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Son of Babelegi

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ABSTRACT

In this long-form journalism project I narrate the history of Babelegi Industrial Park and the socio-economic mayhem that its decline – which began after the 1994 political settlement that ended apartheid – has visited upon its surrounding communities, particularly the Temba Township within which it is officially located. Babelegi is a product of the apartheid government's industrial decentralisation drive that aimed to further its policy of separate development. It is one of the so-called growth points that aimed to create job opportunities for black South Africans away from places decreed white areas. This essay goes beyond the statistics, and the academic and policy debates, and tells the story of real people afflicted by the scourge of unemployment and poverty. It explores the evolution of Babelegi and its subsequent decay and looks at how government policy, or the lack thereof, has impacted on the resultant situation in the area. It focuses mainly on the socio-economic effects – including unemployment, poverty, crime and drug abuse – as well as the flight of business from the area. Further, the essay evaluates whether, how and to what extend the new industrialisation initiatives are assisting in revitalising Babelegi.