moment. As time went on I was able to broach these reflexive questions with those I spent time with. What remains ‘alive’ for me is a moment when one of the research participants explained that having someone who was an outsider listen to her, just listen, made an enormous difference to her life. While I could not change her circumstances, this listening eased her affective load. Similarly, having her to listen to me, to share some of the loss and grief I experienced over the past year, made an enormous difference.

The wider question of what my role as researcher might contribute to these individuals and this collective was not one I could easily answer, when posed to me by one elder of the Occupation. Other researchers point to feelings of shame and “social guilt” that arise in post-colonial contexts (Memmi and Arduim, 1999; Herold and De Barros, 2020). As someone of European, “settler” descent and who had grown up white under the apartheid system, I felt uncomfortable and ashamed at certain moments such as when interlocutors shared their raw feelings and wounds which had a direct bearing on that past.

My interlocutors in the Occupation, in many instances, gave me the tools I needed to

overcome these hurdles of self doubt. I spoke about my sense of being an “outsider”, one of the research participants reminded me that being an outsider is always relative to the next person. No one ever feels completely on the inside, even those living in the Occupation he said. Bennet (2002, p.9) suggests that research does not stop when the researcher leaves the field but ‘lives’ with her.

In conclusion the methods employed in this research were chosen in order to privilege the everyday experience of living in the occupation, its practices and routines through “affect”. The aim was to provide a fine-grained focus not only on the material structures of this place but the relationships of the inside of this occupation. Methods chosen, included using my own body as a recording device, but most importantly participant observation, spending time witnessing unfolding events in this space and speaking to those who used this space. An additional aspect of this research was to capture the voices of those who made this Occupation; not only to explore their practices of place-making in the Occupation, but to link these to past practices and past experiences of home, citizenship, loss, and dispossession. It is with these narratives, recorded mostly during stand-alone interviews, that the empirical body of this thesis begins in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Stories of getting to Observatory

I think we do belong here... The reason, the mayor and the people from the City...know it very well: that it's not us who had the mind to come and stay here: it's what coming from our parents' teachings, or memories.¹⁷

Where did this occupation start from? I begin this chapter with the above quote from one of the long-term members of this occupation. He was replying to my question: did he feel he belonged in this place, along a pavement in Observatory. What he was expressing was that the inception of this occupation and his claim to belonging came from the previous generation. It was the result a history of resistance to spatial segregation and dispossession that connected these occupiers to their parents and grandparents who, themselves, had to think about and resist historical forces of abandonment. There is also a note inevitability in his statement as well as a sense of mutual comprehension levelled at City managers because there was a mutual comprehension, a "knowing" of its inceptions in the spatial segregations of the apartheid city and its exclusions. There was nothing sudden about this occupation this quote suggests, it was an inevitable push back against historical forces of dispossession which could no longer be endured by this generation.

Sailor, dreamer, philosopher, war-veteran, life coach, karate-Dan, jazz singer, mother, planner, cleaner, son of a chief, Hip-hop producer...These were some of the identities of those living here. Another collective identity associated with the Occupation by its members, I was frequently told, was that this one was composed of "citizens". By contrast, a nearby occupation of an old circus school with whom they maintained close links was perceived as mostly for foreigners. Members of this Occupation were from the ranks of the working poor, and unemployed. Several subsisted off state child grants and

¹⁷ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

state emergency subsidies provided for the poor during the pandemic. All respondents were isiXhosa-speaking, the predominant, yet not exclusive language of the occupation (which also included Zulu and Afrikaans speakers)

The chapter is drawn largely from in-depth interviews with eight residents of the Occupation and one leader of the activist group who organised the occupation. This chapter focuses on two individual narratives in which loss is a central theme. It then moves on to unpack what the occupiers meant when they characterised this as a movement of “backyarders”, contrasting the concept with lived experience. Particular attention is given to affective experiences and memories attached to their family homes on the peripheries of the city and how they thought about their homes and process of homemaking in the Occupation in comparison. The chapter begins with the individual narrative of one of the leaders of the *Singabalapha* movement as a way of understanding a personal and collective trajectory to here.

3.1 *A route across the city to this occupation*

After private security guards threw the activists and their belongings out of Arcadia Place in September 2019, the occupiers who decided to remain slept out in the open on mattresses they had salvaged from the building that had stood just behind where they still lived. In the days following their forceable removal, as they waited for their court appeal against that eviction to be heard, the old age home was hastily demolished sending up clouds of dust which they, sleeping just metres away, were forced to inhale. Their occupation continued along the perimeter of the property where the old age home had stood and which was now barricaded behind a high metal fence, barbed wire, and guarded by private security guards. First the protesters slept in tents and under tarpaulin sheets. As the months passed, they salvaged hardboard and planks to build more durable shelters and continued to upgrade their homes whenever and however

they were able.

B was a leader of the housing movement that had occupied Arcadia Place. She had been instrumental in organising a series of previous occupations of vacant buildings over the past decade, none of which had received media attention. Her personal story of getting to Observatory was bound up with the collective story of the Observatory occupation. An isiXhosa-speaking woman in her late fifties, B was the first-born of six children. She was the only child to have been born while her parents still lived in central Cape Town. Her parents had been forcibly expelled from District Six on the edges of the central business district (CBD) shortly after her birth. She had grown up in Gugulethu¹⁸. She linked her later decision to join the anti-apartheid struggle as a teenager with the legacy of dispossession,

When I've joined the struggle, my father was not surprised. One day said to me, 'Yoh! I'm sure I'm gonna get my house back in town'.¹⁹

She was a veteran of the armed struggle against apartheid. During the armed struggle, B had gained expert insurgent skills in the ranks of the PAC's armed wing. Practically, she applied these insurgent skills in the occupations she organised, including the Occupation in Observatory. She recalled with pride, how she helped one of the men break a lock while entering the building in September 2019,

I said, 'Hey you're making a lot of noise. Take that screwdriver, put it in, and then use your strength, and then you open it.'

Then he looked at me before he said, 'You are amazing me'.

I said, 'Let's go inside.' I told them how to creep into the building.²⁰

¹⁸ Gugulethu, was established in the 1960s along with Nyanga. Many people who were forcibly removed from District Six were sent to live there. Established on the then outskirts of the city, it is 15 kilometres from Cape Town's CBD, half the distance of later peripheral "townships" such as Khayelitsha established in the 1980s.

¹⁹ Personal interview with B, 28 April 2021.

²⁰ Personal interview with B, 1 June 2021.

It is significant that B, who considered herself a military veteran and therefore eligible for state housing, had *not* been a member of the now-ruling African National Congress (ANC) , but of the Pan African Congress (PAC) which broke away from the ANC in the 1960s and which, in the post-apartheid era, failed to garner mass support at the polls²¹. She felt that after participating in the struggle against apartheid, she had been overlooked and side-lined by the post-apartheid state, sentiments she expressed as follows:

The problem is that the government doesn't see us. We chose them to be governing us, this country. But at the same time, you'll see that this fight was for certain individuals. ...We have wasted all our time.²²

While the Singabalapha movement was not formally aligned with any political party or group, most members appeared to be PAC sympathisers. The sense that the Mandela government had betrayed the majority, was widely shared.

Y, a woman in her seventies also taken part in several other occupations during which she had been arrested. Like B, was as a veteran of the PAC's armed struggle and had worked for a period of her career, inside government. Y had played roles inside government, as well as outside it, as a housing activist. She had participated several attempted housing occupations and had been arrested several times as a result. She was one of the elders of the Occupation who was also a jazz and gospel singer. She dreamed of her big day on the stage. There is an unsettling juxtaposition between Y's description of her childhood home of the 1960s where she had always been the little one sleeping under the table in the single room of the hostel-type accommodation which her family shared in Langa and her circumstances in the Occupation, sixty years

²¹ Although the Singabalapha group was politically non-aligned, many members of the Occupation supported broadly parties Pan Africanist ideologies. There was also a shared sense of having been side-lined politically in the post-apartheid era, despite their sacrifices and involvement in the struggle against apartheid.

²² Personal interview with B, 5 May 2021.

later, where she and her teenaged grandson shared one part of a badly weathered tent. Describing her first home she said,

... those two rooms were built in such a way that only the cows...the horses that they can even stay there. The toilet is outside. The washing place, the taps was outside and then we were using wires to hang our washing and then they divide the neighbours by the wire.⁷³

There were disturbing parallels to how she and others were living in the Occupation, half a century later which involved daily struggles to access toilets, water to wash in and a place to hang our washing.

For the past twenty years B had combed the city for abandoned, disused buildings, mostly on behalf of a loose affiliation of what she termed, "backyarders"²³. B had a network of contacts she could use when needed both on the streets and within state institutions²⁴ She carried her knowledge of the city and its abandoned spaces inside her head. The occupation of the Arcadia Place old age home was one of a string of others, going back to the early 2000s which had taken place without attracting attention from the media. However, with each failed attempt to occupy a building, B and other activists had grown frustrated at a lack of any tangible results. B expressed her growing frustration with the state's inaction or inertia at these sites, which, she argued, was another way of taking from the poor:

It's just the politics of South Africa that you can take something from somebody's hand for something that you are not going to use for quite a long time.²⁵

Amongst the occupations B had led of buildings that had not been used for some time and which it appeared not to intend using were an abandoned army barracks near the

²³ Personal interview with B, 13 May 2021.

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ Idem.

airport which was subsequently turned into accommodation for police officers and their families after the activists were expelled, a hostel in the quiet, residential neighbourhood of Claremont in 2015 which was subsequently demolished after their eviction. "We challenged the City to fulfil its intention to tackle spatial legacies of apartheid," B explained²⁶.

These past occupations offered an alternative imaginary or alternative to solving the housing crisis which was essentially one of retrofitting and repair. B had attempted to convince the state that one of the answers to the housing shortage was to repair and renovate its existing, abandoned buildings:

You've got a housing backlog, we do understand, but there are these buildings that are vacant. These buildings can be easily renovated. Starting from breaking new grounds to build a house from scratch when there's something that is already available. Put people in this [sic] buildings.²⁷

What the actions she led over the years succeeded in doing was to bring these abandoned, dis-used sites back to the attention of the state who either responded by demolishing these buildings and/or by initiating their redevelopment. In some instances, their occupations resulted the demolition of the buildings and even in redevelopment of these sites. One example was an old hospital, called Conradie that had formerly been a state care facility for spinal disorders and neurodegenerative diseases, but had been closed down and was standing empty. The 22-hectare site comprised of 40 single story buildings. It was located ten kilometres from central Cape Town in the suburb of Pinelands. B and a group of other activists made several attempts to occupy the buildings between 2004 and 2005 but were evicted each time.

²⁶ Personal interview with B, 1 June 2021.

²⁷ Personal interview with B, 5 May 2021.



Figure 7 The derelict Conradie Hospital in 2019 (source: News24, 2019)

After their eviction, the then City manager invited the group of activists to talks about the future of the site. The activists shared their vision for the site which involved renovating the existing buildings to provide mixed income housing and included retail stores such as chemists and grocery stores, creches to provide childcare. They argued that the site was advantageous because of its proximity to public transport routes, local schools and close to the central city. B said she had shared their plans and ideas with City managers during initial consultations, but in the years that followed, she and her fellow activists were left out of the consultative process. They never heard back from the City. In the intervening years the original buildings (which had fallen into dereliction since their eviction as shown in Figure 7) were demolished to make way for a new, semi-subsidised housing development, Conradie Park.

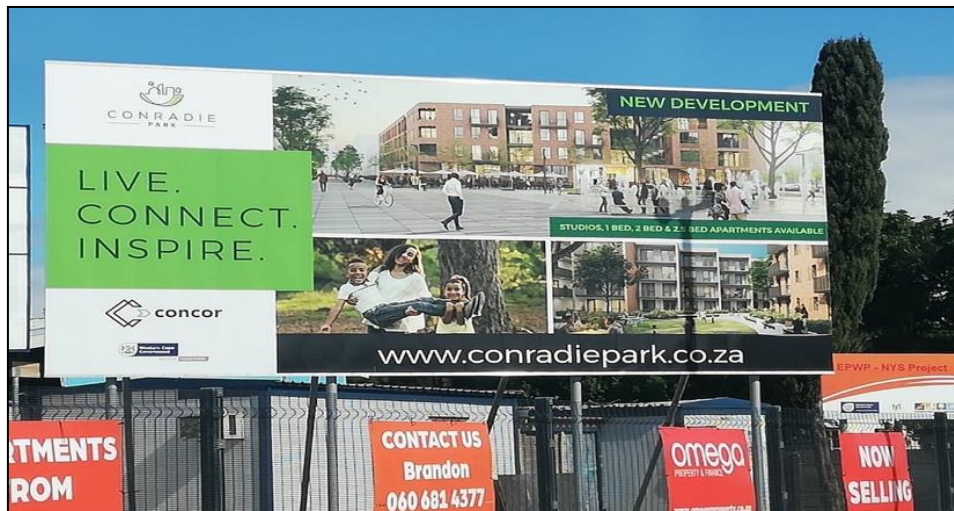


Figure 8 A billboard outside the building site advertising the "mixed use, mixed income" housing, retail and office development (source: Author, April 2021)

The imaginary displayed on advertising for this greenfield development which is a partnership between the provincial government and private developers evoked "connection" and showed happy families in green space echoes in some respects, the original ideas that the housing activists had for this space. Its advertisement promotes its proximity to central Cape Town and railway line and promises an "all in one lifestyle" that includes affordable housing, offices and retail as well as several private creche and school facilities on site (Conradie Park, 2021). However, with the sales price of individual units beginning at half a million Rands, they were unaffordable by most members of *Singabalapha*, who were primarily members of the poor urban majority, many without formal employment if they were able to access state housing subsidies²⁸. "They took our plan," B reflected.²⁹

The series of failed occupations touched on in this section are examples of bottom-up city-making through building occupations described in the literature (see for example Cirolia et al, 2021). Activists, such as B and Y were working between what Miraftab (2005)

²⁸ Since 2013 South African's national government has provided state housing subsidies to those earning a minimum income (R3500) with subsidies to assist with home loans (Department of Human Settlements).

²⁹ Personal interview with B, 1 June 2021.

proposes as “invited and invented spaces of citizenship participation,” (p.200) in that they were engaged in showing the state what it already had and could use for housing and proposed logics of retrofitting and repairing existing buildings as opposed to bulldozing them and starting over.

However, what members of this occupation embarked upon after they decided to stick it out along the pavement after the demolition Arcadia place, was no longer a building occupation of this kind, but an occupation of City-owned verge space. I have woven together both the individual history of B in relation to her family’s housing dispossession from the central city and the history of the *Singabalapha* organisation and its series of attempted occupations. While I do not suggest that the politics of all those involved in the Occupation were synonymous with those of this organisation, indeed the affiliations and alliances of its members were messier and did not necessarily all align neatly. Below, I consider how two individual experiences of past dispossession fed into how these respondents approached their lives in this occupation and the possibilities it offered for the future.

3.2 *Loss, redemption, and occupation*

By no means all those living in the Occupation had arrived there as part of the explicit political mobilisation that surrounded the initial building occupation and their eviction. Some residents had arrived after these initial events. One example was T, a single man in his forties who had come to live in the Occupation after it had been established for some time. In T’s case, his story of loss and redemption hinges around the role of his family’s home in a downward spiral that had led him to Observatory. While deeply personal, his story is not tangential to wider social processes, but a vital individual story of regeneration that wove into this collective project of occupation which transform the city in unexpected ways. T had led an adventuresome life during his younger years He

introduced himself as follows

I'm an ex-soldier. I'm a sailor. I was working in Royal Cape yacht club. I've been in the South Americans. I have been in Mauritius. I've been [in] Seychelles, east of Africa, traveling by boat.⁷⁷

T, who was a single man in his forties had grown up in Langa township. He was one of six brothers and sisters. In contrast to several other respondents who had become adults still living in the family home and who had grown frustrated at sharing a roof with siblings and their families (explored in more detail later in this chapter), in T's memory his family home had occupied a position of pride and upward social mobility. This home was also the reason for the tragic loss that overshadowed his individual life story. The loss of this home was also the shattering loss of social status and the dissolution of both his family and his own personal life. In T's story, there was a before – and an after the “bad thing.” Beforehand he had enjoyed an exciting career as a sailor: “That was the time. My family was still happy, and everybody was alive. Before this bad thing happened to us,” T explained. The “bad thing” T referred to was the loss of his family's home.

In the 1990s, T's sense of his family's upward mobility was linked to this home which his father, who held a government job, had managed to extend from two to four rooms. T described the home and the feelings of pride it engendered as follows,

...like really big, we're all excited at home. At those times, my father was working, then he was working he made a loan on bank to extend the house. But years gone by our lives, were like, alright, we're like, middle class, you know, kind of living people.

This same home, the manifestation of social mobility and success, was stolen from under his ageing father's nose by a criminal syndicate who had access to the deed's office. Although the family blew the whistle and raised a fuss in Langa, it was too late. T explained that the family had to leave their home. As a result, his father, then aged

eighty-eight, was a broken man. The family scattered. T's own life of adventure and travel as a sailor ended abruptly at that time too. T described as follows the shattering of his life:

My life was wrecked. It was really unbelievable. I couldn't believe. I thought, like this was the end of it, end of my life. Then I started doing drugs. Drinking a lot....³⁰

When his father died in 2017, circumstances degraded he explained, "Then that was like real, our dream was all shattered." Remembering the bleak circumstances under which he and his siblings lived during this period he said, "We have places to stay, sleeping on those roads, out of the bridges, try to be helped by cousins and family members." He spoke of this period of homelessness as "dark". The turning point came when a cousin suggested he come to live in Observatory (where the Occupation had begun some months before).

In words that called to mind the rhetoric of a drug rehab programme, T recalled what his cousin had said to convince him to join him in the Occupation, "If you could just take the first step, we will do, we will do great things, me and you." Once T agreed to take that first step, he joined his cousin and shared a single roomed home he had erected in the Occupation. His new life represented reform and a fresh start, T explained, "So, he brought me here in Observatory, so that I could reform, start all over again; slowly, but surely, every day is changing, my life is changing." He added with a grin, "My life is posh! Because I'm here, I get food. Here, I get people that motivate me. I get people that see me for who I am." At first T said that he had felt nervous about leaving Observatory and going to visit his old neighbourhood, fearing he would relapse if he did so.

As the months passed, he relaxed and began searching for work. He put up cardboard

³⁰ Personal interview with T, 20 April 2021.

signs outside his home which faced onto the busy street. On one he offered to volunteer when a fire swept through the university campus in 2021. Figure 9 shows a sign he used to advertise and offer his skills to the neighbourhood, which was also a public way of introducing himself that made the most of the exposed circumstances in which he was living.

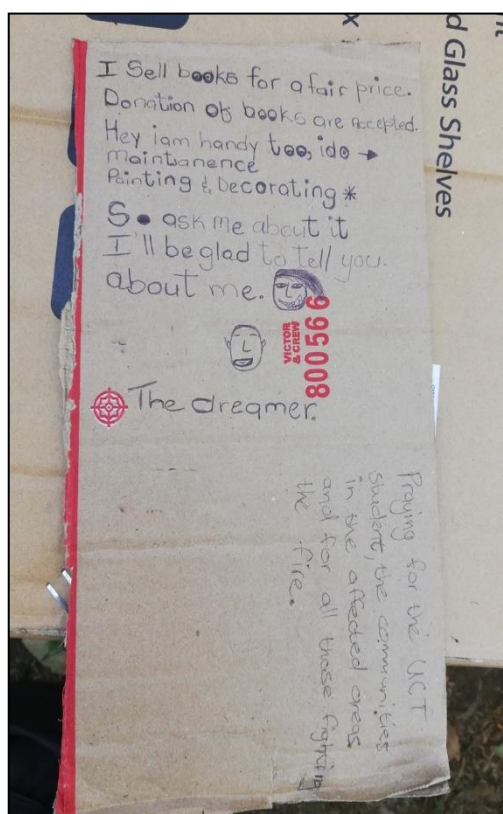


Figure 9 A cardboard sign outside T's home advertising his services and introducing himself to the neighbourhood (source: Author, April 2021)

The Occupation represented, in his case, a place of refuge, a source and juncture of personal redemption and regeneration. In the sign shown in Figure 9 he presents himself as "the dreamer," a presentation and representation of himself to the street and the possibilities that might come from it. This story of personal loss, unravelling and

ultimate renewal as a result of joining the Occupation resonates with Wilhelm-Solomon's (2020) writing about the occupation of so-called "dark buildings" in Johannesburg, describes as "affective regenerations". This provides a way of conceptualising how individual trajectories rub up against larger scale processes, rather than being tangential to them.

As is clear from T's story, people joined the occupation for a variety of reasons. If they did not always identify as activists at the outset, they often become activists in the process. Becoming part of this place was another aspect to individual trajectories, linking this place to other places, other times and other ideas and ideals. Sometimes, coming here was an attempt to redress multiple losses across multiple times and places.

3.2.1 A stolen birthright

The losses that had shaped respondents' trajectories to the Occupation did not necessarily relate only to the material loss of a home. For V, for instance, the loss of his father's birth right, hovered over the lives of two generations – his own and his father's – finally connecting to his life in the Occupation, now. V was a quiet, well-spoken, thoughtful man. When he got going talking however, his eyes would flash as he grew more passionate and enthusiastic about what he was saying.

Outside in his yard was an a dis-used water tank that he had incorporated into his yard and against it was a plastic motorbike and a plastic bath shaped like a shell (see Figure 10). These items were waiting for V's young children who still lived out in Khayelitsha township with their mother. They visited on the weekends, while V planned to extend his place to be able accommodate them. He was in his mid-forties, and, at the time I first interviewed him, was seeking employment but later found a job as a cleaner nearby. Ideologically, he shared the ideas of many other members of the Occupation, and

frequently referred to the former Pan-African movement leader, Robert Sobukwe.



Figure 10 A children's motorbike is propped against an empty water tank in V's yard (source: author, April 2021)

V told his story (or numerous, interwoven stories) across several sittings, well after darkness fell. He was the only respondent who imposed his own jumping off point for these interviews. While in other cases my questions began with what home had been and meant in the past, V imposed how far back to go. He chose to speak of a past that went back to colonial times. His scope was the grand sweep of politics, in which his family had played a part. He referred to legends and lineages. Home was there, but a small, warm holding space represented by a family home still in Khayelitsha which he did not dwell on.

In the stories he told about his life before coming here, what had been lost seemed always, just within reach of being found and the future was never foreclosed. His story was non-linear and required work from me the listener. I had to attempt to patch

together and, feel the multiple resonances of these interwoven threads and what they meant for him in the present. V's story, the weight of the past was substantial and went back to colonial history. The strands of his family's history on both his maternal and paternal sides fanned out in many directions at once.

Although, as it turned out, he was the secret heir to a chieftainship in the rural Eastern Cape, V's father had grown up in the formerly 'white' suburb of Maitland³¹, in Cape Town. V only got to know of the existence of this home when, as a child growing up in New Crossroads township in the 1970s, he accompanied his father, known to everyone as "Lucky" and who was an ice-cream salesperson, on his route through the city. One day, His father, stopped on a street that was unfamiliar to V, and pointed down a side street. "That's the street where I grew up," he said. It was a street imbued with memories related to V's grandmother, his father, Lucky's mother, was a larger-than-life figure in the neighbourhood and known as the "Shebeen Queen of Maitland". When someone murdered his grandmother with a spear on the street one night, another side of the family claimed her house and Lucky had to leave. The dispute over the property remained contentious within the family according to V.

However, it was not the loss of this home that dominated V's narrative, but another form of dispossession that related to his father: a stolen birth right. V described how he had discovered, at a family funeral, that his father was the rightful heir to a major chieftainship in the Eastern Cape, when one of the other guests remarked, "Your father doesn't want his father's things...but his father's things are there. And no one is gonna take them. He's the only one who can take them." V then learned from his father of

³¹ Maitland, close to the site of the first forced removals in colonial times, Ndabeni, was a suburb of racial mixing and diversity although also subject to the apartheid-era forced removals under the Group Areas Act.

repeated attempts to claim his inheritance back in the village where his grandfather had been chief, and of his father's close shaves with death because of these attempts. Each time Lucky came to claim his rightful place, his wily relatives, determined to prevent this city kid from doing so outwitting him each time and even tried to poison him. Over time, the stolen legacy became a family joke, (numbing, but not erasing the sting and pain of this loss). Yet there remained the idea that his father's "things" were still there and this stolen chief's title could, potentially be claimed; a potential from the past that warded off foreclosure.

Significantly, V referred to how these losses could be counterbalanced by another force which he described as "belief" and explained as follows:

...you are standing looking at something else, but you feel in your back there is somebody that is standing there, but he is looking at you. You can sense that feeling.³²

"Belief" is thus less of an idea or a way of thinking than a way of being that can be felt physically, it has a deeply embodied significance. V explained that the importance of "belief" had been instilled in him from an early age through spending time with his maternal grandmother in the rural Eastern Cape.

...you could say, 'Ah this is magic,' but it wasn't magic. It's what they believe in...because she will see if it's gonna rain, she will see.

As the above quote makes clear, far from being magic, or a custom used by the elderly, V viewed "belief" as something that was valid for him the present, in the village in which his grandmother had lived and for his life in the Occupation along a pavement in Cape Town. It was a tool or resource that was intergenerational in its temporality. Moreover, he could draw from it to make sense of the dynamic, changing world around him and

³² Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

the possibilities for moving through it while living in the Occupation. Joining and remaining in this persistent protest had changed him he explained. In the process, he said, he had become an activist who sought answers to the pressing yet daunting question of what alternatives to capitalist accumulation might be from this place. While it falls outside the scope of this thesis to explore alternatives of this kind in detail, it is significant that he drew upon "belief" as an alternative to the "money-cycle" explaining, "Once people see money, they stopped believing, they started concentrating on money." Above all, "belief" helped him persist and endure in the Occupation, despite the derision he had faced from other people. He related these experiences as follows: You find other people who are making jokes. People who look like us; people that are staying in shacks, saying that, "You, you're not gonna get houses, you're wasting your time. Go back home! But I'm the person that believes, man. Because I was raised, I was raised by Lucky."³³

V expresses both the emotional impact of his visible protest and the reaction it draws from others who laugh at him for engaging in a protest read from the outside as an urban citizenship struggle centred on housing. His description of this derision calls to mind Butler's argument about the emotional, embodied struggle that is required to persist. However, "belief", the resource he draws from to continue to persist in this public form of protest along a pavement, bears some comparison Stewart" (2007) suggestion that "ordinary affects" to are at once public (in that they come from and end in broad circulation) *and* they are "the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of" (p.62) which is similar to "affective regenerations" that Wilhelm-Solomon (2020) writes about in the context of the occupation of Johannesburg's 'dark buildings' referred to above. It is significant that "belief", handed down and taught to V by his grandmother is both a social and collective affective resource *and* something that he holds as a

³³ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

special, resonant aspect of himself. Thinking and feeling himself as “the person that believes” is bound up with his individual identity as the son of Lucky, a rightful chief. “Belief” is an affective resource buried deep in his familial history, marking him as special, but also possibly flowing into the collective project of Occupation where all of these ideas, potentials and imaginaries enable him to stay in motion, while enduring. The idea of staying in motion, resonates with the argument that Stewart (2007) makes about “ordinary affects” which, she says are, “Rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility, but in the actual line of potential that a *something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion” (p.2) In this case, “belief” is a way of staying in motion. It helps V to persist here, as he holds out for different kind of future from his father’s, one that is not foreclosed but redolent with potential.

3.3 *From the “Temporaries” to “Jamaica”*

K framed his identity from the outset, as deeply rooted in this (ocean-side) city. “The first thing I saw was the sea,” he remarked, speaking of his birthplace. He specifically referred to Somerset Hospital. It was striking that this is the first thing he told me after we were introduced.³⁴ This public hospital is located near Cape Town’s old harbour, (an area that has become an upmarket mall and tourist hub). An isiXhosa-speaker, K nuanced his sense of belonging ‘here’ through explaining his deep roots in other places as well.

In my culture, when you introduce yourself you talk about where you were born. Which means, where your umbilical cord was cut and buried And then you've talked about *isinge sakho* which means, ‘where your waist is from’, basically, where your father is from.⁷⁰

A highly educated, single man in his late forties, when introducing himself K had to

³⁴ Fieldnotes 1 December 2021.

explain his overlapping multiple senses of belonging which were at once symbolic and embodied, having to do with the "umbilical cord," "burial," "soil" and his "waist". These referred to: (1) the place he was born, Cape Town which was where his umbilical cord was buried (2) where his father was from, a village in the rural Eastern Cape, or where his "waist is from" and (3) where he had grown up, a small town in the Karoo region where his mother worked. Growing up other children ridiculed him for being different because he came from elsewhere and did not know or follow all the codes. He was too much of a country boy for the city and too much of a city boy for the village. For example, he said, "In the Transkei they called me *utotsi*."³⁵

From constantly adapting and moving between places, he acquired a what he called a "tough skin," but rather than numbing or inuring him to the contexts in which he found himself, he revelled in his mastery of translation and play between languages and cultures, between city and village, alternating worlds and imaginaries with ease. What he brought back and remembered from these places, were books: sitting in a fluffy armchair on the front porch of a home in the small town of Graaf Reinet where his mother was a nurse he alternated between English and Afrikaans children's titles, from Enid Blyton to Afrikaans comics and devoured books he found in the Anglican church vestry. In the apartheid-era Ciskei "Bantustan" where he lived with a relative during high school, he lost himself in dystopias, alien environments and time travel, reading authors like George Orwell, Jules Verne and H.G Wells³⁶.

As an adult K had lived and worked in other places, including Johannesburg where he had been involved in television production. Before joining the Occupation, however, he had been living in an area known as "the Temporaries" in Langa township, where he had rented a shack in the backyard of another person's prefabricated home. The

³⁵ "Utotsi" refers to a young urban criminal, especially one from a township area.

³⁶ Fieldnotes, 18 May 2021.

Temporaries³⁷ got its name because its prefabricated housing units erected in 2005 to house those whose homes were destroyed in a fire that had swept through the Joe Slovo Informal Settlement (Solanyile, 2018). Over a decade later, these prefabricated buildings and the backyard dwellings attached to them, had become a space of limbo or what Yiftachel (2009) refers to as spaces of “permanent temporariness.” In recalling the conditions, he had lived under in the Temporaries, K emphasised the poor state of infrastructure:

...electricity went on and off. The sewerage was not very good. We had like dirty water right in front of the yard. And when it was raining it was just ugly. Ablution facilities? It was a bunch of portaloos in one space.³⁸

The above description of failing infrastructures and services in the Temporaries recall the “uninhabitable” which Simone, (2018) suggests emerges from the broken lives and broken infrastructures of “districts (p.4). He joined the initial building occupation, driven by the need for basic services and shelter which were better. “I needed a space,” K said, adding, “[that was a better space than that.” The improved circumstances in the old age home where the occupiers set about reconnecting the water mains, proved to be a short-lived experience. In deciding to stay put after their eviction and stick it out was to embark upon long-term “inhabitability” in terms of his access to the provision of infrastructural provisions such as sewerage, electricity and sanitation.

While he had left the Temporaries where the struggle to access to basic amenities was a sign of state failure to provide basic citizenship rights, daily life in the Occupation

³⁷ The Temporaries is the commonly used name for Intersite, a temporary relocation area (TRA) in Langa, Cape town. TRAs are areas set aside for emergency housing e.g., fire or flooding or evictions and upgrades that require people be re-housed temporarily. TRAs are part of the national emergency housing programme. Housing units are smaller than typical RDP houses, do not have individual plots or titles, and have a basic level of municipal services on a shared basis (The Housing Development Agency, 2012).

³⁸ Personal interview with K, 18 May 2021.

represented too, a constant struggle over access to these basics. However there were some advantages: whereas living on the outskirts of Langa, he could ill afford the cost of transport to get to the more central areas of the city to look for a job, in Observatory he felt close to opportunities for occasional jobs as well as the ideas and opportunities that came from living along a pavement on this main thoroughfare. Passers-by frequently converged around his space where he had established a small food garden which, he explained provided both nourishment and opportunities:

I eat a lot from my garden. The only things I buy from the shop is proteins... and I meat and the potatoes and cereals Of course and milk but veggies, I got plenty veggies here. They never run out....See, that opens up a lot of opportunities for me, because on top of getting paid for doing it ... that person can put other people and that isn't going to happen in the township.³⁹

After being dumped out on the pavement along with his fridge and other belongings, K had first joined Jamaica or the “dragons’ camp” which existed in the early months of the Occupation. A large, gazebo-style tent, it had had housed roughly a dozen men who were known as “the dragons” because they smoked. In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had just elsewhere in the world, but in South Africa, had yet to have serious impact on society and urban life. Jamaica was a communal hub for political and social events and gatherings. Members often gathered there to watch documentaries around a fire outside. With evident nostalgia, K recalled, “It was nice. I won't lie. I mean, it built a lot of camaraderie.”⁴⁰

K, who often described himself as a soldier who kept moving, remained in motion by improvising and experimenting with different projects, and ideas of how the Occupation might develop, including through the installation of solar panels, or as a series of

³⁹ Personal interview with K, 18 May 2021.

⁴⁰ Personal interview with K, 18 March 2021.

colourful, visually appealing cabins which would be an asset to the area as a tourist attraction. These practices dovetail with what Simone refers to as “districts”, describing these as,

...places capable of holding an intensive heterogeneity of lives and ways of doing things, but which also do not hold residents down to specific regimens of discipline or anticipation (Simone, 2018, p. 4).

To extend this idea further, K had gone from a place that was “uninhabitable” in one sense, redolent with the failure of the state to provide for its citizens, to another “uninhabitable” place where there were no basic amenities provided, but where this failure was made a visible aspect of protest. Furthermore, the Occupation was a “holding” space for the projects, experiments, and future imaginaries that he kept in motion.

To one side of K’s garden-space were to be found discarded wire, metal and other materials. K referred to this space, (pictured in Figure 11) dismissively as a “rat hole”.¹²⁶ The space included what appeared a jumble of discarded items – twisted scrap metal, wooden planks, torn wire mesh. Seeing me peering more closely at what the “rat hole” contained, K pointed at a wood and wire box covered in green shade cloth on the side of his yard, “That’s a chicken coop,” he said explaining that he was no longer happy with it and had deprioritised the project for now. These were remainders of the chicken business he had talked about a few months earlier. He had not gone as far as bringing in live chickens to live here. A few weeks later, he reacted with annoyance when someone dumped the chicken coop in an open space on the other side of his yard to make way for another home to be built. Remainders of the chicken coop were amongst the detritus in what K referred to as a “rat hole” to the side of his yard (shown in Figure 11). The space spoke of abandoned practices of the kind that Thrift (2007, p.6) refers to “denaturalized reminders”, “ruins, and melancholy rem(a)inders” They were part of the atmospheres of this place and a layered archive of previous forms of inhabitation as the

occupation endured.



Figure 11 K's "rat hole" is a discarded wire chicken coop (source: Author, April 2021)

Having considered three individual trajectories to this occupation, I turn to unpack "backyarding", a collectively used label to describe participants in the Occupation.

3.4 *"We are tired of sitting at our parents' backyard"*

For all but two respondents, who were veterans of other housing occupations, the occupation of Arcadia Place had been their first experience of taking part in a collectively organised action of this kind. Most respondents described themselves as having been "backyarders" before. In a South African context, "back-yarding" is frequently used to describe informal-type dwellings constructed in the backyard of formal dwellings ⁴¹. However, "back-yarding" was a term that encompassed multiple

⁴¹ A backyard dwelling is defined for the purposes of enumeration as "any dwelling on the same surveyed residential property as the main dwelling. It can be either informal or formal (Statistics SA). On 'backyarding' see Brueckner et al.(2018); Crankshaw et al. (2000); Lemanski (2009) or Morange (2002).

modes of living for these interviewees. Having been a “back-yarder” did not necessarily mean that a person had been living in a back yard of another dwelling. Most respondents used it to refer to having lived in overcrowded family homes which had not been meant to accommodate multiple generations under one roof. One interviewee had lived in the backyard of his family’s home (a formal dwelling) and another had lived in a shack in the backyard of a state-built prefabricated home originally meant as temporary emergency housing.

According to a leader of the social movement which had organised this occupation, its support came from grassroots she characterised as “backyarders”, which meant they were part of the millions of people on the state’s waiting list to receive state housing.

Mostly we consult the backyarders.....people who are staying in their parents’ households... people that been long on the waiting list some of them. Some other people, they were not in the waiting list.⁴²

While in the above quote, the “backyarders” that form the grassroots support are those who stayed in their parents’ households once adults themselves, which is also borne out by the small sample of respondents who shared their narratives in this research half of whom had previously been living in overcrowded family homes belonging to their parents’ generation. Another interviewee ascribed “backyarders” as a label that defined those taking part in this occupation.

We are backyarders. We are tired of sitting oh, at our parents’ backyard. Because my parents must see prosperity in me. Both of my parents must see!⁴³

While L identifies with “backyarders” as a collective identity in this quote, he also expresses affective sense of what being a backyarder had meant for his individual

⁴² Personal interview with B, 5 March 2021.

⁴³ Personal interview with L, 9 April 2021.

identity and agency. In his thirties, he was one of the younger adults of the Occupation., L, who was in his thirties, and from a slightly younger generation than most interviewees (who were in their mid to late forties), described himself as “almost born free”, meaning he had been born shortly before the end of Apartheid. As the above quote expresses, his acute, individual frustration had to do how he appeared in the eyes of his parents, upon whom he had been reliant, before joining this occupation:

Those who had joined past occupations were from drawn from poor township areas on the peripheries, such as Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and Nyanga⁴⁴. However, “back-yarding” was not limited to the peripheries. For L having lived previously as a “backyarder” in Langa had been interspersed with periods of what he referred to as “binge-staying” or living temporarily in several various places for periods of short or long duration in many parts of the city when he was a student. He had even binge-stayed in Observatory in his mother’s home. He explained. “I stay here, tomorrow with other friends and staying in Khayelitsha, [and] with my mom.” ⁴⁵

3.3.1 “As much as this is a house, but there’s no harmony”

A gentle, quietly spoken mother of four, M had spent her adult life in precarious circumstances on the urban peripheries where she had few job opportunities and where she had been waiting to get to the top of the waiting list for state housing⁴⁶. Unemployed and surviving on a government child support grant, M was bringing up her two younger children in the Occupation, as well as her brother’s child, who was a

44 Personal interview with B, 1 June 2021.

45 Personal interview with L, 9 April 2021.

46 For more on the relationship between state housing and waiting in post-apartheid South Africa see, for example, Greyling and Oldfield (date0 suggest that the right to housing translates to a practice of waiting for millions of poor South Africans including waiting inside overcrowded family homes (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015).

baby when I began this research. M described their brief stay inside the old age home before their eviction as “very nice” and said the reason it had been so pleasant was that “for the first time... you've got a space of your own. You share it with your kids, no family around you”.³⁵

M had left her “family home” in Gugulethu to join the occupation. Her father had rented from the City council for years before he was able to buy the house in the early 1990s after apartheid ended. She had good memories of growing up in this four-roomed home which, she remembered as always having been full.

Some of us was sleeping in kitchen or others in lounge... Because if your father got a house and her relatives, they don't have a place to stay. He would accommodate them...So we grew up like this. So, for us this is not something new to share like this, it is our struggle. We started from our parents.⁴⁷

Sharing a small space, M emphasises in the above quote was not a problem. In fact, the practice of making room, accommodating, sharing especially with those less fortunate were all values inculcated in her growing up as part of “our struggle,” which gave it the significance of political practice that her parents deliberately inculcated in her growing up. These were values she and others continued to live by in the Occupation, frequently accommodating those in emergency circumstances or less fortunate than themselves.

The problem, according to M, was that once their parents passed away, was that M and five siblings were left as “elders” in that same house now with children of their own. M had tried to rent outside the family home for periods, before her husband died, only to be forced to return because she could not afford to rent or buy her own home. She explained that what she had run away from before had started again. “We fight again,”

⁴⁷ Personal interview with M (1), 26 March 2021.

she said.⁴⁰ Her desire to have a place of her own was partially for the sake of harmonious family relations, she said,

As much as this is a house, but there's no harmony. You fighting every day with your family... Sometimes you don't have a bread, your sister's got a bread. She gives her children the bread in front of you. So, you don't want to see your kids experiencing that because life is too short. We are going to go.⁴⁸

The fraught experience of conditions in the family home M describes is related to what her children witness and what she does not want them to see and experience. However, living in the Occupation required a daily struggle to protect her children from a range of new bodily risks (as explored in more detail in chapter 5).

3.3.2 *"Enough is enough. Let us also be visible"*

Despite the tensions and fighting described above, joining the Occupation, did not mean that residents of the Occupation intended to escape family home irrevocably. These homes remained sources of emotional strain described by M above where frustration, anxiety and conflict would resurface if one returned and remained too long. However, these family homes remained vital resources for those living in the Occupation (including for the laundering of clothes at weekends and providing care when residents fell ill). The precarity of circumstances in the Occupation where their homes could be destroyed by wind, rain, and fire, meant its members often had little choice but to seek temporary shelter elsewhere until they could rebuild their homes in the Occupation. "You know, when the tents are torn, people tend to run away to families," said M, however, she explained, conflict in the family home inevitably began again after a time. "Because, for real, if you are an adult, and you have children, you can't live with your

⁴⁸ Personal interview with M (2), 26 March 2021.

family," she said."⁴⁹ Participating in the Occupation had helped ease tensions within the family. M explained, "If you don't stay together, it's better because you...miss another one."⁵⁰

Another important distinction between her previous circumstances and her circumstances in the Occupation was one that M spoke about with reference to staying "inside" (by which she meant inside the family home) and moving "outside", in the Occupation where she and others were visible, in the public eye, and not so easy for the state to ignore. She explained this point as follows:

...while I was inside, people that came from other provinces and they got the RDP⁵¹ houses because they were staying like I am now. But if you inside, you staying with your parents, they [the government] don't take. And then there's one thing that they don't notice: your parents' house, you don't own it. It's not yours....So, you come a priority when you do like this. So that's why ... township people they say, 'Enough is enough. Let us also be visible.'⁵²

It was M's perception that over the past two decades while she had been waiting for a state subsidised house, others, whom she said had moved to Cape Town from elsewhere (such as from other provinces such as the Eastern Cape), had been prioritised for state housing⁵³ because they were living in informal housing such as backyard shacks⁴⁵ thus, on the "outside" while she had remained "inside", thus able to be ignored. The past experiences M refers to illustrates what Miraftab (2001) argues, is the state shifting its responsibilities onto households.

⁴⁹ Personal interview with M, 13 May 2021.

⁵⁰ Personal interview with M, (2) 26 March 2021.

⁵¹ Many people still refer to subsidised housing as "RDP" as they were known under the post- 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme under which government built 1.6 million =homes (1994 and 2004). These subsidised homes are now called "Breaking New Ground" (BNG)

⁵² Personal interview with M, 13 May 2021.

⁵³ According to a Statistics SA community survey, the majority of informal dwellings in Cape Town are in informal settlements (60%-65%) with the rest in backyards (Stats SA Community Survey, 2016).

From the above quote it is clear, moreover, that being “outside” along a pavement and engaged in protest, is to make oneself and one’s citizenship claims visible; to expose the state’s failure to provide housing and basic services. Conceptualised in this way, the occupation can be viewed as an example of “spaces of appearance” through which, as Arendt (2013) suggests, visibility generates power. However, a vital aspect of this is that political action within this space requires material, bodily supports that are part of protest action, not extraneous to it as Butler (2011) argues.

Z, a domestic worker and single mother of three, had been living in her mother’s home in Nyanga⁵⁴, a township 20 kilometres outside the city before she joined the Occupation. Her mother’s four roomed home was only other home she had known until moving to Observatory, however, she said, this home was overcrowded, with seven family members sharing one bedroom. In leaving it, she sought a home of her own that could belong to her children one day. “It’s because I want my own place. I want a home for my kids,” she explained. In making her decision to join the Occupation, she chose to leave her mother’s brick-and-mortar home, literally a roof over her head for a tent. Z described the shift to conditions of precarity and risk as follows:

We have nothing, but we stay here. We are not safe, especially at winter because it’s raining. But we have no other way. Because we have no place to stay.⁵⁵

At first Z’s mother did not understand the decision her daughter had taken. “She came here the other day. She said, “Oh! You stay here?” Z recalled. However, Z said, with a hard and determined tone in her voice, “I have no choice. Because I have no money to buy a house.” Z’s decided to remain in the Occupation where she was joined in time by

⁵⁴ Nyanga township is some 20km from the centre of Cape Town, built during apartheid on the outskirts of the city to accommodate the overflow from Langa resulting from the migrant labour system.

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Z, 10 April 2021.

one of her brothers and they began to construct their own home out of second hand materials in spite of her mother's initial incredulity. It was a decision she explained as follows,

We accept to stay here, because we, there's no other way...So we accept as long as we are under shelter and ... this place is mine - it's not my mother's house,"⁵⁶

In the above quote, Z expresses a sense of choiceless choice because "there's no other way", framing a decision to leave what she knows behind in favour of holding out for future claims (a place of her own) while also building a place of her own.

A strong focus on their children's' future was evident across several interviews P, a single mother of three teenaged sons, described their motivation to continue enduring here in relation to their children:

I'm looking at my age currently, because I'm 47, but I'm not giving up...Even if I die one day, then I know that my children, they've got [a] home of their own. And they can just start building their lives from their own home.⁵⁷

One of the chief motivating factors for joining and remaining in the occupation for M was to break a cycle of violence, crime, and extortion that she and her generation had grown up with back home in Gugulethu by taking her children away from this environment. M frequently repeated that she had a sense that violence was growing worse in Gugulethu where she had come from and where the state ignored crime and violence because it could. At the same time, M had to constantly monitor and remain vigilant around her children while living in the Occupation fearing a host of dangers that could come from the street at any moment. She instructed them never to accept

⁵⁶ Personal interview with Z, 10 April 2021.

⁵⁷ Personal interview with P, 13 May 2021.

anything from strangers. In addition, the uncertain time horizon they lived under was difficult for her to explain to her teenaged children,

My girl is saying to me, 'No, Mama, now we building this shack now, so it means for the rest of our lives, we're gonna be living like this?'...You promise something you don't know of for sure, but you just want to give them hope, just for them to carry on.⁵⁸

Living in precarious circumstances in a home constructed from salvaged materials (such as hardboard and tarpaulin) when I first met them, M and her family were constantly exposed bodily, emotionally, psychologically, to the street and its many unknown dangers. These potential dangers included her toddler running into the busy road or the violence represented by predatory strangers in cars or on foot. Having come to live on the "outside" where they were visible to the state, making its failures to provide basic services and shelter visible, but also visible and exposed to a public street in an affective and embodied sense. This exposure, and the efforts of members of this Occupation to mediate, mitigate and strategize around them will be the focus of Chapter 5.

To sum up this chapter, I have introduced a few of the participants in this persistent protest, including a jazz singer and a (former) sailor. I have suggested some of their motivations for joining and remaining here. If we recognise the full depth of experience; in other words, what people bring to their capacities to affect or be affected, then we must also consider their memories, Massumi (2015) suggests. This is therefore not only a site of long-term protest, but also a place thick with the teachings and memories, imaginaries and ideas people brought along with them and which they drew upon as they endured. While personal renewal and regenerations are aspects of these individual projects, the point I wish most to emphasise is the focal point of this occupation: its children and a different future that their parents were, through this occupation, holding

⁵⁸ Personal interview with M, 13 May 2021.

out for and carving out for them. In the process, however, they had to survive, physically and emotionally intact, in this indeterminate state of protest⁴ explores the contestations which shaped the unfolding occupation and which, in turn, the occupation shaped its surroundings. These progress from encounters of the everyday, encounters in the neighbourhood, to wider encounters with agents of the state and City.

Chapter 4: Enduring, resisting, and making home in a contested space

In October 2020, occupation's residents marked "one year in hell" and printed these words in a slogan they wore on t-shirts to mark this grim milestone. Two years on, in October 2021, with the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic behind them, they marked 730 days since they had been evicted from the adjacent property. This property remained "undeveloped" and shuttered behind a high metal fence just behind the homes of the Occupation from which hung pots in plants belonging to a resident of the Occupation. Over the intervening period much had changed. Most no longer lived in tents but in "hokis" and the occupation has become, recognisably, an informal settlement. The present absence represented by this vacant land was a continuous reminder of the contestation around the abandoned building where all of this had begun. Continuing to occupy the adjacent land along its perimeter maintained the occupiers' claim to the vacant space, maintaining too, the stand-off between the Occupation, the city, and the private developers of the (demolished) old age home property.

The focus of this chapter is on the contestations and encounters that shaped this place. This includes contestations of an overtly political kind between members of the Occupation and the state as well as everyday acts and strategies on a micro-level to persist on a micro-level, to endure in this long-term protest with indeterminate temporal horizons. In referring to events which occurred prior to my research, I draw on memories of Occupation residents recorded in interviews with them, news reports and court records. These events do not follow a strict chronological order but are organised around broad themes. The chapter begins with some of the reasons why occupation residents persisted in this enduring protest and what living in persistent protest within this contested space meant to them. It unpacks what the shift from the occupation of an abandoned building to their occupation of "city" land in terms of what it meant for place-making and its available imaginaries. Next it traces the day-to-day strategies and struggles to access basics amenities through a process of anchoring into place. Finally,

it describes the shifts in their tenure in space against tactics by the city aimed at erasing the Occupation. First, I turn to a wider context in which the occupation endured marked by the appearance of makeshift shelters in public spaces across the city, notably also the central parts.

4.1 An official response to "land invasions"

As this occupation endured, it did so within a wider context where the appearance of tents and makeshift shelters under bridges, along unfinished highways and pavements was associated (at least in part) with a halt in evictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Between March 2020 and April 2021, the provincial government estimated there were 1,025 unauthorised settlements or what the government termed "land invasions" on land owned by the City of Cape Town. (TimesLive, 2021). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, national government put in place emergency regulations prohibiting evictions⁵⁹ while "lockdown" measures in response to the pandemic remained in place. In 2020 the state (by which I refer here to both the provincial government officials and City officials) blamed what it referred to "illegal land invasions" and "opportunistic land grabs" on the economic impact of the pandemic, but also on what "shack farming" but also as being politically motivated.

Many of these so-called unlawful occupations took place in areas demarcated as nature reserves or on failed or failing infrastructures (for example, unused railway tracks). It is important to note that these occupations occurred not just in the central areas of the

city, but across the metropole including its peripheries⁶⁰. In a further strategy to frame these as criminal acts, the City of Cape Town set up a hotline for the public to report 'illegal land invasions. In late 2021, a top official from the province's Human Settlement's Council, Tertius Simmers repeated a commonly used refrain in state discourse in relation to land and housing occupations by accusing those involved of 'jumping the (housing) queue when he complained that government had spent money it could have spent on providing 500 housing units for the poor on curbing "land invasions" and said these were hurting the poor especially backyard dwellers who had waited more than 15 years to get to the top of the state's housing waiting list⁶¹.

4.2 *From a housing to a land occupation*

By deciding to stick it out along the main road after their eviction from Arcadia Place, the protesters embarked on a different *type* of occupation. Instead of the building occupation on which they had embarked with its own set of logics, imaginaries and practices (as described in Chapter 3.1), they embarked on land occupation which involved a different set of material constraints, logics and practices, not least of all that they had to shelter themselves. The old age facility was owned by the Cape Peninsula Organisation for the Aged (CPOA), a body set up during apartheid but since classified as a semi—private, non-profit organisation.⁶² However, the occupiers regarded it as part of state housing stock. The home had been built in the 1950s during apartheid

⁶⁰ Between March 2020 and April 2021, the provincial government estimated there were 1,025 unauthorised settlements or what the government termed "land invasions" on land owned by the City of Cape Town. (TimesLive, 2021).

⁶¹ Cape Town's housing backlog stood at 347 000 in 2021 according to figures announced by provincial managers. 60 000 homes had been built since 2021, an average of 6000 a year (Serra, 2021)

⁶² Arcadia Place Home had been owned and run by the Cape Peninsula Organization for the Elderly (CPOA), an institution described as a Non-Profit Organisation whose business model was based on cross-subsidising homes for the poor and working class from homes which did make a profit. However, the CPOA had begun closing one unprofitable care facility after another especially in poorer areas. During the Covid-19 pandemic its financial situation was reported to have worsened considerably (ENCA, 2021).

using taxes (included taxes of the working poor) which, Occupation resident, L argued, meant it was still legitimately state stock,

... the place was a government place, which was built with people's money. Yes, taxpayers' money. And then the place was sold into a private person. So, what we were claiming that since it's a government's place that was built on a taxpayer's money. We have the right to live on it.⁶³

In the short time they had spent living in Arcadia Place this group of activists quickly connected to the water and power mains and set about cleaning the building, setting in place a practice of repair and revitalisation drawn from past building occupations (as mentioned in chapter 3).

The place was fine. It just needed the cleaning, which we did. Even when they demolished the place, we couldn't understand what was the reason or the motive behind[it] because the place was in a condition that people can live in.⁶⁴

Furthermore, their occupation of the building resisted the forces of capitalist appropriation and speculation. Although Occupation members had not been informed of the eventual fate of the site, there were rumours that at least part of this asset had been sold private developers and that penthouses would allegedly be built there along with a shopping mall.⁶⁵ Their enduring occupation along the site's perimeter created a stand-off between the occupiers, the City (on whose land they now lived) and the developers, which Occupation resident K described as follows:

... as we are right, smack on one of the busiest roads in the city. So, the City one way or the other, is affected right, in the sense that ... there's business around it...now they...demolishing the space...as a way of trying to discourage and telling us, there's no way you're going

⁶³ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

⁶⁴ Personal interview with P, 13 May 2021.

⁶⁵ Personal interview with B, 11 May 2021.

to go back into it. But they're gonna do jack on the space now. They can't build. They can't do anything. Once we're here.⁶⁶

As the months passed and the Occupation endured along the shuttered, barricaded property where Arcadia Place had stood, it did so on what was land belonging to the City.

4.2.1 *"We are the city's people"*

Several respondents expressed the view that they had ended up occupying city land, because the city had not acted to prevent their eviction from the old age home, which should have been its responsibility towards its citizens. The leader of the activist group who had occupied the building, explained,

Now the courts are done, the burden is going to lie with the city of Cape Town. We are his people. So [the] City...is supposed to be doing something about us.⁶⁷

Similarly, Occupation resident, K pointed out,

....when we were being kicked out of here the City was supposed to be there in court and make plans because now the people are going to be made homeless. So the city's duty to give those people temporary accommodation until decent accommodation can be found for the people, the City failed on that.⁶⁸

While holding out for the City to do its "duty" as K put it, they were living on a piece of land owned by the City. In practical, day-to-day terms, how the occupiers used this space were highly contested and had to be carefully strategized around. For example, residents took pains to keep the pavement and other public walkways clear and ensured that the exterior netting that surrounded their living area snaked behind public

⁶⁶ Personal interview with K, 18 May 2021.

⁶⁷ Personal interview with B, 11 May 2021.

⁶⁸ Personal interview with K, 1 April 2021.

infrastructure such as a post box. They erected structures only on the space that had been grassy verge before.

4.2.2 *Occupying the verge*

Taken from Google maps which retained an image of this space captured before it was occupied, Figure 12 shows the once grassy strip of 'verge' of approximately five metres in diameter. To the right of the image behind the bus stop, a person can be seen lying down on the grass, which provides some idea of how this public space had previously been used.

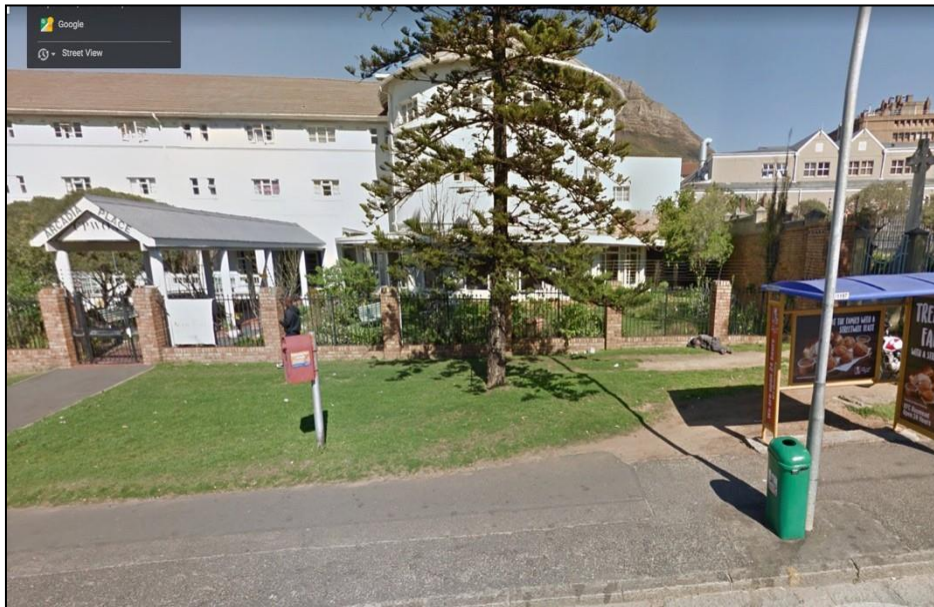


Figure 12 The grassy verge in front of Arcadia Place before it was occupied.

(source: Google, 2021)

A continuation of this same verge strip on the adjacent block beneath the St Peter's Square shopping centre, was under trees until it was fenced off in mid-2021, a move interpreted by Occupation members as a move by the shopping centre owners to prevent a further extension of the Occupation into this space). I observed that members

of the public used this shady spot to sit or rest in and occasionally as a urinal. The verge space does not fulfil the characteristics of a 'void' understood as "left over" or somehow forgotten by planners or developmental pressure (Lee & Yeoh, 2006; Talocci, 2011) indeed, it is clear for the current use of the equivalent adjacent verge spaces along the main road and from photographs taken before the Occupation, that this grassy verge was at least nominally used by the public to sit on, sleep or urinate and that this space had been neatly maintained before their occupation.



Figure 13 A continuation of the verge on the next block (source: Author, April 2021)

Through their inhabitation of it, the grassy verge had been transformed. M, expressing her discomfort over how the space had been altered by their inhabitation, said,

... this is a pavement, and we need pavements for such things that I'm talking about these trees, grasses. There should be grass here. Where is it now? We destroyed it. ... We need those grasses.... if it rains you, you wish that there was a grass somewhere to suck all that water.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Personal interview with M, 13 May 2021.

With the grass gone, the first rains turned the bare earth to mud and the earth hardened. Residents had to cover as much of the surface with carpets and mats as they could. They also built around trees and even incorporated living trunks into their homes. For instance, in Figure 14, the top of a tree can be seen sprouting through the top of one of the tents whose occupants



Figure 14 A tree grew out through the top of this tent into which it had been incorporated (source: Author, April 2021)

The shift from the occupation of a building to a land occupation involved another set of logics, imaginaries, and practices, however, this did not mean abandoning the logics and imaginaries that had informed the occupation of the building. Instead, enduring outside along the pavement where they had no formal access to basic services such as water and electricity and had to construct their own homes represented a leap into the unknown. Expressing his sense that remaining in the occupation was a way to feel his way forward, V said,

Here I am on the city trying to find my way out. Now, because I'm thinking that if I don't do anything, who's gonna do it? So that's why

I choose to volunteer myself and say, 'No, since I'm already in in this. I'll tackle this. I'm not alone'.⁷⁰

In this quote V expresses a sense that he is trying to "find a way out". This "out" encompasses the cycle of abandonment in which the poor majority are ensnared in this city, perhaps too, a way out of the usual citizenship-state contestation over housing as the principal definition of citizenship. A way out is a way forward. In thinking of himself as a "volunteer" there is a notion of himself as apart from that very majority, a kind of pioneer but one who, because he has already joined the Occupation of Arcadia place, he is "already in this" and remains, enduring outside it which is a reference to the constancy of indeterminate temporal horizons. He can "tackle" whatever comes because of the solidarity and strength inherent in the collective nature of protest and thus, he is "not alone".

Tackling everyday life in the face of constant precarity and indeterminate temporal horizons meant that Occupation residents like V constantly adapted their expectations, routines and rhythms as their circumstances changed and evolved over time. This had implications for the kinds of politics, encounters and engagements which occurred in this space. V explained that for the first year at least, "It was so very, very busy...the law enforcement was trying to remove us so that you couldn't move so far, you couldn't go and look for a job." What occupying meant doing in its early stages, involved constant vigilance, checking, watching for the approach of law enforcement or other perceived threats. As time went on, living there meant focusing on other activities, such as finding and keeping a job in V's case. Over time too, his was also able to alter and improve his living conditions. In early 2021 V had been living in a tent, but later he erected a corrugated iron and wood "ready-made". As time passed, he began to feel less anxious about the imminent threat of eviction and, he said, "it was free for me to leave my stuff

⁷⁰ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021

you know and go look for a job.”⁷¹

In order to unpack the shifts that occurred between the two moments V describes: a state of hyper-vigilance in case of visits by police or agents of the state and a state of greater security where he feels he can leave the site of occupation to go out and work, it is important to understand the ways in which the Occupation’s legal status and tenure in this contested space was affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which began in South Africa in autumn of 2020.

4.3 *“We won’t get on the bus”: pandemic, home-making and resistance*

A significant event that influenced the process of mutual shaping of the Occupation’s politics and the wider state politics, was a failed attempt by City authorities to convince the occupiers to move to an emergency shelter set up for those considered “homeless” during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The City of Cape Town opened what it termed an “emergency facility near the coast (some 20 kms away from the Occupation) in early 2020. City managers planned to use large tents to house thousands of “homeless” people. In media reports, the camp was called an “open air prison” (Kiewit, 2020). Six weeks after it opened, the city was forced to close the camp when the South African Human Rights Commission published a report on its investigation of human rights bodies reported abuses there (Jenkins, 2020). These abuses included the confinement of people in cramped conditions and a lack of social distancing.⁷² The state’s pandemic response produced what Agamben (1998) refers to as a “state of exception” (Agamben, 1998) where ordinary constitutional rights may be

⁷¹ Personal interview with V,

⁷² The report commissioned by South Africa’s Human Rights Commission said some 1500 people were put into confined spaces against their wishes, compounded by non-existent social distancing in direct criminal violation of lockdown regulations (Jenkins, 2020)

diminished, removed, or superseded in the process through which a state claims this extension of power, and which produce “spaces of exception”.

Several interviewees recalled that two buses arrived one day to take them to what they were told was a homeless shelter set up by the city and where they were promised food, shelter, and Covid-19 tests¹⁶⁵. Members of the Occupation refused to board the buses. V described the incident and their response as follows:

...they came with law enforcement, and we told them that you are not going anywhere, and we are not street people... we're gonna quarantine in our house.⁷³

In response to attempts by authorities to send them to this camp, Occupation residents insisted upon both their right and their ability to quarantine if necessary, during this lockdown period. Although they were living along the street, they strongly resisted the label of “street people” (conflated, with the ability or inability to quarantine in a defined space) as they had their “own” homes where they were better able to quarantine than they could in a state facility. They argued that it made no sense, Occupation member said, “to go from somewhere you have space and partitions, to a place with no partitions”⁷⁴. At the time (in early 2020) the Occupation was composed of tents. Therefore, their assertion that they could quarantine at home was an assertion that tents were home. B explained, “A tent is a home. We are not homeless. A tent has a door. It has windows. It isn’t just like a plastic you put.”⁷⁵

In such “spaces of exception”, Agamben (1998) suggests, sovereign power invokes the law to suspend the law. In the process, a boundary is created between those politically qualified to have life, and those qualified to merely exist, thus wilfully exposed and

⁷³ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

⁷⁴ Fieldnotes, 5 March 2021.

⁷⁵ Fieldnotes, 5 March 2021.

abandoned to violence and death. This incident, a pivotal encounter between the Occupation and the state, had the effect of laying bare this intentional exposure of Occupation members to death. According to Occupation resident, V it, became obvious to him that the city was not interested in helping the Occupation with “what we were here for...housing”; instead, he said, “They wanted to kill us”. Furthermore, V pointed out that it made no sense to send them to live in tents by the sea in the middle of winter during a pandemic. The real intention behind this move, he said, was the following:

If we did move...they could have cleaned everything and take everything to the dump and close that place with barbed wire.¹⁷⁰

In V’s description there is an echo of the barbed wire and electric fencing that was strung around the perimeter of the Arcadia Place property after the activists had been evicted. Their resistance against the move to send them to the camp was thus a resistance against a repetition of “cleansing” of this space through their removal.

4.2.1 A legal interregnum

The second aspect of the “state of exception” ushered in by the pandemic was a changed legal context marked to some degree by a moratorium on evictions which further shaped the Occupation and its resistance. In March 2020, South Africa’s government declared a state of disaster under which it instated a moratorium on evictions.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the City of Cape Town did not stop its evictions. In August 2020, for example the Cape Town High Court granted an interdict to stop the city’s anti-land invasion unit from evicting people and demolishing homes without a court order

⁷⁶ South Africa’s government used a ‘differentiated response’ to the pandemic, through a “Risk Adjusted Strategy” setting out different regulations at “Alert Levels” that ranged from 1 to 5 (5 being “full lockdown” and 1 being “normal activity with precautions”). At Alert Level 5 (which began in March 2020) courts were prohibited from making eviction orders and evictions of any kind were prohibited, while at Alert Level 1 (the level at the time of writing) courts could make orders, but their execution was stayed until after the end of the lockdown period (for more information see (Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, 2020)

while the national state of disaster remained in place. This followed a widely publicised incident during which a naked man was dragged from his home in Khayelitsha during an eviction by this unit (Alexander, 2020). The city was forced to halt these evictions by a court interdict that was brought by several human rights groups in August 2020⁷⁷. The city unsuccessfully appealed this interdict. Its (then) Mayor, Dan Plato said, the court's decision would "open the floodgates on illegal land invasions, leading to a breakdown in law and order" (Alexander, 2020).

Members of the Observatory occupation applied for an interdict against the city after a visit by city police in May 2020 during which they cordoned off part of the street, issued several fines for the contravention of municipal ordinances and arrested one member after he refused to sign the fine, he was issued (Hendriks, 2020). In October 2020 the Western Cape High court ruled they could not be evicted without due process and barred the city from using its by-laws to harass activists.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the court said the City had used its by-laws as a "quick fix" and to circumvent national laws governing evictions.⁷⁹ Even with the national moratorium on evictions still in place at the time, this was a significant, separate legal victory for the *Singabalapha* occupation. This interdict offered extra legal protection against eviction (beyond the national moratorium on evictions).

⁷⁷ In August 2020, the Cape Town High Court granted an interdict to stop the City's anti-land invasion unit from evicting people and demolishing homes without a court order while the national state of disaster remained in place. This followed a widely publicised incident during which a naked man was dragged from his home in Khayelitsha during an eviction by this unit (Alexander, 2020).

⁷⁸ Under South African law no one may be evicted from or have their home demolished without a court order obtained after examining all relevant circumstances. These provisions are contained in the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE) of 1998 (10.5).

⁷⁹ According to a quote from the Acting Judge after the ruling, "The City is using the bylaws as a quick fix to persistently harass the residents so that they will eventually succumb to pressure and vacate the settlement." (Broughton, 2020).

A perusal of the court records is reflective not only of what the judge indicated was the City's double act in relation to the Occupation but also of the stakes and strategies employed by both sides in the contestation over city land. The judgement also quoted a section of the street by-laws that specifically excluded informal settlements from prohibitions on sleeping in a public place.⁸⁰ An informal settlement is defined in these same by-laws as "an area without formal service and with informal housing,"⁸¹ which, by the judge's description (see below), applied to the Occupation. Furthermore, the court said, photographic evidence had not supported the city's contention that the makeshift structures blocked a public space or pedestrian pathway. According to the judge,

...on the contrary, the photographs and video recording show tents/structures erected on a grass area beyond a pedestrian sidewalk, without blocking the latter (Hockey, 2020, 24).

It was clear from the city's behaviour towards the occupiers the judge indicated that it in fact regarded occupation residents as "occupiers" rather than "homeless". This was evident in the language used on arrest warrants etc., For example, the City's Displaced People's Unit issued a fine against one of the Occupation's residents for erecting "street makeshift structures in a public place" (Hockey, 2020, p.22).

This recognition of the long-term efforts that occupation residents had gone to not to block public walkways shows the tactical importance of these efforts in their contestation with the city over the space. During this research I noted, for instance that

⁸⁰ The subsection from Cape Town's 2007 by-laws on conduct in a public place state that, "no person shall, in a public space – Sleep overnight or camp overnight or erect any shelter, unless in an area designated for this purpose by or with the written consent of the City, provided that this shall not apply to cultural initiation practices or informal settlements (Streets, Public Places and the Prevention of Noise Nuisances, 2007)

⁸¹ This definition matches official definition of an "informal settlement" by Statistics South Africa as 'an unplanned settlement on land which has not been surveyed or proclaimed as residential, consisting mainly of informal dwellings (shacks) (Statistics South Africa, 1998)

public walkways (pavements) were kept clear of building structures and materials, including the former entranceway to Arcadia Place and the entrance to a seldom visited ossuary as well as efforts to build around a seldom-used postal collection box (see Figure 15).



Figure 15 The exterior netting of the Occupation runs behind a post box to maintain accessibility from the outside (source: Author, April 2021)

In making his ruling, the judge agreed that the occupation was an “informal settlement” (and thus exempted from the provisions of these by-laws), thus

Singabalapha is a small informal settlement which was established during October 2019, in Observatory, Cape Town on a grass area in front of a vacant building ...the settlement largely consists of tents and other informal structures (Jordan and others versus the City of Cape Town, 2020)

This ruling conferred a measure of legal recognition of their tenure and recognised that they had turned this place into an informal settlement. Yet the politics and practices of the occupation were not confined to battling for tenure in the courts. The occupiers did

not need a judge to confer upon them the label, “informal settlement”; they had been engaged in relacing their tents with durable structures for many months as the next section explores.

4.4 *An insurgent settlement in the making*

By October 2021, the second anniversary of the Occupation, almost no tents remained. From December 2020, after surviving a harsh winter in tents, there was a collective decision that everyone should erect shacks as soon as they had the means to do so.⁸² Some structures had been built earlier (June/July 2020 to early 2021) mostly as and when second-hand materials became available.⁸³ From mid-2021, most residents erecting homes were choosing “ready-mades” from shiny, often colourful new corrugated steel sheets with the cost of transportation and erection included. These were slightly costlier for residents than building from scratch using salvaged materials however⁸⁴. While colourful and noticeable once they were up, Occupation residents stood less chance of harassment by authorities while in the process building because they were erected quickly.⁸⁵

The transformation or construction of the physical structures of the occupation were at once fundamentally insurgent and relied upon the maintenance of this inside and outside. While the predominant choice to erect more homes from more durable

⁸² See for example personal interview, 8 April 2021.

⁸³ These materials frequently came from demolition sites or where people had torn down informal dwellings in the ‘townships’ and had to be transported by truck at considerable cost to Occupation residents to this central area of the city.

⁸⁴ A one-roomed ‘ready-made’ of 3mX2.7m ‘ready-made’ (also called ‘bungalows’ by residents of this Occupation) cost residents in the Occupation approximately R4500 (inclusive of delivery and erecting the structure). These dwellings, made from corrugated steel sheets galvanized with zinc are often red, green or beige and can take anything from a few hours to half a day depending on how many people are available to help.

⁸⁵ Despite a court interdict barring their eviction, police continued to respond to what they said were complaints from the public over building activities at the Occupation (fieldnotes, 15 June 2021)

materials (in most cases shiny, new 'ready-mades') to replace the tents they had lived in for over a year coincided, roughly with the court interdict in which the judge referred to the Occupation as an "informal settlement," they did not begin putting up more permanent structures *because* they got this legal green light, but they were now able to do so more openly . By March 2021 several residents had already erected structures made from more durable material than tent material. They had done so under cover of night and shrouded from view behind the high netting fence. This practice was part of the insurgent nature of this occupation.⁸⁶ An activist described the importance of the netting fence that ran along the exterior of the Occupation to their insurgent building practices.

We were making a fence here with these nets so if your *hoki* comes in , [it] come[s] inside here during the night...Then we put a black plastic on top of the wall so when they are standing there watching they don't see.⁸⁷

One example of the practice described in this quote, of shrouding a hoki with black plastic so that whoever is watching is not able to see what is going on is in Figure 16 where a shiny new "ready-made" was covered in black tarpaulin sheets during the day to make it less noticeable.

⁸⁶ On 'insurgent' practices of planning and building see, for example, Miraftab (2009:35) who builds on (Holston, 2009) notion of "insurgent citizenship" to suggest that in cities of the Global South, (including South Africa), squatter settlements can stabilize the state by providing shelter for the poor majority yet also breed counter-hegemonic, insurgent movements which mobilise outside the control of the state and claim a right to the city.

⁸⁷ This quote comes from a speech by a *Singabalapha* activist during the second anniversary of the Occupation in 2 October 2021.



Figure 16 Black plastic sheeting covered this brightly coloured "hoki" making it less noticeable from the street. (Source: author, April 2021)

While a full description of the various transformations or iterations the Occupation went through over the period of research falls outside the scope of this thesis, it is vital to understand the constantly changing, transforming nature of this place-in-the-making.

In the broadest terms, it underwent a process of transformation from a tented encampment when I first began mapping it in early 2021, into a settlement that was composed of more permanent structures (largely made from wood and corrugated iron structures) by the end of that year. Over time the Occupation densified and the living spaces or yards in which individuals, families (or sometimes several families grouped together) lived, became more clearly demarcated and smaller in size. Furthermore, some spaces and structures remained vacant or unfinished which reflects the spatial and temporal gaps that existed as residents left for periods or waited to have the materials or financial resources to upgrade. Some incrementally adapted their living spaces.

In March 2021⁸⁸, for instance, it was divided into roughly ten yards, (one resident referred to these as “kraals”⁸⁹). By mid-June 2021, these “kraals” had become more clearly demarcated as well as smaller in size. The term “hoki” was used by Occupation residents to denote housing built with several types of materials⁹⁰. This broad descriptor thus includes various types of materials. These were self-made dwellings constructed from various second-hand or salvaged corrugated iron or wood which residents paid to have transported from sites on the peripheries, but also included the ‘ready-mades’⁹¹ which were made from brand new corrugated iron often in bright orange, green or red. These categorisations are inevitably reductive in a context where there were many gradations between types of structures and their various stages of completeness. In mid-2021, for instance, the Occupation was composed of structures made from many varied materials, including tents and wooden Wendy homes.

4.4.1 The persistence of uncertainty

Although the city immediately announced its decision to appeal the High Court interdict against it¹³⁶ this ruling gave residents some measure of security that they would not be evicted without warning. The ruling did not represent an end to uncertainty however, but a temporary and tenuous respite. Despite the ruling, city police continued to make irregular visits acting on what they said were complaints from the public (including complaints about Occupation residents constructing home. In addition, the question of

⁸⁸ From a base-line survey conducted by the author which has been redacted for ethical purposes. It is available upon request (see chapter 2).

⁸⁹ A “kraal” is an Afrikaans word that is commonly used in South Africa to refer to a traditional village or collective homestead enclosed by a fence.

⁹⁰ A ‘hoki’ (plural ‘hokkies’) comes from the Afrikaans ‘hok’ meaning a small enclosure. This was the general term Occupation residents used to refer to both self-made and ‘ready-made’ structures.

⁹¹ ‘Ready-mades’ were more costly than to build from salvaged, second-hand materials, however, with the relatively high transport cost of materials from the peripheries to this central area factored in, the cost of a ‘ready-made’ was only slightly higher and had the advantage of being quickly assembled.

when the national government would lift the national emergency regulations put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, halting evictions could be lifted. In September 2021 there were indications that city authorities were marshalling the legal means to begin evicting what it saw as “unlawful land incursions” across the city as soon these pandemic restrictions ended. The council passed amended by-laws which rights groups criticised for criminalising homelessness.⁹² The City’s Safety and Security Portfolio Committee Chairperson, Mzwakhe Nqavashe was quoted as saying, “The clause in the by-law is actually to ensure that open spaces are meant to be public, to be available for all to use ... and not to be reserved by people.” (Marvin Charles, 2021).

4.5 *Standing on our own: resistance as homemaking*

Their refusal to board the bus was pivotal in how residents of the Occupation came to approach the practice of occupation. It was significant in shaping the collective identity of this group of people and the place they were building but also represents an event through which the politics of this place acted on and shaped the politics of the state. This encounter hinged on attempts to corral them into a definition of “street people” and their refusal is summed up again by V, thus:

... the city was treating us as if we are street people, people who are running away from home, things like that. But we keep on telling them that no, we are different. We are people that are coming from a warm house, but we are people who have a good mindset of standing on your own, have your own space, because it's your rights⁹³.

⁹² The amended law on “Streets, Public Places and Prevention of Noise Nuisances” (2007) states that anyone found sleeping in a public place without permission will be issued with a fine and offered alternative shelter and reads, “Such a person only commits an offence if they refuse a reasonable offer of alternative shelter.” (City of Cape Town, Media Office, 2021) Civil rights and housing groups, (including *Singabalapha*) contested these amendments calling them punitive towards homelessness, through marches and legal appeals, see (Hyman, 2021).

⁹³ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

In contesting the City's politics which seeks to label them as "street people" in order to erase the Occupation, V contends the following: that they (1) come from warm houses, (2) have a mindset of standing on their own (3) they have their own space(es) and related to this, (4) have (and know) their rights. I wish to pause here to engage these four aspects he alludes to as a powerful expression of an emerging "affective politics" of this occupation. In doing so, I do not suggest that his ideas encapsulate this politics in a reductive sense, but rather to use them as ideas that form part of a process of continual complexification and open-endedness that Massumi (2015) refers in writing about the politics of affect.

The "warm house" V refers to is an example of "home" as "a spatial imaginary that connects and extends across places" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p.5). The spatial imaginary that V calls upon here links back to what several interviewees mentioned in Chapter 3 in relation to their family homes. Rather than running away from home, they insist on their connection to "warm homes" and families to which, many remained connected as a means of material support to their protest. In the above quote what emerges is the use of "home" as spatial imaginary but also resistant politics against a binary imposed from the outside of "homeless" versus "homed". I do not suggest that Occupation members defined themselves against homelessness, to the contrary, those formerly street-based had joined the Occupation and the *Singabalapha* social movement had associations with groups representing the rights of street-based people. This was about resisting lethal politics of control by the state by an emerging affective politics based on "standing on their own" and having a 'space of their own'.

The question of whether occupation residents considered themselves 'homeless' and equally whether they were considered by the outside world (including people in the surrounding area and state actors) to be so, was a vital aspect of their building of place and their affective politics which centred on home and belonging. For census purposes,

a homeless person is defined as,

...those who had no form of shelter no known living address, but could be found spending the whole of *census night* on street corners or pavements, sleeping under bridges, in doorways, in alleyways, at entrances to buildings or shops, at railway stations, or even sleeping in public toilets (Statistics, 1998)

While in some respects, residents of this occupation fitted the above definition (e.g., by sleeping along a pavement); but in many other respects they did not (e.g., they did have shelters and an address). Moreover, in a wider context of increased social and economic crisis through which many more people had been recently become jobless and unhomed these very distinctions made little sense. For instance, the Occupation had welcomed several people who had formerly slept on the street. Furthermore, *Singabalapha* had strong associations with other activist collectives which represented 'homeless' groups. In constructing a politics centred around 'home', they were not rejecting people without homes, but a biopolitics that sought to use these labels to displace them.

Theirs was not, however, the only occupation of interstitial space on or adjacent to the pavement over this time. While it falls outside the scope of this thesis to consider what led other individuals or groups to erect makeshift shelters over this period, nor to comprehensively map these other makeshift occupations around the area of study, it is an important aspect of the wider context this occupation took place in that there was a noticeable increase in makeshift occupation of interstitial spaces over this time. This is true both of this neighbourhood and many other areas of the city. Both Figure 17 and Figure 18 show examples of other dwellings near to the immediate area of study (within one kilometre). These were made from salvaged materials such as tarpaulin, cardboard and scrap wood and erected along the same pavement within one kilometre of the Occupation along Main Road. The pavement home shown in Figure 17, was

approximately 500 metres away (it remained in place at least for the duration of this research).



Figure 17 A makeshift shelter on the pavement, Observatory (source: Author, March 2021)

Figure 18 shows makeshift shelters which proved more temporary. These were made from black which were set back from the pavement in an otherwise unused space which had formerly been an entrance road. These shelters had been attached to the railings that separated the pavement from a parking lot for the nearby hospital.



Figure 18 Makeshift shelters in front of hospital parking lot, Observatory (source: Author, March 2021)

While their protest exposed state failures to provide basic services, at the same time, their bodily endurance, and the maintenance of the “space of appearance” (Butler, 2011) involved residents of the Occupation in trying to access these basics such as water, power and toilets informally in the surrounding area. Below, I go on to explore some of these everyday strategies and struggles.

4.5.1 Contestation and strategies of the everyday

Living along a busy Main Road, residents of the Occupation were visibly abandoned by being denied help by the state. However, as illustrated above, if they went cooking, cleaning, washing or cooked food where they lived, these residents could be fined and harassed by-law enforcement agents as part of attempts by the city to criminalise them for contravening its street by-laws⁹⁴. The daily, physical struggle in the arena of the body and its needs, was the arena of contestation with the state which also took place within this “space of appearance” where their abandonment, but also their resistance to

⁹⁴ See ref above to incident of visit by police to the Occupation in May 2020.

abandonment could be visible to all who passed.

The Occupation took place in a middle-class neighbourhood where other residents could take these services for granted) which only deepened the awareness of their privations from what their bodies required. In paying attention to what Butler refers to as “the bodily dimensions of action” (2011), I consider the conditions of their persistence in this place which, as Butler suggests, are also the conditions of power. As the months passed, neither the state nor the city provided access to basic sanitation or adequate housing to Occupation residents as was their constitutional right.

Having to strategize around the absence of infrastructure was not unfamiliar to many of the Occupation residents some of whom had lived in backyard shacks most of whom had grown up poor and on the peripheries (as discussed in chapter 3.) Referring to life back in Khayelitsha where he had been a backyarder in his parents’ home he said, “You have to suffer on your own. Just like here where we are now.” The crucial difference was that on the main thoroughfare in Observatory it was visibly clear to anyone passing along this main thoroughfare that “the city of Cape Town doesn’t want to help us”.⁹⁵

Assistance, when it came, was through a chain of relationships that stretched from the Occupation out into the neighbourhood, and through the associative networks of activist groups and civil society organisations with which the Occupation maintained relationships. V expressed this sense of a chain of relationships as follows:

So us here, we didn't get no help. It was only private organizations, you know, and even those organizations, we get them from people who knows them.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

⁹⁶ Idem.

Nor were Occupation residents necessarily always recipients of the help described above. At times they helped others. K described volunteering as part of a neighbourhood community kitchen as part of the Community Action Network (CAN) who provided meals to those who needed food-aid during the months of “hard lockdown” associated with the pandemic. Recalling this experience, K said,

That time I was also volunteering...making sandwiches for people that sleep on the streets. So I guess I feel I built a relationship with our Obs CAN⁹⁷.

The network of relationships between the Occupation, neighbourhood collectives and civic associations informed how the Occupation came to be defined and defined themselves as if not independent of the state, at least not dependant on it.

By March 2021, regular food donations from local soup kitchens and canteens which had been set up over this period had dissipated. However, members of the public continued to drop off donations of food, clothes, and other items at the Occupation. As Occupation resident, P explained, donations did help to soften the hardships of daily life, but did not let the state off the hook for its refusal to provide them with essential services:

There's nothing positive yet. I would say it is positive if the government was at least providing the primary, or the basic needs like water - solar, maybe - and, like, toilets at least.⁹⁸

While the state’s failure to provide the basics P mentioned above was a glaring fact of daily existence, and their struggle to maintain a dignified access to these basics were both the condition of their protest, and in many ways what their protest was about.

⁹⁷ Personal interview with K, 18 May 2021.

⁹⁸ Personal interview with P, 8 April 2021.

Occupation residents sometimes went to great lengths not to attract attention to their everyday ablutions and household tasks. The need to do so was linked both to the harassment they had experienced from city officials who used their municipal by-laws to criminalise their cooking, cleaning etc. as well as to concerns over how they were perceived by the surrounding area, the abiding concern over maintaining their respectability and the idea of this Occupation as law-abiding and as an asset to the neighbourhood.

An example of the lengths people went to hide their ablutions, were the buckets of dirty water that were standing inside peoples' homes. They had to keep their wastewater until late at night when they could venture out, unseen, to dump the water into the drains at the shopping centre next door. They did not want to be seen throwing wastewater into the road and furthermore, according to one resident, they were afraid of attracting flies by throwing dirty water into the road close to where they slept.⁹⁹

Enduring here, meant adopting very particular strategies around constraints that were unique to these circumstances and to the resources available. One resident cooked on a wood fired brazier placed in the middle of his tent. When I asked him where the smoke exited, he grinned and replied, "Out," with a wave of his hand. However, had adapted the type of fuel he used to cook with he explained,

I used to use planks, but the planks make a lot of smoke...So now I only use trees' fallen off branches and stuff from around here.¹⁰⁰

Persisting also meant adapting one's daily rhythms. For instance, without electricity they relied on solar lamps or torches that had to be recharged from mobile power banks. Children hurried to complete their homework during daylight hours as one mother

⁹⁹ Fieldnotes, 26 March 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Personal interview 1 April 2021.

explained,

... they need to do their schoolwork while there is still light. Because once it's dark, they are unable to read their books because there's a lack of light and a lack of resources for lightning.¹⁸³

The larger electrical appliances, such as fridges, that respondents had meant to use in their occupation of the old age home, were useless outside the old age home – at least as far as their former uses went. “I don't have a fridge so put stuff in the ground. I put my medication in the ground,” said a diabetic resident who had to use the earth to attempt to keep his medication chilled. Instead of discarding it, he used the fridge to stock wood, leaving it standing just where it been thrown out onto the street by security guards after their eviction from the building.¹⁰¹

Strategies to gain informal access to these basics meant that residents had to constantly move between sources they knew were available in the surrounding area and search for new ones when those dried up or were refused.

Evidence of the unreliable nature of “help” was a large, green water drum stood, empty, mid-way along the row of Occupation dwellings. During the lockdown associated with the pandemic, a network of community volunteers had filled it regularly, dropped off water at the Occupation for distribution every day. That initiative fallen away by the time I began this research. The practices and strategies that Occupation residents used amounted to a set of ever-precarious and changing routines which constituted what Thrift (2007) refers to as a “basic intelligibility of the world”(p.6).

Their ability or inability to access what they needed depended on the strength of the networks of connections that they had established in the surrounding neighbourhood

¹⁰¹ Personal interview 1 April 2021.

over time. For example, one Occupation resident filled up his water bottles regularly at the house of a woman who lived nearby and whom he knew through her cousin for whom he had done some work.¹⁰²

For those without individual relationships of this kind nearby, they had to ask at a petrol station roughly one kilometre further along the main road where they would, sometimes, be allowed to fill up water cannisters. The catch was, they could not go and ask there too often. "They get tired of people asking but they sometimes refuse to give us water," explained an Occupation resident. Moreover, there were times, such as the hard lockdown period when there was a heightened sensibility around frequent handwashing, when the need for water became more pressing than at other times and their ability or inability to access it, more laden with anxiety "It's not easy to wash the hands because we must always wash our hands. Before we touch anything".¹⁰³ Families who needed larger amounts of water than what they could hope to collect at the petrol station, walked 1,2 kilometres to fill up at the old Circus School, another occupation allied to theirs on the other side of Observatory.

This routine patterned a routine to their lives. "When they come from school we take a walk," ¹⁰⁴ said a M, who walked across the suburb in the early evening when the roads were quiet. She carried the baby strapped to her back and pushed a shopping trolley in which they could store the water containers. Following these daily rhythms was easier on long summer days, but as the colder, rainy months approached, the task of fetching water was more difficult.

These strategies were tenuous and often failed. One resident sent her children to fetch

¹⁰² Personal interview, 1 April 2021.

¹⁰³ Personal interview with Z, 10 April 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Personal interview with M, 16 April 2021.

water from a range of the known places where it might be available on any given day. Some evenings however, they came home empty handed. This meant the next morning there would be no water to wash with before school. In such cases she said, she resorted to using packaged “wet-wipes” to clean her children,

... I will always keep the wipes so that if they didn't get water the previous day, then they can use the wipes at least to wipe themselves.¹⁰⁵

Those who did not have the time to make multiple, alternate plans to access water or to walk to the occupation at the Old Circus School to fetch it, had little choice but to bring it from elsewhere. Several respondents regularly obtained water back in homes on the peripheries where they had lived before. For instance, Z, who worked long hours during the week and returned home after dark said, “If I have no water, I phone my sister to come with a water from Nyanga”. Transport from her sister’s home, (15km away) was too costly for this to be an ad-hoc strategy, instead this was a support that assumed regular visits from family. This is further illustration of how, far from being abandoned, family homes functioned in many instances, to provide the “material supports” that allowed for the protest to persist that Butler (2011) refers to.

While in this section, I have suggested how bodily endurance necessitated various strategies of making-do in order to access basic services denied by the state. While in some cases these strategies signalled forms of anchoring into this neighbourhood and its networks, in other cases, family homes far away, nevertheless provided vital support, especially when other forms of access were difficult. In the next section I turn to the transformation of everyday activism and protest over time.

¹⁰⁵ Personal interview with P, 13 May 2021.

4.6 "Being here" as protest

It was early winter 2021. Rain had fallen overnight dampening the couch outside his tent. Realising it was wet outside, K ducked inside his tent, fetched sheets of newspaper, and laid them over the sodden surface to make me, his visitor, comfortable before he we could start our interview. Living in a tent in the rain and cold was part his perpetual "being here": a state of perpetual protest which was both a daily, physical struggle to remain in place, and a political protest that made future claims. "I'm always here protesting. My being here is a protest against spatial zoning," said K. He continued, "The housing issues that we're facing, you know, the city. The city is still stuck in the old apartheid mentality"¹⁰⁶. For K this protest was not only against their immediate eviction from the old age home, but the layers of historical disposessions that had shaped the city and which had also led to the most recent dispossession – their eviction from Arcadia Place.

A protest against persistent spatial inequalities that remained from the apartheid era was a part of what this protest was about, what it claimed and what it hoped to achieve, but it was only one aspect. A leader of the *Singabalapha* movement explained what it meant to her to remain on this piece of land after their eviction from the building behind it,

... we told ourselves that we didn't have a chance to fight for the building. When we have a chance, we fought for this piece of ground. To us, it means security. It means freedom. It means access to all amenities.¹⁰⁷

By "security," "freedom" and "access to all amenities," B was not referring only to what they could access by remaining here, but also what they were fighting for: access to the economic and social privileges of the central city (such as security and access to

¹⁰⁶ Personal interview with K, 18 May 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Personal interview with B, 26 March 2021.

amenities such as schools, public transport etc.).

As their protest endured and no formal response or offer of negotiated settlement came from the City, the basic demands and claims of this protest were articulated differently by different people. The focus of this thesis is on the “affective politics” of this occupation, a broader, messier politics of the everyday that unfolded as this occupation endured over time. It was a politics that was closely intertwined with the agenda *Singabalapha* movement, but not synonymous with it. A pamphlet to mark the Occupation’s two-year anniversary emphasised that it was not one set demand for housing or land, but instead a demand for basic services which were their constitutional right while they waited for a more permanent solution: “For the time being we want basic services while we wait for land on which we can build houses with our housing subsidies,” read the pamphlet¹⁰⁸. The organisation’s demands related to different time frames: one for the immediate future and one for the long term. The other possibility they gave the state was a continuation of their activism mentioned in the previous section of using existing, vacant, and abandoned state buildings and also referred to the type of plan they had drawn up to use in the case of the old Conradie hospital revitalisation they had attempted (see chapter 3):

Or, give us empty buildings that are currently being vandalized. We would make them beautiful homes for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. We have a plan that can be used by the government and the city that will be less costly and faster than their affordable housing programmes which are stuck.¹⁰⁹

According to several interviewees, they could not stay in this place in the long term given the physical hardships and risks of remaining along a busy main road (these

¹⁰⁸ Excerpt from pamphlet distributed to the public and membership during a meeting marking the second anniversary (*Singabalapha – We belong here*, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Excerpt from pamphlet (*Singabalapha – We belong here*, 2021).

embodied struggles explored in more detail in the next chapter). While M was holding out for somewhere with grass and trees, for L, this occupation was a demand for land near central Cape Town:

... all I'm asking for is for a land base near CBD¹¹⁰ because we're tired of staying at *lokishini*¹¹¹ We want to a land base that is near CBD ... that we can stay with our kids.¹¹²

A significant aspect of this protest and its politics from the inside, was the existence of a list of members which functioned as a legacy, a membership and set of expectations that could be passed on to the next generation no matter what happened and what their occupation eventually resulted in, would benefit their children as well.

4.6.2 Practices of the inside: waiting and place holding

Several respondents referred their understanding that their names and those of all those who had taken part in the Occupation up until this point were safeguarded on a list in the possession of members of the housing movement. The appearance of their names there was both tangible evidence of their membership and their legacy. The understandings and logics around this list contrasted with the other list which respondents mentioned: the housing list for state housing.

In the first weeks following their eviction from the old age home, the numbers of activists taking part dwindled from somewhere around 200 people¹¹³ until only a core

¹¹⁰ Central Business District.

¹¹¹ A slang term used in isiXhosa for 'township' derived from the word "location".

¹¹² Personal interview with L, 9 April 2021

¹¹³ This rough estimate is based on press reports as well as interviews with residents who had taken part in this initial occupation.

group of around 70 remained.¹¹⁴ The Occupation remained inclusive. Those who had to leave for whatever reason, could return and take up their place again as V explained,

We told ourselves that, no, since you are old people, you've got these chronic diseases and stuff, you're supposed to go back and stay where you used to stay with your families. But don't worry, your names will be on the list.¹¹⁵

The existence of the list was something that shored them up against a sense of precariousness and ephemerality of their material circumstances, as V again explained:

... we end up collecting ID copies. So that we cannot forget those people, even if ever maybe it's raining and all those papers became wet, because you are living in a tent and the tents get broken. So that we can have something.¹¹⁶

In writing about how the process of waiting on the state for housing shapes politics of ordinary life for many South Africans, Oldfield and Greyling (2015) suggests that waiting generates what they refer to as “a politics of encounter” between the state and citizens. These practices, they furthermore suggest, involve them in often contingent and opaque government practices in which policy changes are the norm. Having waited her adult life (20 years) in vain on the state’s housing list, M pointed out the crucial difference between the inheritable rights to one’s place in the occupation and the state’s list that if you died before receiving a house from the state, you lost your place. She explained, “Your children don't inherit from it if you pass before you get it.”¹¹⁷ In emphasising that one’s death represents is the end of the line of succession, despite years being spent in a state of waiting thus in a state of encounter with shifting and opaque government

¹¹⁴ People frequently came and left the Occupation when they needed to. This figure is a rough approximation based on a base-line survey I conducted in June 2021, including children.

¹¹⁵ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

¹¹⁶ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

¹¹⁷ Personal interview with M, 26 March 2021.

practices, , the point that M makes here is a crucial one in terms of the temporal horizon lines of this Occupation for its residents: in contrast to waiting on the state, one's place in the Occupation is mutually witnessed and safeguarded as a legacy for the next generation.

This chapter has shown two examples of how the politics of this occupation was shaped not only by powerful forces which sought to erase, exclude, police and harass the Occupation: an attempt by City authorities to send them to an emergency camp for the 'homeless' during the pandemic and the legal contestation with the city over their tenure in the space. Equally, however, it has shown how contestations of the everyday which included the strategies, challenges and routines people used in order to access the basics in a place with no tap, toilet or connection to the electricity grid.

With reference to the attempt to send them to the pandemic facility for the homeless, I have suggested that Occupation residents had, over time, defined themselves as home(ed), and homemaking not homeless against a biopolitics that a resident said was aimed at killing them, thus, literally erasing their existence and the Occupation as a place. Furthermore, the occupiers fought for their (tenuous) tenure in court after several attempts by the City to use municipal street by- laws to police them for going about their daily acts of survival such as cooking or constructing shelters, securing an interdict against the city however, it was unclear how long it could hold without being challenged. Furthermore, their protest was shaped by an additional layer of politico-legal context of perpetual uncertainty linked to a national moratorium on evictions during the pandemic. This too, affected what daily life as protest could entail: it impacted for instance, upon their ability to construct homes for themselves or go out to work, thus marking the rhythms, sensitivities, privations, and indignities of their lived and daily experience of protest. One way to understand the political-legal terrain in which this occupation is situated, is in a zone that is neither private property nor the

urban commons argues Wilhelm-Solomon who suggests that they emerge in a space he terms the "city otherwise" which is, "in the interstices of constitutional law, in a zone neither public nor private," (2020, p.405).

Finally, I have shown that theirs was an insurgent, enduring, persistent politics of the inside. At the core of the Occupation and its politics was what they held to and held each other to: the belief that they were creating a legacy that would benefit their children. I turn in the next chapter, to a fine-grained focus on what it took to survive, daily, as vulnerable bodies in this space of constant flow and flux, along a busy pavement and main road.

Chapter 5: Turning this place into a place: embodied practices of the everyday

The space has been changed. And our main aim or for South Africa to see that whatever the City may try to do or not want to do, we are going to turn this place into a place.¹¹⁸

As time passed, the Occupation was virtually unrecognisable from the tented camp it started out as the above quote by one of its members emphasises – it had changed, evolving each day as they turned this place into a place. By now, more and more people building durable shelters out of whatever they could buy or salvage. Despite the ongoing stand-off between the occupiers, the City, and would be developers of the property behind them explored in the previous chapter, this was a place in the making. This chapter engages with the turning of "this place into a place" as a struggle of the everyday. More specifically, as an embodied struggle. I focus on the building of this as a place-in-the making that was at the same time the space of visible protest or a "space of appearance" (Arendt, 2013, Butler, 2011, 2015).

¹¹⁸ Personal interview with V, 6 May 2021.

This chapter focuses on how residents strategized, improvised, and adapted their living space and their occupation space in the construction and maintenance of an “inside” and an “outside” - both in tangible and intangible senses. It explores the bodily challenges particular to enduring in this place, just metres from a busy main road. What impact did proximity and constant flow have on people and on their capacities to endure? In it, I pay particular attention to strategies around openings between people’s living spaces, between their homes and outside spaces and between their yards and the street. Finally, I single out two spaces where encounters take place between the “inside” and the “outside”: a pavement bookstand and a garden belonging to one of the residents..

5.1 *Between the inside and the outside: Barriers, openings, closures*

The space in which Occupation residents lived was characterised by constant flow including the flow of pedestrians walking along the pavement and vehicles driving down the main road, just metres away. To persist here, was to live with the real threat of bodily harm; with the feeling that nothing is safe – neither your body, nor your possessions. B described this embodied experience as follows:

Even your bed will be spoiled because everybody passing bumping by your bed doing this and that. So there’s nothing that you can keep for long here. Also...a taxi, a bus stops here in front of your face.¹¹⁹

This feeling, (or the expectation of it) that you could be “bumped” up against at any moment amid the constant flow of people passing by described here reflects the bodily experience of being exposed, too close, spoiled, bumped. It evokes a feeling of entanglement of bodies and the street. This quote expresses the intensity of affect –

¹¹⁹ Personal interview with B, 26 March 2021.

bodies affecting and being affected – in a place where nothing can be kept for long. Yet, engaged in long-term protest, they were struggling to do just that – to hold onto and keep intact, themselves and their possessions.

Amid of the barrage of sensoria that accompanied this flow and the constancy of the gazes from outside, barriers were of vital importance. Barriers of different kinds, including the exterior skeins of garden netting, but also wooden pallets, scrap wood and metal were used to divide yards and living spaces within the Occupation from one another as well as to separate the inside, intimate space of occupation from the outside world – and its unpredictable flow.

The first and most obvious form of barrier used were the opaque sheets of shade-cloth netting hung along from wooden poles along most of the outside of the occupation, between the pavement and the “verge”. Although not uniform in height, most sections were as high as a person during the phase of my research. The external barrier had evolved through various material iterations over time. In early 2020, for instance, the netting that hung along the perimeter of the then predominantly tented camp was lower in height, which then corresponded to the height of tents (see Figure 19 and Figure 20). However, by the end of 2020, a higher net barrier had been put up across almost the entire length of the Occupation as shown in Figure 21.



Figure 19 The wooden pallet exterior barrier in early 2020 (source: (Broughton, Groundup 2020))



Figure 20 The Occupation in February/March 2020. (source: supplied from resident's collection).



Figure 21 Shade cloth was erected along the perimeter of the Occupation (source: Author, June 2021)

The netting had multiple functions including (1) to obscure what went on inside from the gaze of outsiders, and (2) to shield or muffle what went on outside for those living in the occupation. To illustrate point (1), the yard space, shown in Figure 22 is shielded from the outside behind a high barrier composed of several layers of material, added over time. Behind a low strip of cardboard, a fencing made of wooden pallets are remainders of a previous iteration of fencing from the year before when the occupants of this home were living in tents (seen in Figure 19). Since that time, high wooden poles were added to hold up the netting which reached the level of the roof of this home. The incrementally constructed barrier allows for a space of greater intimacy in this yard space amid the sensorial barrage and flow of the street outside with its dangers and risks, both real and perceived.



Figure 22 Seen from inside a yard. Shade cloth is held up on wooden poles at the height of the roof to shield this yard from the outside (source: Author, October 2021)

Even a single layer of netting skein could have an effect of muffling the sensoria of the outside. Figure 23 provides a visual illustration of what was a (multi)sensorial experience of the “inside”. Using the method of my own body as recording device, noting “somatic amplitudes” (Dewsbury, 2010). I was seated on a plastic chair one a quiet afternoon inside one of the yards whose occupants were out at work. The group of children, who were on a school break, and were inside one of the nearby homes. Close enough so that I could hear their happy chatter.¹²⁰ In my journal I noted that people passed me, just on

¹²⁰ Over the time of my research the children came to associate me with drawing as they could always ask to use a store of paper and pens, I put at their disposal to draw with.

the other side of the cloth, “like ghosts, just figures going somewhere”¹²¹. If I purposefully ‘tuned in’ to sounds, I could also hear the roar of trucks and taxi operators yelling as they slid open and shut their doors to collect or drop off passengers along Main Road. Near my feet a plastic bag tugged against the netting in the wind. Despite this noise and activity so close by, it was possible to feel alone sitting behind this netting, screened from the world.



Figure 23 Sitting inside one of the yards facing the street, with the cold wind whipping my face, I could see people walking by just on the other side of the cloth, like ghosts (Source: Author, April 2021)

Thus, while residents of this place mediated the terms of their visibility and thus the visibility of their enduring protest by erecting barriers, these barriers also performed a vital function of filtering or muffling sensoria. However, these flimsy materials could do

¹²¹ Fieldnotes, 30 April 2021.

little to protect vulnerable bodies from the ever-present, proximate dangers represented by the flow of people, vehicles, goods etc. along the street outside as the next section explores.

5.1.1 *"A car don't behave": our bodies and the street*

Vehicles moving down the main road, represented ever-present risk. Another respondent spoke of the terror he felt on nights when his ten-year-old daughter came to sleep over in the Occupation,

... a car don't behave..., he don't care. You have a zinc, you have a wood, whatever you have, but it just come in and imagine it kills my daughter! We can't stay here my sister.¹²²

Listening to L, I became momentarily aware of the heavy traffic along the main road that led from here onto the freeway and out of town and which was barely two metres away from the Occupation as can be seen in Figure 24. The noise of the traffic, moving along the road, was so ubiquitous that it was easy for me, the occasional visitor, to block it out and to overlook the constant, physical harm which vehicles represented to the bodies of people. It was not so easy for residents like him.

¹²² Personal interview with L, 8 April 2021.



Figure 24 The Occupation from across the Main Road, on a rainy evening (source: Author, May 2021)

Indeed, the constancy of this threat was one of the obvious reasons why L said, “we can’t stay here” alluding to the belief that their persistence could not continue indefinitely in a bodily sense.

Besides the physical exposure of bodies, were fears connected to less tangible dangers. For example, M, worried her children were being continually exposed to seeing what they could not have:

People [are] passing by carrying groceries that you can’t even afford. And yet your children are watching people with groceries, nice groceries, taking them to their children, but yours cannot get access to all those, all that stuff.”¹²³

During the day traffic noise could be muffled or dampened by the distraction of whatever else was going on. However, at night it was different. There was the best

¹²³ Personal interview with M, 26 March 2021.

chance of sleep between the hours of 11pm and 5 am, when the traffic down this main thoroughfare of the city died down sufficiently. Sleep deprivation, compounded by chronic insecurity, accumulated in layers over time, and was part of an embodied struggle.

The capacities of bodies to persist in the occupation were stretched by the sensorial immediacy and proximity of this street. Sitting with a group of women in one of the yards I noticed that one woman who was usually chatty, was sitting slumped over on her chair in the meagre shadow of the nearest home. For the past few days, I had noticed the dark rings under her eyes. I asked if she was sick. "It's this difficulty of ever getting to sleep properly," she replied. The moment she said this, all the physical signs I had noticed made sense, yet I had not imagined the most obvious cause because sleep deprivation was so ubiquitous to daily life here as to be simply an assumed, constant. However, in this woman's case she was more affected by noise because she lived behind a bus stop and the buses began running at 4am. In addition, sleep deprivation was compounded by insecurity. She had no means to securely lock her door and could not truly rest knowing she and her children were exposed to whatever might come from the street. Massumi makes the point that the ability of the body to affect and be affected is not constant. He explains this as follows,

.... depending on the circumstances, it goes up and down gently like a tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave, or at times simply bottoms out. (Massumi, 2015, p. 17)

The example above illustrates, the bottoming out that Massumi points to as well as the fluctuations of bodily persistence here response to constant exposure to noise and risk, in the daytime but especially during the night. This example does not only have bearing on this particular individual at this moment but goes beyond the individual to affect space and temporality in a wider sense. Anderson (2006) suggests, "The affectivities of different types of relation can be witnessed in the qualitative differences that

energetically enhance or deplete the living of space-times" (p. 735).

There was much that barriers could not keep out, including rats, which ate their way through the malleable wood and cardboard exterior of residents' homes and left their droppings as evidence. Ordinarily open and welcoming to most visitors, K, felt differently about rats. After yet another nocturnal visit by a rodent, he remarked,

Well, if I would catch, that rat, I won't kill it. I will hang it by its toes. If it's got a toe... I hate it that somebody feel that way about animals, but it's not an animal. It's a pest. Yeah, it's got a right to be here. I guess. He has a right to look for food. But it's inconveniencing me.¹²⁴

The previous night, a rat or rats had managed to eat through the chicken wire he had strung around each of his plant pots to stop their nocturnal rooting.

5.1.2 Intuiting the flow

In this environment they were required to intuit between what was potentially "helpful" and what was perhaps harmful in a split second. Intuiting required constant effort and attention at some level, and provoked constant, low-level anxiety amongst the adults in relation to the children. Often it was best just to go with the flow and not dwell too much on what the intention might be behind something that arrived. This was made clear to me when, one morning a man deposited a plastic crate on the pavement in front of where I was sitting with one of the residents. The man muttered, "vis"¹²⁵ then dashed off leaving behind a strong fish odour was impossible to ignore. A fish head and tail protruded from a plastic bag inside the crate. While I hesitated between being outraged that this rotten carcass had been dumped outside their homes or thinking it

¹²⁴ Personal interview with K, 1 April 2021.

¹²⁵ "Vis" is the Afrikaans word for "fish".

might be intended as a gift, the resident with whom I had been chatting simply laughed and said, rhetorically, "What do they say in English about a gift horse?"¹²⁶ He picked up the crate and deposited it under the lamppost garbage can - where it would get collected later in the day.¹²⁷

I turn to how residents mediated the exposure of their bodies through barriers, openings and closures.

5.2 *Openings and closures*

The constant flow of people along the street meant openings onto it had to be carefully strategized around. As Figure 24 shows, some residents chose to put up gateways or barriers across the entranceways between their yards and the pavements, while others left them open or allowed people to enter through a flap in the exterior netting.

Barriers could signpost what behaviours were expected of others, rather than as serious material barriers against the street. To illustrate this point, Occupation resident Z, who was in the process of constructing her home, was considering putting up a gate between her yard and the pavement, but, she said that it would be made from cardboard, or what she called, "something to suggest."¹²⁸

Likewise, V had erected a gate between his yard and the pavement had attached a short section of spikes to the top of it, but nowhere else along his outside perimeter¹⁰⁸. When I teased him about the efficiency of this as a security measure, he joked, "No one will enter, because they can feel there's someone here with a sense of humour!" The gate's

¹²⁶ Fieldnotes, 18 May 2021.

¹²⁷ Municipal cleaning services empty public garbage bins along the Main Road daily. This service is not the same as residential waste removal, which occurred once a week for residents living in the formally built homes of this neighbourhood.

¹²⁸ Fieldnotes, 10 April 2021.

(home-made wire) latch remained open and friends could drift into his yard at any time to fetch something, or to knock at the door of his home. In addition, he had added a security feature at ankle level - a wire wrapped in black plastic, strung diagonally from his gate pole, and jutting out into the street (see Figure 25). This "tripwire" didn't look dangerous, but if someone stumbled over it late at night, the commotion would be enough to alert him.¹²⁹

The living spaces on the inside of the Occupation were intimate spaces of care, which, as Anderson (2006) suggests, "are enacted from shared attunements of parents and children," (p. between, for example, what is animate and inanimate (p. 735). One of the larger, centrally placed yards provided a gathering space for women, particularly those with young children to spend time chatting while the children played. It was also the yard where single mother, M and her young family lived. In the early months of 2021 M used a blank to stop her youngest child crawling out of her home into the yard. The smiling baby, passed from lap to lap, hardly ever touches the ground. She is often with the older kids, on a hip or a back. When she is hungry or tired she returns to M. The cadence of days here follows the cadence of her rhythms, her smiles, tears and tears¹³⁰. The space adapted around her as she grew. A few months later (in June) the child, then a lively toddler, was just over a year old and starting to walk. Increasingly firm on her legs, she appeared in total control of the yard around her and was vocally engaging with the adults and children around her.¹³¹ To stop the child making an unpredictable dash in the direction of the road, M had fashioned a new entrance way to the pavement using an old pole across the top of the flap in the netting. Shown in Figure 25, this makeshift arrangement allowed the netting to be drawn closed and pegged shut when

¹²⁹ Fieldnotes, 10 April 2021.

¹³⁰ Fieldnotes, 26 March 2021.

¹³¹ Fieldnotes, 26 June 2021.

there was a chance the toddler could get out, but it could also remain open as an invitation to other women to join them. Moreover, this gate-flap could be better and more easily monitored as a single exit and entry point than before when people had simply lifted the entire netting barrier to get in and out.



Figure 25 The entry into this yard can be closed with a fixture made from a salvaged tent pole, (source: Author, June 2021).

The intimate space described above is one of attunement between adults and children based on care; thus, the affective atmosphere adapts around the bodily changes of children, extending also to material adaptations of space which are a part of this acute atonement and the holding of this space against the risks of the outside.

5.2.1 *Permeability*

M's home was window-less. Its only opening was a doorway, closed by unfurling a roll of cardboard tucked to one side when the door needed to remain open. Light entered through the doorway and filtered in through chinks and gaps between the top of the walls and the ceiling. The cardboard doorway could not do much against the rain. However, M explained that at night it muffled the light and noise that came from street so that the household could sleep¹³². It did not block out this noise too completely. For instance, if someone came calling or knocking in an emergency, those inside could hear just as that outside could hear them.

As a makeshift safety measure to mitigate these risks, the cardboard roll proved its efficiency one night in April 2021, when her toddler knocked over a candle while the rest of the occupants were asleep. As the flames licked up the chipboard walls, a teenaged boy awoke. His cries alerted those outside and neighbours came running, extinguishing the flames before the fire could spread.¹³³ This example illustrates a point made by Simone who notes that "opening and closing is always a risk" (2019, p.19).

¹³² Fieldnotes, 26 March 2021.

¹³³ Fieldnotes, 27 April 2021.



Figure 26 A rolled up doorway to the right of the entrance to this home could be pulled shut when needed (source: Author, April 2021)

On the outside of the home (shown in Figure 27) corrugated steel sheets had been nailed across the bottom section of a large wooden door - the single opening to the home. Only the top part of the door, composed of glass panes, let in the light. When I exclaimed it was a pity to hide such a pretty door frame, the home's occupant explained the corrugated iron sheets were necessary to ensure that nobody looking in could ascertain with ease whether there was someone home or not. This was essential since members of this household were away at work or school during the day.¹³⁴ On the other hand, they used a padlock to secure their door, a measure she felt was necessary. Still, it made her anxious since this lock made it obvious that they were out. "When it is on, you can see nobody is there."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Fieldnotes, 10 April 2021.

¹³⁵ Fieldnotes, 17 April 2021.



Figure 27 A metal sheet nailed across this glass-paned doorway prevented anyone from looking inside (source: Author, April 2021)

5.2.2 Conversations that stretch

Conversations within the Occupation could enliven space, contain disparate energies, ward off the worst effects of boredom. It was one of the particularities of the material space that voices could pass through the porous materials which constituted peoples' living spaces, such as fabric, cardboard and plastic. For example, M recalled how she and her neighbour living in a tent just a metre away from her own self-built hoki made from chipboard and plastic, kept their conversation going at any time of the day or night. M (whom her friend, Nika affectionately called, "Mummy" recalled her conversations in the early hours of the morning,

She doesn't get tired of talking you know, one o' clock in the morning she would call me, "Mummy!"

It's the night-time, I'm here. 'What is it?'

'Hey, I remembered something.' She tells you something.

I said, 'Nika, I'm old I must sleep.'¹³⁶

Affect is sometimes described as the "energetic outcome of encounters between bodies in particular places" (Conradson & Latham, 2007) while Deleuze (2005) suggests that the effects of bodies affecting other bodies occurs in ways which are particular to those spaces. What was unique to this space and time, was how conversation between these two friends was not broken by the usual boundaries of night-time or bedtime. It kept going, filling the space between their bodies, traveling through the flimsy materials that separated them so that they remained connected. The fact that Nika had been murdered a few months before M related this story to me, heightened the affective intensity of this memory layered into the affective atmosphere of this place.

I turn to an exploration of particular affective atmospheres particularly through spaces which broke the linear division between inside and outside.

5.3 *Spaces of encounter*

Referring to Spinoza's frequently quoted definition, Anderson (2006) argues that "'Being affected – affecting' emerge from a processual logic of transitions that take place during spatially and temporally distributed encounters" (p. 735). In this section I pay attention to specific spaces in which encounters between the "inside" and "outside" of the Occupation took place, namely the bookstand (a space of constant vigilance from the inside – out) and a garden that one of the residents maintained between his tent and the pavement (a space of relative permeability and openness to encounters).

¹³⁶ Personal Interview, 6 April 2021.

5.3.1 Watching from the inside: the role of the bookseller

Over time, as the Occupation densified, open spaces were being filled quickly for residents to build their homes. There were ever more limited yard spaces large enough children to play in.

Maintaining the safety and sanctity of the children was a constant effort of attention that involved everyone, not only the parents of these children. The adults preferred the roughly dozen kids¹³⁷, who ranged in age from a toddler to teenagers, to stay together and remain in sight, but sometimes gave them permission to visit a public park nearby if they went in a group. There was strength in numbers and in remaining visible to others in the Occupation. However, while being outside on the street could be dangerous because anything could happen at any time, equally, being shut up inside the Occupation where you could not be visible to protective eyes was dangerous too. One mother confided in me that the children, especially the young girls, were not allowed to go inside alone and close the door in case someone from the outside could get inside and harm them there.¹³⁸ Mostly, therefore, children's' play spaces were close to home where they could be monitored. Spontaneously, play could occur anywhere along this strip of pavement, including a bus- shelter which they used for games of hide-and-seek, or where they hunched down together under the shelter's roof to draw on loose pieces of cardboard.¹³⁹

The bookseller's almost constant presence at his stand allowed him to play multiple

¹³⁷ An approximation as the numbers of children living in the Occupation was not constant. Several children spent holiday or only weekends there while a few lived there permanently and went to school in the area.

¹³⁸ Fieldnotes, 21 April 2021.

¹³⁹ Fieldnotes 28 April 2021

roles. Not only was the book display stand an informal business that sustained his life in the Occupation, but, through this space, he was part of the collective work of maintaining it by securing its inside. This role can be viewed, as Simone (2004, 2015) suggests, as “infrastructural,” especially in the maintenance of inside and outside of the Occupation which, as I argue in this thesis, was one of the principal tasks that enabled their persistent protest. The bookseller maintained a constant presence on his chair on the pavement where he acted as a sentinel between the inside and the outside. He remained watchful, playing the “monitor” role referred to by a mother above, attentive to whatever street might bring next – danger, help, or something random. For instance, when a traffic accident occurred or police pulled a taxi over to issue a fine, he was the first to know, almost before you could become aware something had occurred.

Children of the Occupation enjoyed acting the bookseller’s assistants selling book titles.¹¹⁹ This helped to keep them occupied and, in a place, where the adults knew where they were without having to keep their eyes on them all the time. One of the mothers explained the role that the bookseller, played as follows: “There’s always someone that is sitting outside, which is monitoring them because for them to be on the streets, I think they need to be monitored”. She pointed out that the bookseller enjoyed doing so and had offered to keep an eye on the kids when he was sitting outside. However, she added, “We don’t rely on it.”¹⁴⁰

The bookstand was a landmark. It stood out. People who had passed by the Occupation remembered this feature and would often mention it to me once they found out about my research. The bookseller was a 4th Dan Kung Foo master. He often wore an aviator jumpsuit and colourful bandana – an outfit he referred to as his “flying gear.” He sat on a wooden seat he fashioned painstakingly from reclaimed wood using reclaimed nails.

¹⁴⁰ Personal interview with P, 13 May 2021.

The process of its construction took time, as he explained but he had time to spare. His trust and generosity pervaded this place, as much of an “affective” landmark as his actual stand represented on the pavement. His presence was part of its “spirit and transformed the quotidian atmosphere of the street.

The bookstand (shown in Figure 28) was a carefully curated space. From science fiction and fantasy novels, literary classics to textbooks, he carefully selected the titles he chose to appeal to students from the nearby residences, or for medics, nurses, and ambulance drivers who worked at the hospital. I watched as a young woman medic in a white coat stopped to chat, the two smiling and bending low while they talk, relishing the quiet exchange of pleasantries in a routine of quiet observances.¹⁴¹ To potential customers who stopped at his stand, he offered more than books. People told him their problems and he listened he told me, his soft voice barely audible above the noise of the traffic alongside us. He referred to himself as a “life coach” and “motivational speaker” wo was he insisted, “here for a purpose.”



Figure 28 The bookstand which sold books and music CD disks which would appeal to customers were students from nearby residences or health workers from the nearby hospital (source: Author, October 2021)

5.3.2 *Pavement garden: an opening to encounters*

Unlike most other living spaces of the Occupation which were shrouded from view behind high shade cloth, K's yard had a low barrier that ran along the front of this yard. The effect was to create a "picket fence" type arrangement which and allowed a more permeable opening between exterior and interior spaces than was to be found elsewhere in the Occupation. This made it easy to strike up conversations from the outside with K where he sat on his sofa two metres back from the low 'picket' fence.' When I asked why he had crafted a space so distinctly open in comparison to the adjacent yards which were shrouded from view, K replied,

...a lot of people come through, they have chats, and it's always good to talk to people. I grew up in a village, where it's very important that the next person is very important.¹⁴²

In the above quote K suggests some of the forms of social capital that were available to him and from which he could draw while living here, now. The importance of the next person is rooted in an upbringing that saw him shuttle the city and the village in the rural Eastern Cape he refers to above. This quote also gives some clues as to how his senses of belonging were being dynamically constructed through this occupation (Youkhana, 2014)

In emphasising that his openness, is a choice that allows him to continue a social practice that engages with the the next person, somewhat at odds with most of his

¹⁴² Personal interview with K, 1 April 2021.

neighbours in the Occupation, K is also referring to past associations with this practice. Pieterse (2011) suggests are “senses of belonging” which ordinary citizens may decide to “display, mobilise, invest in and invariably ambiguate when the need arises” (p.18). In this case, the sense of belonging he mobilises and invests in is “the village” of his childhood.



Figure 29 The yard-space, including tent and garden seen from the pavement outside (source: Author, April 2021)

Sitting inside this cavernous outside space that was filled with plants in containers and covered with a semi-opaque greenhouse material, I was both inside and outside. People could stop and speak to K from the street through the opening just above the picket fence, but they could not lean into the space as Figure 30 shows. People constantly drifted by on the street and greeted him, and then came around to sit and chat, or ask for something. “Do you know everyone?” I asked one day. “More like everyone knows me,” he replied.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Fieldnotes, 16 March 2021.

Inside this space, a semi-opaque greenhouse plastic sheet stretched across part of the yard forming a canopy overhead. Underneath plants grew out of various containers and pots. It was also a space of non-human visitations, including a praying mantis which visited his spinach plants and stayed a week.¹⁴⁴ The feeling of being there, inside was at once a feeling of partial openness to the street, but also of being inside a lush, cavernous space, protected from the rush of outside. The inside was not just a space for growing plants, but also for conversation where ideas, stories and philosophy thrived.



Figure 30 The view from inside K's yard (Source: Author, April 2021)

5.4 Residues and ruins

Although the Occupation was just over a year old by the time, I began my research, there were layers of residues, of past practices and projects now defunct for whatever reason and of people who were no longer there. These were testimony to the passage

¹⁴⁴ Fieldnotes, 17 November 2021.

of time and the transformations that had already occurred. A tattered sign read, "Washing hands regularly" while another said, "No more forced removals", testimony to different moments in the life of this protest, marked by its involvement in city-wide anti-eviction battles and a politics that insisted on a right and ability to quarantine at home in case of Covid-19 infection (as explored in the previous chapter).

An empty space, referred to by Occupation residents as, "Sis Nika's" space, was where the tent belonging to an activist who had been murdered (in another location) allegedly by her boyfriend had stood for a time, then was taken down leaving an empty space for a time (representing a "void"). I draw from my field notes spending time in these spaces, I combine observations and residents' own descriptions. I will refer to specific spaces such as the "rat hole", "bookstand" some of which appear on a sketch map made in March 2021 (shown in Figure 31).

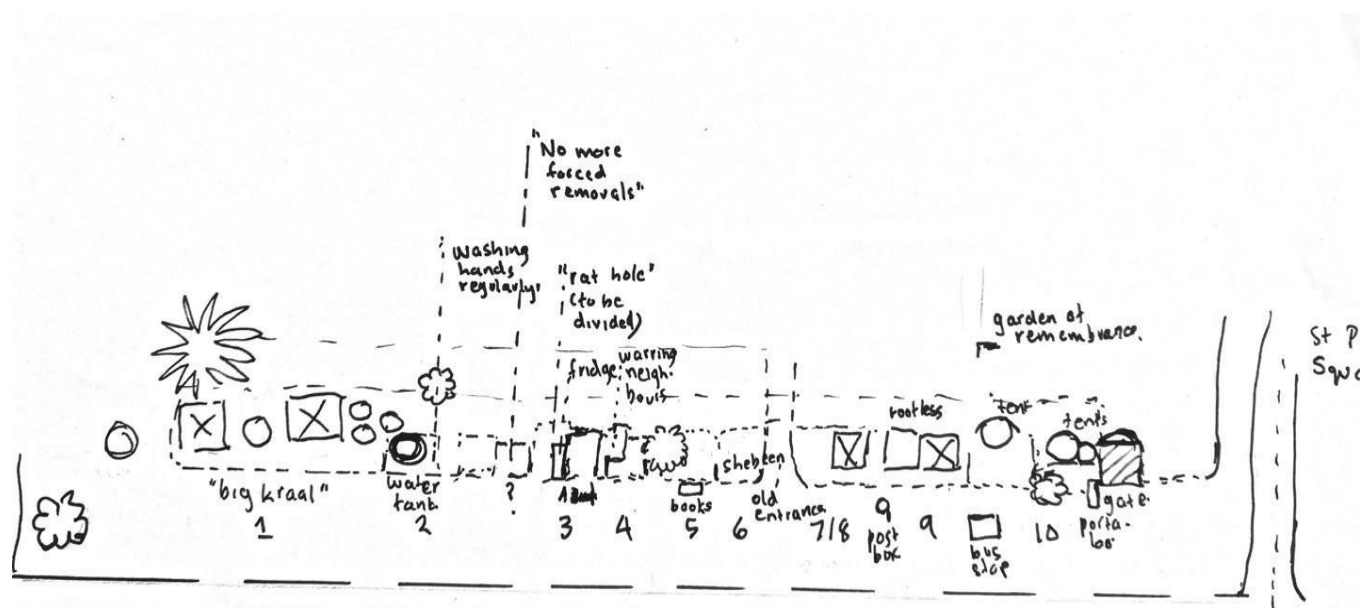


Figure 31 early sketch map of the Occupation (source: Author, March 2021)

5.4.1 *The ruins of Jamaica*

Located behind the “rat hole” which included a discarded chicken coop (shown in Figure 31) was the site of the defunct, “Jamaica” camp. The presence of its ruins - a gazebo frame and tent poles – had affective charge, contributing to the depth of the ongoing experience of occupation. I only became aware that these were a form of “melancholy reminders” (Thrift, 2007) when, one day, standing staring this space whilst attempting to make a sketch map of the Occupation. I became aware of the presence of a young boy who liked to follow me around and help me with my research. Seeing what he must have interpreted as my confusion, he offered, “I think it is an abandoned house that someone was living in.”¹⁴⁵ It took me a moment to realise that he was right and, taking another look, I could make out the metal rods and frames that had once been components of a large gazebo-style tent. These were the remnants and ruins of the “Jamaica” camp. The camp had not endured beyond the initial months of the Occupation. This was due largely, to the COVID-19 pandemic which meant that Occupation residents shifted away from communal modes of living in larger tents (such as “Jamaica”) into individual dwellings and partitioned spaces¹⁴⁶. Jamaica’s “dragons” disbanded during this period in mid- 2020 and particular affective atmosphere of this camp, characterised by the male “camaraderie” that K described came to an end in that form. I return to Massumi’s (2015) point, that if we recognise the full depth of experience, this includes what people bring to their capacities to affect or be affected, and this includes memories. In this case, memories are attached to the affective residue of space, representing one of the possible directions the camp may have gone in were it not for the pandemic. Jamaica represents a collective site and a site of collective memories, albeit one that included only men.

¹⁴⁵ Fieldnotes 28 April 2021.

¹⁴⁶ A leader of *Singabalapha* explained how the pandemic had shaped their organisation of the space, saying that Covid meant limiting numbers in spaces and social distancing.(Fieldnotes, 26 March 2021)

In summation, this chapter shows some of the tensions and paradoxes residents lived with around the maintenance of visibility against constant bodily vulnerability. On one hand, as respondents indicated in Chapter 3, they had joined this occupation as a way of being visible to the state so that their housing needs and right to basic services could no longer be ignored because they were living as “backyarders” inside family homes. Going from “inside” to “outside” meant they had to maintain what Butler (2011) calls a “space of appearance. Yet, enduring here meant maintaining and strategizing around the terms of visibility and the protection of vulnerable bodies. Netting, tents, chipboard, plastic, and even corrugated iron materials used for barriers and homes could not protect them entirely from their constant exposure to the flows of the street, such as the risk of a vehicle losing control in the road. Some individual residents thought differently about the degree of permeability and flow between “outside” and “inside” than others. For example, a garden belonging to one of the residents, broke the linearity of the exterior because it was not shrouded behind a high netting barrier, allowing for greater permeability between inside and outside.

As several respondents quoted in Chapter 3 indicated, the next generation, i.e their children were at the centre of this occupation and what it hoped to achieve. However, children were also in a bodily, affective sense, what this occupation had to hold and protect. The collective anxiety and awareness over the children, what they were doing and where they were was part of the work of enduring here. This related to the function of this occupation as a space capable of “holding” lives (Simone, 2019). This was a desire to keep them off the street (in the sense of maintaining their innocence, safety and not allowing them to beg), while living on the street. Seated at a pavement bookstore, one of the spaces of encounter considered in this chapter, the bookseller played a vital “infrastructural” role as monitor of the street and over the children and the street. Furthermore, Occupation residents thought carefully around visibility in terms of the

security risk that openings in the Occupation represented. They strategized around the location of gateways, doors and windows open to their yards and to the street and kept them to a minimum. Having concluded my empirical findings, I turn now to analyse and discuss these in relation to the relevant critical literature on abandonment, occupation and affect.

Chapter 6: Resisting, holding, enduring, and turning a pavement into a place

"You can't evict an idea whose time has come" (Occupy Wall Street slogan, 2011)

Residents of the occupation were the heart of this thesis engage in long-term resistance that requires them to hold out bodily in a state of constant endurance and against indeterminate time horizons. The tensions and paradoxes they negotiate in their daily struggle to continue to persist forms the focus of this chapter.

Living in conditions of constant and proximate flow along a busy street, residents' bodily capacities included split-second intuition between what might be helpful. Over time, residents' affective capacities ebbed and flowed too, sometimes bottoming up and leading to detachment. People's coping mechanisms were particular to this context and integral to their changing requirements of an embodied activism.

Drawing from literature which suggests how occupation can represent a "bridge" across temporalities, I argue that through occupation, the meaning attached to the family homes many had left behind to join, was altered through the experience of enduring in in these precarious circumstances as they constructed shelters which were their homes in this occupation, they could call their own, holding out for a more permanent housing solution within the central city. Furthermore, joining the occupation meant going from

"inside" and therefore invisible to the state, to "outside" on the pavement, where their rights could no longer be ignored.

Children were at the core of the politics of occupation and its temporalities of placemaking. This includes what children represented in terms of its claims and legacy and what its residents hoped to be able to leave behind as a result, but also the constant anxiety and attention of adults to ensure the physical protection of children.

I suggest that while site or the original occupation was an abandoned old age home, by embarking upon and sticking it out in a different form of occupation - of an interstice of city land, these residents retained a relation to abandonment. In reference to the literature on abandonment in Southern contexts, I argue that abandonment is not attached to a fixed locality in this site but is at once multiple and fluid in its effects. Moreover, it is present in multiple, temporal layers at the site and immediate vicinity. In occupying the interstice between pavement and the barricaded vacant plot where the old age home had stood, this occupation shows how marginalized people produce places through using them. Borrowing and adapting concepts from both Doron (2000) and Povinelli (2011) I suggest that residents enlivened this space producing a 'pavement otherwise'.

Finally, the occupiers were engaged in a politics of the everyday, forged through contestations at this site with powerful forces, including the state, the city and would be private developers. Some emerging threads of this unfolding micro-politics turn around the insistence upon themselves as home(ed), homemaking and coming from "warm homes" as a means of resisting a biopolitics which attempted to police and erase them by labelling them as "homeless".

This chapter's structure echoes the architecture of the Occupation, as a way of

theorising it. It moves from the inside to the outside. I consider the interplay between past and present, "outside", and "inside. Next, I turn to what the inside holds. The last two sections focus on the turning of a place into a place and the politics emerging in the process. First, however, I consider the up-too-close experiences of enduring along a busy street with its constant, unpredictable flow of people, vehicles, and sensoria of every kind.

6.1 Intuiting, detaching, adapting: Everyday forms of endurance

Conceptualising this occupation as a form of endurance of the everyday, I suggest that the constant exposure to conditions of being entangled in, up too close to the street and its unpredictable flows had multiple effects. Occupation residents described, for instance, their fear of being physically "bumped" by passers-by or, in the worst nightmares, that a car would lose control and smash into a makeshift shelter or cardboard and plastic. Barriers made from flimsy; porous materials could do little to protect bodies amid the proximate flow. In considering these conditions from the perspective of entanglement between bodies and environment, Roberts (2017) suggests that "toxic boundaries" such as exhaust fumes from highways which literally get "entangled" in people's bodies, is, in some cases, the price people pay to maintain their stability as these conditions of toxic entanglement form barriers which protect them from harassment by agents of the state for example. While the toxic conditions the occupiers in this case study live under do not form a barrier in themselves against the state, in an important sense, enduring in this state of entanglement is the price they pay to hold out for a better life. Thus, living in a state of entanglement is an integral aspect of the daily practice of showing up.

To take an even close look at what this entanglement implies: bodily capacities amid this constantly unpredictable flow involved intuiting, in a split second, for example,

between a gift and garbage being dumped on the street. Drawing from Massumi's (2015) suggestion that the ability of the body to affect and be affected is far from constant but goes up and down depending on what it is exposed to, including bottoming out (p.17). Bodily persistence here meant a constant exposure to insecurity and noise and sleep deprivation settled on individuals in layers, sometimes leading to bottoming out, or a temporary detachment.

Barriers are used to mediate both the terms of visibility: preventing unwanted gazes entering from outside, but also muffling the sensoria of the outside for the benefit of those inside, within the limits of the possible. This shielding, even by flimsy, opaque garden netting, creates a filter so that passers-by can cross one's line of vision like "ghosts" literally filtered out. Even this flimsy, opaque net created an affective atmosphere of being alone even while the outside world rushed by, or bodies from the outside impinged on bodies on the inside with malevolent intent or just bumping into them. In this context of acute entanglement shaped by conditions of extreme social inequality this netting functioned as a "boundary (Roberts, 2017; Simone, 2018)).

However, as both Roberts (2017) note in environments of entanglement, both opening and closing always involve risk. Similarly, Simone (2018, p. 19) suggests, "...too many firm enclosures atrophy the competencies of residents. Suture and detachment must be taken, but there are no clear, equal measures". The material practices of Occupation residents provide examples of the mitigation of the risk of both opening and closing to which Roberts and Simone refer. In an environment where the pros and cons of any opening between a home and the outside (even if into a yard-space) had to be carefully considered in terms of the security risk it represented. These risks include the possibility of that a criminal could establish who or what is inside, or if the occupants are out. Against this must be balanced against the risk of children being shut inside a home with a potential abuser alone and invisible to other members of the Occupation. In an

example which illustrates Simone's idea that there are no clear or equal measures to be taken in terms of opening or closure, residents of an otherwise windowless home rolled cardboard across the single entrance at night. This permeable material, muffled sound and blocked out passing lights at night. While providing no hard barrier capable of deterring a would-be criminal, the barrier would neighbours to enter and assist in case of emergency, when a cry from inside could alert them.

6.2 Going from "inside" to "outside (occupation)": complexifying the "space of appearance"

The occupation represents, for its residents, a 'bridge' across temporalities. Individual memories, attachments to places, practices and ideas about the past which respondents shared, these can be understood in relation to what Blunt and Dowling (2006) call "geographies of home" spanning memory about the past, everyday life in the present and dreams and fears about the future. Occupations have also been framed in some of the critical literature as "autonomous geographies" (Vasudevan, 2015) which bring together different spaces and times and moreover, work across multiple scales (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). Similarly, Cirolia et al. (2021) referring to the retrofit-logics and practices which characterise the occupation of an old hospital in central Cape Town argue that residents engage in a process of 're-placing' which they argue do the following,

... these practices reflect a 're-placing' –the making of new places, infused with meaning, ambition, and desire. Through practices of re-placing, residents build bridges between their past (displacement), the present (experiences of collective precarity), and future (ambitions and desires). (2021, p.160)

Building on this idea, I argue that this occupation is where residents build bridges between their past (often marked by dispossession of parents and grandparents from

the central city) through the present conditions, (marked by experiences of extreme collective precarity which required them to build own shelters). Residents were not only building bridges between experiences of displacement from or conflict within family homes in the past. They made temporal connections which were, in some cases, embodied. One Occupation resident referred to Cape Town being where his umbilical-chord was buried, literally, rooted in the earth¹⁴⁷, while another traced circuits of belonging through a web of tribal lineages and family relationships which connected 'here' to elsewhere (such as a village in the Eastern Cape) in a non-linear fashion. In some instances, the occupation represents a bridge between complex experiences of dispossession and near-renewal which signals the emergent, always out of reach possibilities of the present and the future. Individual projects were not incidental to the collective project. Like the "affective regenerations" described by Wilhelm-Solomon in Johannesburg's "dark buildings" (2020, p.31), individuals sought to shape their personal and social renewal in response to larger city processes. When considered in its full dimensions, affect represents "a co-presence of potentials" suggests Massumi (2015, p.18). This is a generative way to look at how seemingly disparate threads which emerged in individual narratives of the past in this case study related to experiences of dispossession and loss. One Occupation resident spoke of past dispossessions which marked a family lineage back far into the colonial past and encompassed a broad sweep of clan connections, and quasi-magical practices. All these seemingly disparate threads, and ideas, broken aspirations and almost-redemptive chances formed a co-presence of potentials which were present for him as he attempted, he said to "find his way in the city" through participating and living in the Occupation.

In several cases, residents rework their connection to the family homes they had left

¹⁴⁷ It is a Xhosa tradition to bury the umbilical cord at the place of birth. Now in modern parlance, this phrase is used to indicate what a Xhosa person considers as their real or original home place, the place of birth, wherever they may subsequently have settled.

behind to join, through their experiences of the present. Some had given up a roof over their heads in brick-and-mortar family homes, which belonged to their parents, opting to stick it out along the pavement in conditions of collective precarity explaining they wanted a space of their own. They made this commitment for an indeterminate period in conditions of physical hardship and exposure. However, crucially, many Occupation residents still relied on the families and the homes they had left on the peripheries for material and emotional support. It was not uncommon for residents to transport water long distances back to the Occupation after a weekend visit for instance.

Although the contexts she refers (protest which are broadly alter-globalization in nature) are substantively different to my case study Butler's (2011; 2015) reflections on the inter-relation between collective action, the embodied nature of protesting and the material supports it requires has resonance for some of the questions that are at its heart, including the tensions and paradoxes inherent in such an exposed environment of long-term protest and its visibility. Butler's argues, that through a collective action that is embodied, residents lean into and draw from such supports, which enable their continued endurance, and indeed, become what the struggle is about. Through occupation the functions of these supports are thus reworked. I draw on this argument to suggest that in this case, the meaning attached to family homes was reworked and redefined through occupation and formed part of its enduring politics. From being associated with inter-sibling conflict and where they, as adults were forced to constantly return, if they lost their jobs for instance, (a cycle of precarity from which, ultimately, they felt there was no escape), these homes were instead redefined as sources of support which enabled endurance.

An objective of their persistent protest, several Occupation members said, was to render *visible* the state's failure to provide the occupation with basic sanitation and services such as toilets, water, and shelter as was their constitutional right as citizens.

Furthermore, according to one respondent, a middle-aged woman who had spent her adult life on the waiting list for state sponsored housing. Being on the outside is equated to informality. While “inside” and thus able to be ignored (effectively) invisible inside her family’s overcrowded home, she had been waiting to get to the top of the state’s housing list. This same respondent emphasised her frustration with this invisibility saying “enough” and that by joining the Occupation, she had decided to be “seen”. According to this logic, she was now visible, on the outside, living in a place that was her own, in a protest camp turned informal settlement, which, remained a visible site of protest, but one in which people and their bodies were exposed.

However, somewhat paradoxically, largely due to the sombre-coloured green high shade cloth along the outside, the occupation could appear from the outside as inconspicuous, almost as if it were hiding in plain sight. In unpacking this apparent paradox, I suggest that in their struggle to access basic amenities and endure in this place with dignity, residents created a “space of appearance” a term Butler (2015) borrowed from Arendt (2013). In the context of this occupation, it had to fulfil multiple, sometimes contradictory functions.

The principal architecture of the “space of appearance” was the high netting fence around much of the Occupation’s road-facing perimeter which its residents erected early on, and which they raised as time passed until it was as high or higher than eye-level. The self-built barrier enabled the bare conditions for privacy for those inside and the maintenance of intimate space. However, concerns over visibility pertained not only to this maintenance of the physical perimeter of the space, but also to residents’ quotidian strategies, routines and making do-practices to access material supports which, as Butler suggests, were not only part of the action of their protest but also what was being fought about. One of its crucial functions was to create the bare conditions that enabled their embodied persistence. However, Butler argues that bodies, persisting

together to make political claims in itself is an act of delegitimization,

...political claims are made by bodies as they appear and act, as they refuse and as they persist under conditions in which that fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimization of the state (Butler, 2011).

Everyday strategies were tempered with the occupation residents' attention to how their occupation appeared in the eyes of the surrounding community, with which they generally worked hard to maintain friendly relations, but also from within which came complaints to the police about their presence, for instance from watchful businesses close by.

6.3 *What the inside holds*

I return here to my argument in which I draw from Cirolia et al, (2021) in order to suggest that residents of this occupation engaged in building bridges between their past, their precarious conditions of the present and their future hopes and desires. While engaged in a persistent politics of the inside what residents held onto (and held each other to), was the expectation that they were creating not only a place, but also ensuring a legacy, a longer-term claim to what the Occupation achieved – for the next generation.

Children were at the core of both the politics of occupation and what it hoped to achieve (individual and collective) as well as the precarious practices of place-making in the present. The temporal horizons under which residents endured represented an extra source of anxiety in relation to the children adults carried. As a mother explained, it was one thing for her to live without knowing how long their occupation would endure, but she had to promise her children it would not be forever.

Yet, through constant effortful, anxious effort, residents created a material and

emotional space of holding: a holding of precious bodies and young consciousnesses. Adults were engaged in a constant effort to ensure the children who lived there were kept way from the real or imagined predations that might come from the street and its unpredictable flows. I posit that bookseller who sat out on the pavement most of the time played an “infrastructural” role to borrow a term from Simone (2004). One of these roles, other adults said, was to keep a watch over the children in order to ensure they did not wander into the street for example.

In this place-in-the making which was also their home in the precarious now; occupation members engaged in practices akin to what Vasudevan suggests prefigure the social order they seek to enact (2014, 2015). For instance, several children of the Occupation attended local schools, used the local library, and played in the nearby park. Yet, at home in the fast-densifying Occupation, space for their play was limited. In addition, as parents incrementally built homes, they also adapted their living spaces, particularly entrance ways, around growing physical capacities of their children. The proximity and unpredictability of street flow created anxieties around less tangible risks of exposure. One mother said moving to the Occupation meant she could shield her children from a cycle of violence she feared would affect them if they went on living on the peripheries, but, in her current circumstances, she was aware that their witnessing of their own relative under-privilege in relation to passers-by in this middle-class neighbourhood could be damaging too. While it fell outside the scope of this research, an unexplored question is what the children themselves felt about these experiences.

The Occupation as a space of holding for a heterogeneity of projects, ideas and imaginaries resonates in some respects with what Simone (2018, p.4) refers to as districts which “hold” the “somewheres” which he contends, improvised lives require. Within specific spaces, conversation created connection across flimsy divides or gave residents something to escape into. These spaces held them amid the sensory barrage

of the street. In some spaces, protected by a canopy of greenhouse plastic, plants sprouted from containers, while fantastical plans and philosophy brewed. Other other spaces resonated with grief, loss, and anger.

However, at the same time as holding this heterogeneity, it remained an active arena of collective protest where residents hold each other to specific regimens of anticipation over the long term. The mutually understood terms through which they persist was evident, for instance, in the list of members' names and places in the occupation, "held" in safekeeping by other members. This could also be described as a legacy, trace, and archive of this occupation; a way of maintaining its gains and the motion it has set into action. This is what would be passed on to their children even in the event of their deaths. In this precise specification, they broke with the logics of waiting that characterised the state's housing list where one's place was lost in the event of death.

6.4 *Producing a pavement (otherwise)*

The original or intended site of this occupation was an abandoned old age home. However, whether by choice or necessity, by embarking upon and sticking it out in a different form of occupation - of an interstice of city land, these residents remained in relation to abandonment. Drawing on Stoler (2013, 2016) I argue that abandonment is not attached to a fixed locality in this site but can be seen as a process; a historical force which included displacements and dispossession of the past including the removal of the bones of white settler descendants from the cemetery behind to make way for capitalist-driven development decades earlier, through to the destruction of the old age home as part of accelerated gentrification.

buildings of the kind that Tonkiss (2013) refers to. Rather, it began in an abandoned building which the occupiers approached as the type of "urban void" which the city

might benefit from being regenerated or retrofitted (Zara, 2016). However, once the Occupation began outside the barricaded perimeter of the vacant property, the locus of abandonment shifted, along with how it might be interpreted and, crucially, how it might be resisted.

In arguing that these occupiers produced a pavement as a place – or a “pavement otherwise”. In doing so, I build on both Doron’s (2000) idea that marginalised groups of people produce spaces through transgressing them and using them (include quote). I nuance the notion of transgression however, with the efforts of the occupiers to keep walkways clear and the bookseller himself was careful to keep trader’s licence up to date. These were some aspects of what Povinelli’ (2011) argues that practices that resist economies of abandonment, which include endurance are mechanisms through which marginalized social groups and abandoned people nurture social projects for living “otherwise”.

Thus, people who have been “abandoned” to marginalised spaces of this city (Selmeczi, 2010) have created spatial forms and practices which transform this part of the city. The pavement was at once public walkway *and* a bookstore. A little further down the block, the pavement was fringed by a garden where Belgian spinach sprouted. The occupation “enlivened” what otherwise represented emptiness, a hole in the urban fabric: For instance, one resident created what he termed a “vertical garden” by hanging pot plants from the railings of the barricaded perimeter around the now vacant site where the old age home had stood, guarded by private security. On the other hand, by occupying it, residents had also “deadened” other aspects of the pre-existing space. For instance, the grass died and turned to mud through human inhabitation in the occupation. In between these binaries of ‘life’ and ‘death’ were a heterogeneity of material and relational practices that extended and thickened possibilities of life in this occupation and in this city.

What began as an occupation of an abandoned building morphed into another type of occupation outside along the pavement, incorporating state-citizenship contestation into a contestation with the property owners and developers over the building and the land. By setting up their occupation along the building's perimeter, these occupiers maintained their claims on the now "empty" site where the building had stood before being demolished. Thus, the occupation held off any eventual plans by developers for the site, on hold, thus ensuring the empty property where the building had stood remained a gap, or void in the fabric of the neoliberal city. This resonates with Talocci (2011) suggestion that urban voids are never static, but rhizomatic in their effects and movements, always subject to forces of entropy. If, as Talocci's semiotic reading of how urban voids operate in Istanbul's landscape, where splintered urbanism operates, similarly in some senses to Cape Town is applied to this case, then it is possible to imagine that the "urban void" represented by the abandoned old age home and later Talocci's argument further in this case and ask, whether the urban void (represented first by the abandoned old age home, and later, after its demolition, a gap in the city fabric, had rhizomatic effects. In this reading, the void becomes an enduring 'island' of 'heterogeneity', and from which the residents of this occupation resisted abandonment

Furthermore, the Occupation's landscape was also littered with ruins and remnants of past practices and failed/abandoned projects. One example were the ruins of the 'Jamaica' camp, a large tent shared by men that had been abandoned in early 2020 during the "lockdown". Another was an abandoned chicken coop, part of a venture its owner had chosen not to pursue. These projects and practices resonate with some aspects of what Simone (2018) describes as "somewheres" which are "places capable of holding an intense heterogeneity of lives and ways of doing things" (ibid). Simone suggests that the continued existence of "somewheres" depends on improvisation. Improvisation in turn, depends on the space and capacity to fail.

While some projects failed, others persisted. One example from this case study is the food garden in a resident's yard. Tonkiss (2013) provides numerous examples of "makeshift" practices which are characterised by being regular, painstaking, and open to contingency (such as food gardens) take hold and thrive in "abandoned" spaces cities post the 2008 financial crisis. While the contexts Tonkiss considers – Northern cities – are different from my case study, the basic idea that practices ordinarily at odds with the logics of urban development in the neoliberal city are more likely to take root in a moment of "exception" resonates in this context of Cape Town, during a global pandemic. The rhythms of this pavement garden and the social practices its resident cultivated where there was always time to sit down with the next person, talk, and watch the plants grow.

The global pandemic, which interrupted "normalcy" in Cape Town and in cities across the world, occupations and have accelerated unexpected forms of urban transformation (Appadurai, 2020). However, because it pre-dated the onset of the pandemic and measures taken by the City and state to combat it, this occupation and its achievements cannot be summarised to the pandemic context. Similarly, while these activists were not alone in occupying an interstitial along a pavement, makeshift inhabitations, either in this city, this neighbourhood, or even along this same pavement, the fact that theirs was a organised action led by a social movement belied any attempt to summarise it to the increase in makeshift inhabitations, or what the state called unorganised "incursions" over this period of time. The occupation therefore defies easy categorisation. It allows for questioning "from here" which yield generative answers about what forms of bottom-up city making are available from here.

This occupation took place in a wider context where a proliferation of micro- incursions of a makeshift nature into the city, (including its central areas) was associated with

increased economic and social distress and the national government's moratorium on evictions in response to the pandemic. However, as this occupation (which began in late 2019) predated the pandemic by several months, it cannot be summarised to these wider processes alone. thus, predating the start of the pandemic by several months, it therefore cannot be said to have resulted directly from these social processes (although as I argue in this thesis, the pandemic context was intimately connected with its endurance and its emergent politics). Furthermore, far from singling out this occupation as different from other makeshift incursions into the city over this period as an example of a willed social movement, this case invites a questioning of the validity of these distinctions in the first place. As Bayat (1997) suggests it leads us to ask about how the politics of everyday life in makeshift camps elsewhere can engender social change, even if they appear "silent" and "free-form" forms of activism which characterises the politics of informal people (Bayat, 1997, p.55)

The occupied space was, in many senses, 'uninhabitable' (Simone, 2018) not because this middle-class neighbourhood was uninhabitable; on the contrary, indeed, several Occupation residents said they felt safer living there than in on the peripheries where they felt their families were trapped in a cycle of violence and feared extortion gangs. It was uninhabitable in the sense that it was a narrow, truncated space along a busy road that was not intended for human habitation. As one interviewee who feared his child would be struck by a car losing control in the road as he slept said, this was one reason they could not remain. Moreover, in this space they were subject to biopolitical neglect without access to toilets, water, or power. Their persistent protest contested and made visible this abandonment. In so doing they also challenged a state discourse that framed the occupations of (particularly public) housing and land as attempts to jump the housing queue and to "reserve" city spaces for certain people, at the expense of the majority by making visible and public that were being "reserved" (as in 'to keep or hold back') were their basic rights as citizens.

Once they were outside along the pavement, they became as one of its leaders put it, "the city's people". In so doing this also became too, a space of struggle over their rights as citizens to adequate shelter and basic services. However, in the process "abandonment" as fixed concept and as a locality, is displaced as these activists use their protest site to render visible state abandonment of people. Their occupation of the building (built during the apartheid era as part of a social welfare institution) exposed the "death of the social" which Selmeczi (2010, p.6) argues is evident in the collapse of semi-privatised welfare institutions under neoliberal city governance. By occupying the old age home, the activists had intended to revitalise it to expose the state's abandonment in the sense of its failure to use of dis-used and abandoned existing housing stock which an activist leader amounted to taking from the poor. Moreover, the occupiers viewed this building not as semi-privately owned, but as part of social welfare stock which had been paid for by the taxes not only of white people, but of the black working poor in the apartheid years.

6.4 *"Homed", not "homeless": a resistant politics from here*

Over a period of two-year history up to the time of writing, the residents of the occupation were engaged in a dynamic politics of resistance which was an everyday, bodily struggle. In so doing they resisted a biopolitics that was aimed at their erasure by, for example, refusing to be defined as 'homeless' and sent to a mass camp during the "lockdown." This resistance and contestation shaped the politics of this place which in turn shaped the biopolitics it resisted. There was a constantly unfolding affective politics. Change was its only constant.

In explaining what fighting for "this piece of (occupied) ground" meant for her, a leader of the housing movement said that it meant "freedom", "security" and "access to

amenities". Her statement refers to and encompasses not only the future desired what this group hoped to achieve as result of their occupation (freedom, security, and access to amenities close to the city centre), but what they were presently creating themselves as they endured. these activists had managed to carve out a tenuous window of tenure in this space through a successful court interdict they brought against the City, however, how long it would protect them was uncertain. Enduring here, they employed everyday strategies and practices of the everyday including accessing water, toilets, and battery recharges as best they could in the surrounding area and employed insurgent practices to build homes, against which the threat of the police and its order hovered constantly. The ideas contained in the activist leader's statement about "freedom, access and security" they were fighting for, is merely a stepping off point (one of many) into what might broadly be termed an "affective politics". Massumi, 2015, p.8) suggests, "Thinking the transversality of affect requires that we fundamentally rethink all of these categories in ways that include them in the event, together."

Taking forward this idea and thinking in terms of concepts and their constraints as Massumi (2015) suggests. Thus, for example, one might consider "freedom" and "constraint" together (Massumi, 2015), or in this case, "access", and "indignity". Melded into unfolding events, is the earlier imaginary proposed by the Singabalapha housing which at one stage worked at least partially in an invited space with the state, melds in this Occupation into unexpected and constantly unfolding practices in which other imaginaries converge, disrupt, and alter it. Into this politics are folded individual experiences of dispossession and loss and the attempt at regeneration (Wilhelm-Solomon, 2020) as suggested in Chapter 3 as well as the anger connected to the loss of one of their members who was murdered (allegedly at the hand of her lover) over the time of their occupation. This incident further altered the politics of the Occupation giving it a more vocal, feminist agenda (which I do not suggest was shared by all members). In this thesis, I do not encapsulate or summarise this politics, rather, in

considering politics through affect (Massumi, 2015) is not to cancel out the individual or collective political valence or charge but rather to complexify it and to amplify its senses.

At certain moments in the history of the occupation, its members had gone to great efforts to shroud their ongoing efforts to create homes for themselves behind the high exterior netting and black plastic covering. At other junctures, (once their legal status became more stable thanks to their court action against the city which resulted in an interdict preventing their eviction without due process), they felt more at ease about building more openly. However, they did not depend on a court to confer this status, they had already created an insurgent settlement, a set of informal dwellings in a part of the city historically resistant to this form of habitation.

As this case study shows, their tenure in the space was tenuous at best; always subject to a shift in the legal landscape as the moratorium on evictions during the emergency linked the pandemic could end and to the City's ongoing intent to control and criminalise their construction activities (as well as everyday practices such as cooking, washing etc) using its ever-tougher set of municipal by laws. These insurgent practices (Holston, 2009, 2021; Friedmann, 2002; Miraftab, 2009), relate, as Miraftab and Wills (2005) suggest to a "new drama of citizenship" arguing, that it is performed,

...not only in the high courts of justice and ministerial corridors of government institutions but also in the streets of the city, the squatter camps of hope and despair, and the everyday life spaces of those excluded from the state's citizenship project (p. 201).

Offering a different slant on where this drama takes place, Wilhelm-Solomon (2020) suggests that unlawful occupations challenge the meaning of home in post-apartheid SA, but also the contradictions between private property and socio-economic rights on a global scale. Although the case study he draws from - "dark" buildings which are high-

rise buildings in a post-industrial neighbourhood of Johannesburg mostly occupied by foreign nationals – is substantively different in many respects from this case study of an occupation of what is a city/public space, however the idea that occupations emerge “in the interstices of constitutional law, in a zone neither public nor private” (2020, p.405) is relevant here. The original site occupied in this case study – the old age home – is considered by the occupiers as part of a grey zone of public stock which, in the post-apartheid state has been privatised and therefore to be re-used and reappropriated by the people. Through occupation however, the occupiers make visible the failure of the privatisation model.

A second set of circumstances relevant to the politics emerging from this site relates to the state “exception” ushered in by the pandemic in the City of Cape Town. The Occupation residents’ resistance to the attempt to erase them, bodily, from the site by sending them to the camp an example of what Agamben termed “spaces of exception”, produced when the state invokes the law to suspend the law. It was clear to Occupation residents, who refused to go, that the intention was to kill them by sending them to a camp by the sea in the middle of winter. Here, the boundary is created between those politically qualified to have life, and those qualified to merely exist, thus wilfully exposed and abandoned to violence and death (Agamben 1998).

In response to this biopolitics of exclusion and abandonment, these activists insisted they could quarantine, if necessary, in their homes in the Occupation more effectively than they could in the overcrowded tents set up to provide emergency shelter for the “homeless”. In so doing, they made no distinction between whether these homes were tents or made from more durable materials such as corrugated iron – home was based less on its material composition, than what they could do with them and the rights they insisted upon in doing so. Thus, they insisted upon this occupation as a space of people who were home(d), and moreover, on their connections to elsewhere; specifically, what

one resident described as 'warm' homes they had left behind. Another way of looking at the City politics Occupation members resisted and the means through which they did so, is suggested by Povinelli (2011). The City's politics is a means to distinguish them as "surplus" (rather than functional to the order of value) and therefore able to be left to die. Crucially, Povinelli suggests that amongst practices which resist these "economies of abandonment" are "the persistence of living." Persistence and endurance are vital components too of resistance from this site. However, in the bodily struggle of persisting every day, I suggest, a vital aspect was the creation and maintenance of a holding space which I examine in this thesis through attention to visibility, "inside" and "outside".

Residents strategized and adapted their spaces around security concerns within the limits of what permeable materials and spaces allowed. Some insisted that this place was more secure than the cycles of violence and extortion that plagued their lives in townships on the peripheries. Meanwhile, "access to amenities" referred to, was provisionally, always precariously maintained through the shifting, always provisional relationships Occupation members managed to establish in the surrounding area. In exploring the fulcrum between relations, events and change which, as Massumi (2015) suggests is a process-oriented approach to affect as politics, this research has surfaced some vocabulary with which to begin talking about how the lives of those in this occupation were assembled. Among the 'travelling concepts' (Massumi, 2015) which can be applied here, are homemaking and connected to "warm homes" not "homeless".

Finally, as their politics emerged, rubbing up against, contesting these political uses to which the concept of 'homelessness' was put by the City, Occupation members did not reject other people experiencing homelessness as other. On the contrary, the occupation, had, on occasion, incorporated individuals who had been de-homed for whatever reason. I argue that this emerging politics must be seen in a wider context of

where new alliances between social groups including occupations by foreigners and by citizens which are part of city-wide social action which brought together, for instance, backyard-dwellers and people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

This occupation offers a space in which to reflect on urban alternatives, ones that are particular to this location, in other words, a critical urbanism from 'here'. This thesis has introduced people who live in, build homes in, and transform this place in myriad ways, many of them mundane. They are the planners, thinkers, dreamers, parents and children of this occupation all of whom are engaged in resisting what often seem intractable systems of power. The perspectives and possibilities offered by these occupiers has wider pertinence beyond this occupation. The vocabularies, ideas and politics emergent here are at once particular to these people and their circumstances, however, they are also pioneers or 'volunteers', feeling their way forward in the city and they are not alone in doing so. As this thesis showed, their occupation was crafted as much from wooden poles, tarpaulin, shade cloth and bamboo as through experimental modes of collective life and alternative knowledges within it.

Although small in scale – one block of a city with a population of close to 4 million, this occupation mattered and continues to matter. It mattered as month after month, exposed to noise, pollution, and the threat of eviction, its residents continued to endure. They persisted, persistently visibly showing up the state's neglect of their bodies but also resisting the capitalist appropriation of the urban "void" where the abandoned old age home had stood. As a site of resistance from which to imagine forward under what are often impossibly difficult conditions, it represents a site of urban transformation from the bottom up, but also from a very particular site where place-making is read and understood through the maintenance and construction of an affective politics, born

through an embodied struggle to remain in place. Although the global pandemic and its effects are not the immediate focus, this research suggests how, within a state of exception on both a local and global level, unexpected forms of place-making and forms of collective life and politics emerge. Key to understanding occupations, particularly in highly unequal cities of the Global South, is their affective politics, which extends more conventional readings of the occupations as contestation between citizens and state, and which invites more extensive and grounded research in other occupations.

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