



# Community, Place and Transformation: a Perceptual Analysis of Residents' Responses to an Informal Settlement in Hout Bay, South Africa

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**Abstract:** Land invasions, where people move onto private or public land illegally in an attempt to gain access to resources within the urban sphere, result in the juxtaposition of contrasting urban landscapes and in alterations to place-making processes. This paper examines the changes to place, as perceived by the formal residents of the area, arising from the establishment and growth of an informal settlement in Hout Bay, a middle-to-upper-income coastal suburb of Cape Town, South Africa. The resettlement of over 2500 squatters in a site-and-service scheme in close proximity to established formal residential areas resulted in marked social conflict. This was perhaps inevitable given the sharply contrasting socio-spatial patterns that were created. In analysing the surrounding community's perceptions of the informal settlement, the influence of spatial proximity *vis-à-vis* other explanatory factors is the paper's central focus. The paper reveals that a number of different factors underlie the conflict: factors rooted in social structures and processes (both class and political); in the actions and interpretations of human agents; and in the nature of the locality. Most formal residents were negative about the development of the informal settlement, although for different reasons, depending on their socio-economic status. Shifting political relations in South Africa during the early 1990s played a key role in influencing both the planning of the informal settlement and residents' reactions to it. The paper concludes by suggesting some policy implications of the Hout Bay case study. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

**Key words:** post-apartheid cities, urban planning, informal settlements, land-use conflict, South African cities, community and class conflict, urban policy

## Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in the reconstruction of society in post-apartheid South Africa is overcoming the spatial legacy of apartheid. Entrenched in the very geography of the country, across a range of scales, are the racially-based divisions of residence, ownership

and welfare that were the material outcome of segregationist policy and legislation. Davies (1981) produced a model depicting the 'apartheid city', with its separate residential zones for different race groups; its intervening buffer strips or other physical barriers; its relegation of black housing (to use the distinctive South African racial terminology<sup>1</sup>) to the urban

periphery—all superimposed on a basically capitalist urban form. Blacks were not meant to be part of the urban system of 'white' South Africa, beyond providing labour and service; but were rather to have their place in the particular ethnic 'homeland' to which they were assigned in the Grand Apartheid scheme. Economic, social and ultimately political realities dictated otherwise. By the time the National Party government relaxed influx control and came up with its policy of 'orderly urbanisation' in the 1986 White Paper on Urbanisation (South Africa, 1986), rapid and less-than-orderly urbanisation of the country's black population was already well under way, much of it in sprawling, largely peri-urban shack settlements. These settlements today house some ten million people, or almost quarter of the country's population. Rural-urban migration, people moving out of overcrowded official 'township' housing, and natural population increase together drive this phenomenon, which has transformed South Africa's urban landscapes.

The transformation has been marked and rapid in the city of Cape Town, where additional legislation excluding most blacks (as opposed to coloureds) from residence and employment in the Western Cape region had long been in force. The State reluctantly made some provision for the city's growing black population with the establishment of the new township of Khayelitsha in 1983, but this was both woefully inadequate and had all the classic apartheid planning characteristics, being peripheral to the existing urban fabric and lacking many of the amenities and services associated with 'normal' urban life (Cook, 1992). In defiance of restrictions, and in response to the grossly inadequate state provision of housing, ordinary people became increasingly active in securing for themselves access to urban life and all it offered. In the words of geographer and urban planner Alan Mabin (1992, p. 20):

Struggling to survive and gain greater access to the accumulation of wealth represented by cities, African people all over South Africa, by individual and collective actions, began to remake the nature of urbanism in the country... Crossroads [a squatter settlement near Cape Town] survived, grew, and developed a defiant and uncontrolled culture which challenged the bases of an earlier urban regime.

In 1989, as a reaction to the huge increase in squatting, the government passed the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Amendment Act (South Africa, 1989) in a

last-ditch and wholly ineffectual attempt to exert State control. With the 1990 initiation of major political reform, the balance of power shifted even further out of the hands of a regime that had effectively acknowledged its own illegitimacy. During the drawn-out interregnum that followed, in the face of a combination of political volatility and sheer demographic imperative, the State was powerless to do anything but try and manage the increasingly spontaneous, even anarchic, processes shaping South Africa's urban places. In this highly fluid environment of social and political transformation, there arose the space (literally) to challenge the status quo and its manifestation in the built environment. Whereas most informal settlement took place adjacent to the established official townships, thus entrenching the apartheid spatial order, there emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s the phenomenon of land invasion in or adjacent to traditionally white, middle-class suburbs, creating precisely the juxtaposition of black and white, rich and poor, that apartheid planning had tried so assiduously to prevent.

A case study of a land invasion that occurred in the Cape Town suburb of Hout Bay is presented in this paper. It is concerned particularly with the response of the established residents of Hout Bay to the initial illegal land invasion and subsequent legal resettlement of squatters on a site-and-service scheme in their suburb. The paper first discusses the context and background of the conflict in Hout Bay, considering the nature of the communities living there, along with the history of the development of the informal settlement. After a brief description of the research methodology employed, the formal residents' perceptions are described and analysed. Finally, the paper considers the policy implications of the Hout Bay case study for housing South Africa's urban poor.

### Context of the study

Hout Bay is a spatially separate residential suburb of Cape Town offering a high quality environment. Its mountain scenery, rural atmosphere and beautiful bay make it an area of high aesthetic quality. Three very disparate communities presently reside within this locality. The largely white middle-to-upper-income residents, referred to as the 'ratepayers'<sup>2</sup> live in the valley and along the mountain slopes in homes that represent high socio-economic status (Plate 1). The harbour community consists of both lower-

income coloured residents, who reside in hostels and flats (Plate 2), and middle-income coloured and white residents, who are located higher up on the slopes of Hangberg in an area known as Hout Bay Heights. The third community, which has developed more recently, is the informal settlement of Mizamoyethu (Plate 3). This low-income site-and-service settlement houses black and coloured residents, most of whom formerly squatted illegally on land elsewhere in Hout Bay.

### **The development of Mizamoyethu**

Although not legally allowed to be in Hout Bay under apartheid legislation, a number of black people for many years had squatted 'inconspicuously' in the area, along sheltered river banks and in backyard shacks in the harbour community. These people were mainly employed in the fishing industry and their small settlements consisted essentially of extended families. Coloured people who had been displaced when farms were subdivided in the 1970s also squatted in the valleys. Hout Bay thus had a history of squatters who were largely accepted and accommodated by the formal residents of the area.

However, due to the changing political climate in South Africa with the decline of the apartheid state, new opportunities were afforded to the homeless, and land invasions of groups of squatters onto unoccupied State and private land began to occur. Government policy with regard to illegal squatting had been challenged and was thus unclear. The forced removal of squatters had become a highly sensitive issue with serious political implications for the State, and groups of people who managed to gain a foothold in an area were unlikely to be forcibly evicted. Local resettlement or the provision of site-and-service-schemes became the preferred official solution.

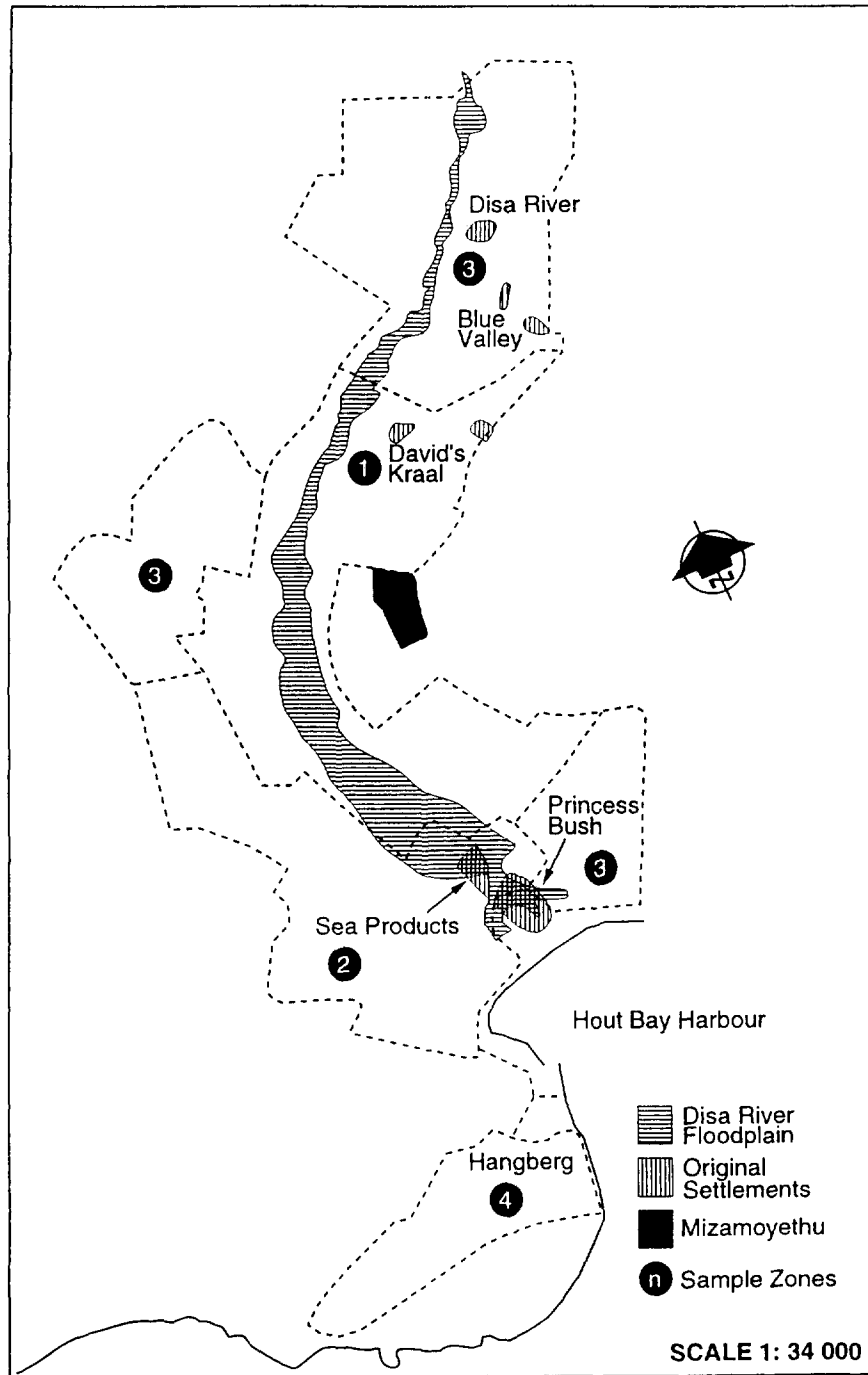
Hout Bay experienced land invasions during 1988 and 1989. Two squatter settlements, of considerable size, developed relatively quickly on both State and privately owned land along Princess Road (Figure 1). Princess Bush was the larger of the two settlements and was located in the dunes behind Hout Bay beach. The Sea Products settlement was located across the road on land alongside the Disa River. These communities comprised workers from the harbour area, who had moved out of crowded hostels, flats and backyard shacks in order to gain access to land to house their

families. People also moved to the settlements from the crowded and politically tense conditions of the Cape Flats townships, as well as from rural areas. Once the squatters had gained a foothold in the area, so all the settlements began to grow. Thus by 1990 there were approximately 2000 squatters living in five settlements around Hout Bay (Gawith and Sowman, 1992).

The development of these settlements had a dramatic effect on the nature of Hout Bay as a locality and a community. Formal residents expressed strong concern with regard to the squatter issue. They claimed that the settlements would affect health conditions in Hout Bay; that security had decreased dramatically; property prices were being negatively affected; pollution had increased; and the quality of life in the valley had diminished. As a community, the formal residents began to put pressure on the local authority, in this case the Cape Provincial Administration (CPA), to deal with the problem. At the same time the squatters had mobilised themselves. They exploited the shifting power relations in South Africa during a period of political and social transformation, pressurising the State to find land for them in Hout Bay. Conflict developed and the State was called in to mediate. By November 1990 the squatters had acquired legal rights to settle permanently on 18 ha of land within Hout Bay, much to the dismay of many of the formal residents. In April 1991 the five squatter communities were moved to the new site officially named Mizamoyethu but commonly known as Mandela Park (Figure 1).

### **Methodology**

There existed several possible routes to an understanding of the conflict surrounding the creation of Mizamoyethu. Other scholars have focused on the more material and planning aspects (e.g. Gawith and Sowman, 1992). It seemed to the present authors, however, that much of the conflict was driven by the ideological and perceptual premises of the established residents, who felt threatened by this 'backyard' manifestation of the socio-political transformation of South Africa as a whole. In order to gain insight into their perceptions, a formal questionnaire was administered to 275 members of the surrounding community. Questions were designed to elicit information on residents' perceptions of the planning process; the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the

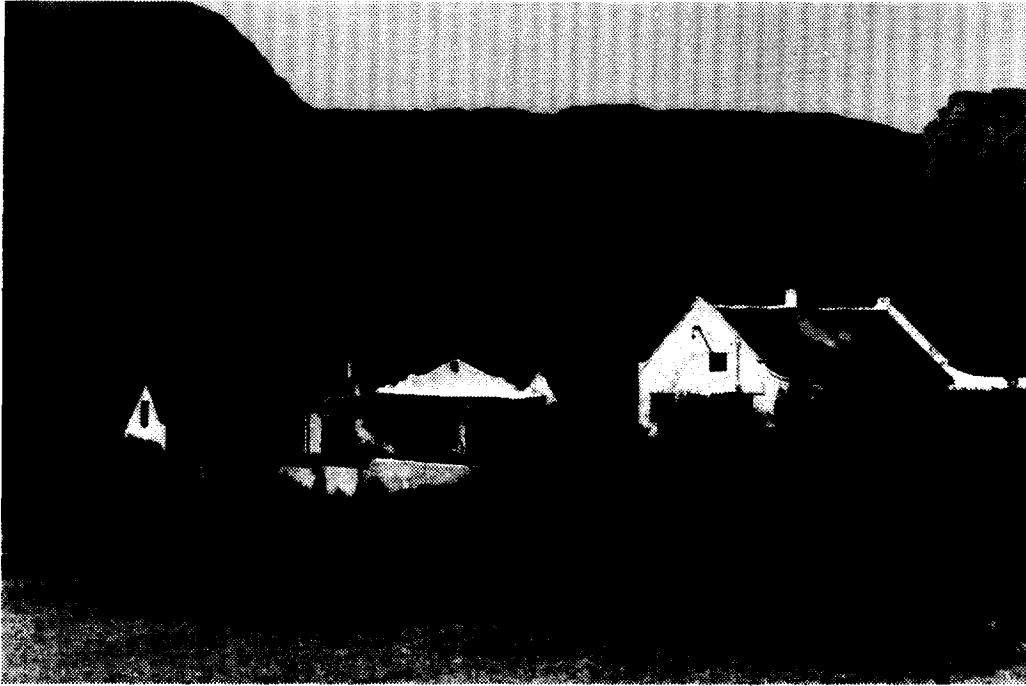


**Figure 1.** The informal settlements in Hout Bay.

settlement; and the prospects for integration of the various communities.

One of the main hypotheses examined was whether distance from the settlement affected residents' perceptions. It was appropriate to use a stratified random sample in order to group residents in such a way that the relationship between perceptions and distance

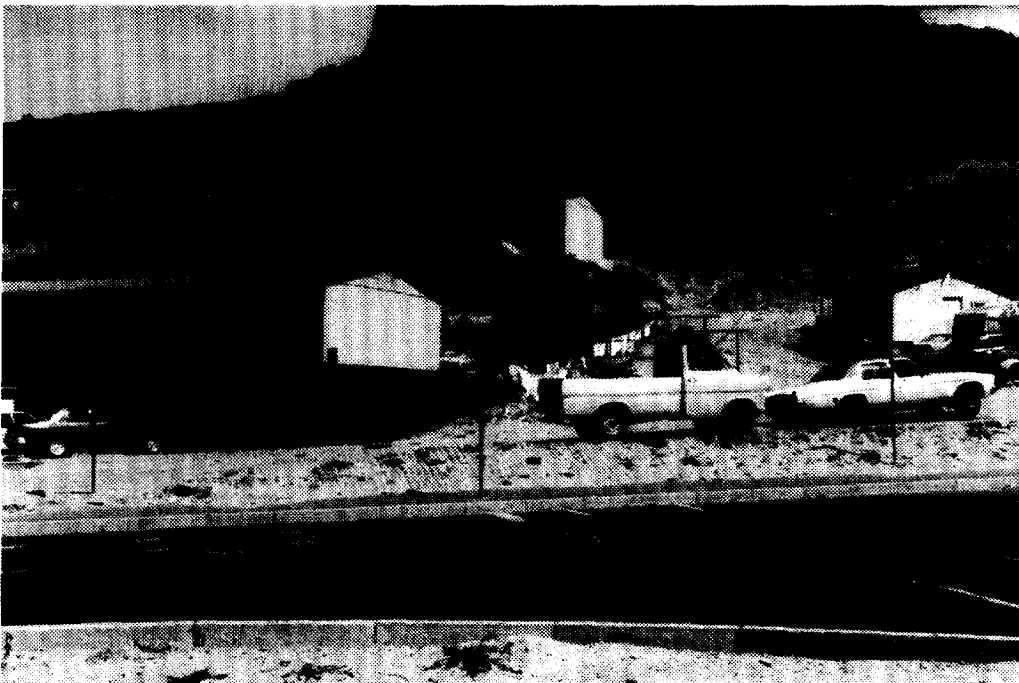
from the settlement became apparent. Three sub-groups were chosen on this basis (Figure 1). The first group, Zone 1, consisted of the three estates immediately adjacent to Mizamoyethu. These areas are commonly held to be the most affected by the informal settlement. The second group, Zone 2, was selected not only in terms of distance from Mizamoyethu, but also because it represented a group of residents that had



**Plate 1.** The residential area of the ratepayers.

lived close to the two largest original squatter settlements of Princess Bush and Sea Products. The third group was chosen as the peripheral group, as they were not spatially close to the settlement. It was postulated that if the perceptions of residents were dependent on 'real' impacts, then this latter group

would have the most positive perceptions. A fourth group was delineated both according to distance from the settlement and because it formed an important subgroup based on another set of criteria. This group encompassed the harbour community, which has a different socio-economic status to the broader formal



**Plate 2.** The residential area of the low-income harbour community.



**Plate 3.** The residential area of Mizamoyethu.

community, being predominantly coloured and thus suffering the legacy of apartheid planning. The four zones were demarcated and households within each were randomly sampled: 75 respondent households each from Zones 1 to 3 and 50 from Zone 4.

The survey was conducted from 20 October to 20 December 1992. Timing was an important factor, as perceptions would be affected by events occurring at the time of the interviews, but fortunately life in Hout Bay was relatively stable during this period. In addition to the formal survey, more qualitative, participant research approaches were also adopted through involvement with various committees and community-based organisations working in Hout Bay.

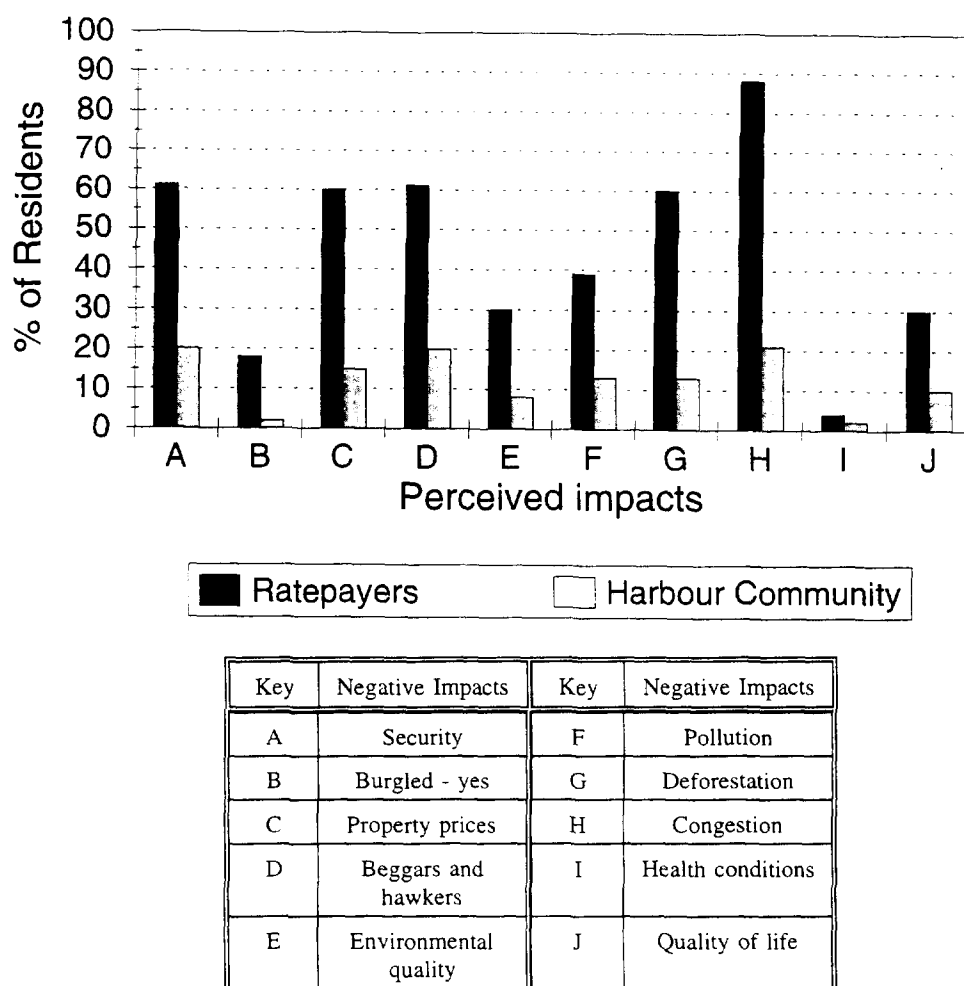
### **The land-use conflict in Hout Bay**

As Wolch and Dear (1989, p. 4) so cogently argue, our “objective in human geography is to understand the simultaneity of social, political and economic life in time and space”. The land-use conflict in Hout Bay displays all of these elements. The close spatial proximity of three such different communities within the same locality has resulted in the development of interesting and contrasting socio-spatial patterns.

A majority of both the (largely white) ratepayers and the (largely coloured) harbour community responded

negatively to the development of the informal settlement. However, this was for very different reasons, based primarily on the differing socio-economic and political positions of the two communities and thus the different interpretation and meaning that each attached to place. The ratepayers resented the development of Mizamoyethu largely because it represented a breaching of class barriers. They are a middle-to-upper-income group who have invested in the built environment in Hout Bay in order to secure a high quality of life, and for the social reproduction opportunities offered. The harbour community on the other hand are largely a lower-income group who have resided in Hout Bay for a considerable length of time, supplying labour to the fishing industry as well as providing artisan and other unskilled labour in the area. The ratepayers wanted to maintain the ‘upmarket’ socio-economic status of the neighbourhood, while the harbour community felt threatened because of the increased competition for scarce resources and jobs in an area of already high unemployment. Furthermore, the ratepayers are able to choose whether they want to share the local clinic and shopping areas with the informal settlers, being sufficiently mobile, both financially and physically, to seek these services elsewhere. This is not the case with many of the residents of the harbour community, who are dependent to a far greater extent on the provision of local public services and facilities.

## The Development of Mizamoyethu Perceived negative impacts



**Figure 2.** The response of ratepayers and the harbour community to the negative impact of the informal settlement on quality of life indicators.

Beyond these areas of direct competition, the harbour community showed less concern for many of the other issues identified in this research (Figure 2). Overall they felt that the development of Mizamoyethu had not significantly altered the nature of place or quality of life in Hout Bay. Existing problems within their own community, such as crime, unemployment, pollution, overcrowding and lack of services and facilities, were of greater concern than the impacts of the informal settlement on Hout Bay in general. The ratepayers, on the other hand, expressed strong concern with regard to an increase in crime in the area, and the subsequent devaluation of their property. Police statistics show that crime increased in Hout Bay when the squatters were living in the

original settlements, but then decreased again with the establishment of Mizamoyethu (Oelofse, 1995). Hout Bay has a relatively low crime rate in comparison to the rest of the country, but the incidence of intermittent 'crime waves' which continue to plague the area, remain of strong concern to the residents. Property prices have improved in areas further away from the settlement as the conflict over the development stabilised, but property values of houses closer to Mizamoyethu, which initially decreased in value by between 25% and 30%, remain depressed (Oelofse, 1995).

Responses to a question asking why informal settlers had moved to Hout Bay were telling. No less than 48%

of the white ratepayers believed that the squatters had come to Hout Bay as part of a political plot to move blacks into white areas in order to increase black voting numbers in white communities and cause general destabilisation. Such views were common amongst whites in the period between 1990, when South Africa's major political reform was initiated, and 1994, when the first democratic elections took place. The harbour community responded very differently, with 56% of this group suggesting that the informal settlers had come to Hout Bay not for any covert political motives, but simply in order to find work. Since most of the harbour community stated that they themselves lived in Hout Bay because they worked in the area, they were in a better position to understand the lack of choice of residential location for lower-income groups.

A number of factors combined to fuel the formal residents' negative perceptions of the settlement: a lack of information; their non-participation in the planning process; anger and resentment towards the changes taking place in the neighbourhood, over which they felt relatively powerless; and biased and partial media reporting on the situation. Resistance to change seems to be a contributing factor, as newer residents seemed less concerned about the development of the informal settlement than those who had lived in Hout Bay for a longer period of time, and who wanted to preserve the sense of place they had grown accustomed to. Respondents with the most positive perceptions were those who had had the greatest amount of contact with the informal settlers.

The most negative group of ratepayers were those who were in the middle stages of the life-cycle, middle-aged, male landowners who had lived in Hout Bay for six to ten years. They represent a group with the greatest social and economic interest vested in the neighbourhood, thus having the most to protect and defend. By locating themselves in Hout Bay, they had secured access to socio-economic privileges and the opportunity for upward social mobility, and they did not wish to see their position eroded. Within the harbour community, it was lower-income female residents who had lived in Hout Bay for over ten years who tended to be the most negative. This group was threatened by the presence of the informal community because of heightened competition for economic opportunities and State assistance. Harbour residents of many years felt that they had contributed to the economic development and func-

tioning of the area by working in the fishing industry, yet continued to suffer poor living conditions. They resented the informal settlers, seeing them as newcomers to Hout Bay who were receiving State support and funding while the harbour area was left with its deteriorating housing stock and dearth of public facilities.

The 'squatter' issue led to the formation of many action groups in Hout Bay. The squatters mobilised themselves, initially to secure rights to land in Hout Bay and subsequently to establish their position as legitimate, permanent residents. The ratepayers formed residents associations aimed at protecting their own interests and what they perceived as the special nature of Hout Bay as a locality, which to many meant the exclusion of squatters from the area (often expressed in terms of conserving the natural environment or 'maintaining standards'). The harbour community were relatively complacent in terms of their reaction, although they had been involved in the initial struggle of the landless people of Hout Bay, many of whom were then residing in backyard shacks in the harbour area. Their interest, which had been aimed as much at the upliftment of their own community, soon waned, and this politically and economically marginalised group retreated to the periphery of the debate.

For certain of the questions posed, such as the perceived need for buffer zones between the formal and informal community and the impact of the settlement on property values and security, respondents' proximity to the settlement was the most significant determinant of attitudes. This was not, however, to the extent that it could be stated that distance from the settlement was the only factor. Thus the 'real' impacts of the settlement are not solely responsible for the reactions of residents and are, in some instances, less significant than factors such as class position, sense of place, and changing power relations.

### **Understanding the conflict**

As Ley and Duncan (1993, p. 329) suggest, "landscapes and places are constructed by knowledgeable agents who find themselves inevitably caught up in a web of circumstances—economic, social, cultural and political". The interaction of these various components forms the basis of residents' responses. Broadly,



three sets of causal powers are important in explaining the respondents' perceptions: class conflict; political relations; and human agency and interpretation. While each of these comprises a distinct theoretical lens, it is only by combining them that an understanding of the conflict can be attained. These are now dealt with in turn.

#### *Class conflict*

Inter- and intra-class conflict underlies much of the concern expressed by the formal residents in relation to the development of Mizamoyethu. The ratepayers' responses suggest that their resentment toward Mizamoyethu is class-based rather than overtly racist. While racism associated with the apartheid era may influence the conflict, case studies on residential integration in Southern Africa indicate that differences of class and income are of greater significance (Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1990; Schlemmer and Stack, 1990; Cilliers, 1990). The ratepayers felt that it was inappropriate and unacceptable to site a low-income informal settlement within a middle- to-upper-income area with many desirable qualities and positive externalities. Their expressed concerns reflect a desire to maintain a neighbourhood that is congruent with their values and socio-economic position. They have invested in the built environment in Hout Bay in order to reap the benefits of a market-oriented system and they believe that the presence of the informal settlers has eroded this investment. The process of social distancing which is usually prevalent in capitalist societies has been over-ridden by the informal settlers, and economic dominance, which usually secures preferential access to the powers of the State, has been challenged.

The perceptions held by the harbour community, on the other hand, suggest that their relations with the residents of Mizamoyethu are rooted in intra-class competition for jobs and resources. They resent the fact that the informal settlers have been provided with services and facilities to which they believe their community has long been entitled, yet still not received; and that competition for scarce employment has increased. Socio-economic position thus plays a fundamental role in determining residents' perceptions of the situation. This is supported by the different responses and perceptions of the ratepayers in comparison to the harbour community. The needs, expectations and concerns of the two groups in

relation to the development of Mizamoyethu are underpinned by their economic status.

#### *Political relations*

Shifting power relations, the result of the fundamental transformation of South African society, have been instrumental in the conflict in Hout Bay. As Robinson (1992) comments, not only economic processes determine socio-spatial outcomes, but political power also plays a fundamental role in altering society and space. Under the apartheid system, the race classification of the ratepayers provided them with unbalanced access to political power. With the social and political transformation of South African society in the early 1990s, black and coloured South Africans gained political leverage, using this to gain access to land through a series of land invasions. The social and spatial distancing characteristic of the capitalist and apartheid city was thereby over-ridden. The fact that the State largely ignored the wishes of the white elite by addressing the needs of the homeless resulted in conflict, as the ratepayers expected the State at least to maintain patterns of class-based residential segregation arising from market-oriented processes.

As new socio-political relations consolidate, so the three communities in Hout Bay may experience further shifts in political status and influence, with class replacing race as the basis of new patterns of access and exclusion. As Saff (1996, p. 251) has suggested for the comparable case of the informal settlement at Marconi Beam in Cape Town:

[T]he perceived illegitimacy of all government structures and the segregated nature of the suburbs in question clearly worked to the benefit of the squatters...It is thus ironic that the establishment of more legitimate government structures together with the desegregation of suburbs are likely to undercut the bargaining process that many squatter settlements enjoyed during the transition.

#### *Human agency and interpretation*

Individual interpretation of landscape and the meaning and sense of place also played a role in determining residents' responses to the development of the informal settlement. Cultural differences mean different world views and ways of being, and in Hout Bay the interfacing of such different groups, and the intersecting of a variety of daily paths, has upset the 'place-

ballets' and lifeworlds (Seamon, 1979) of the previously dominant white community.

White residents expressed concern about the increase of minibus taxis in the neighbourhood; the number of people loitering in the streets or waiting on pavements in an attempt to secure casual labour; the behaviour of people in the shopping areas which had now become more crowded; the number of beggars; and the use of sidewalks and buffer zone areas as toilet facilities (Figure 2). Prior to the development of the informal settlement, Hout Bay was considered to be a peaceful residential area with a rural village character. At this time an estate agent in Cape Town (*Cape Times*, 1989) was quoted as saying "Hout Bay is an upmarket area, with virtually no low priced houses available. It is a suburb for those who have made it, and those who are going to make it". The influx of a number of informal settlers with different daily paths, lifestyles and behavioural norms has upset the ratepayers' sense of place and belonging.

Such concerns were low in the priorities of the harbour community, suggesting once more that socio-economic position influences the way in which people interpret and value place (Figure 2). The white ratepayers had chosen to live in Hout Bay for predominantly aesthetic and social reasons; the harbour community lived in the area due to employment opportunities in the local economy. The two communities value Hout Bay for different reasons and thus have different vested interests to protect.

### Conclusions and policy implications

Given the combination of structural and contingent factors underlying the conflict that developed over the informal settlement, neither ready conclusions nor obvious policy implications present themselves. At the local scale, the informal settlement might now be regarded as a planning success. The creation of a development forum, consisting of representatives from all the communities involved, as well as the local authority, has mitigated conflict and enabled a degree of public participation in the planning process. Certainly the residents of Mizamoyethu regard it as a desirable place to live, preferring it over other low-income housing areas. They value its relative safety and security, its level of service provision, the attractive natural surroundings, and the proximity to potential employment sources, however limited. But

does this make it a 'blueprint' for the post-apartheid reconstruction of South Africa's urban places?

Extending the analysis to this broader scale, it seems that there are at least three possible interpretations, with different policy implications attaching to each. One is that land invasions, squatting and informal settlement represent an inevitable re-ordering of space in the process of post-apartheid social restructuring, that the poor will continue to 'make their own geographies', and that this must simply be accepted and managed by the urban authorities. A second, perhaps more idealistic view is that the deliberate spatial juxtaposition of hitherto segregated races and classes is a mechanism for social integration, and as such should be allowed, even encouraged to proceed. A third interpretation is that the creation of Mizamoyethu was no more than crisis management during a period of weak government and incoherent official policy, and in some ways is no more than a replication of apartheid planning on a smaller scale. Hout Bay's disparate communities are juxtaposed rather than integrated, coinciding rather than interacting in space and attaching very different (and often conflicting) meaning and significance to place. Such juxtaposition can serve to heighten rather than diminish inter-group conflict, and thus to hinder the process of social integration (Pringle, 1990; Oelofse, 1996). Adopting this latter view, the policy implications might be to promote better-located and planned settlements for the urban poor, in closer proximity to places of employment. Perhaps the most important lesson is that there are no 'blueprints', and that it is the particular attributes of each locality—attributes environmental, social, economic and political—that need to be considered in deciding the appropriateness of similar developments in the future.

Today, management of the housing crisis in urban areas remains fluid, although the democratically-elected ANC-led government has acted to attempt to contain squatting and land invasion. Market forces, combined with State provision of housing grants to low-income households, are now the dominant processes in meeting housing needs. The demand remains enormous and State and/or market failure to meet it will mean that informal unplanned settlement will persist. As this paper has shown, however, housing provision is not simply the supply of a certain number of sites, units or subsidies. Rather, it has to take cognisance of the people and places involved if conflict is to be avoided and progressive social transformation

achieved. Places are made by people acting within structural frameworks. The challenge for development is to create frameworks that enable rather than constrain human agency in the production of liveable and sustainable urban environments.

## Notes

1. Racial classifications have been used as they are significant in understanding the conflict which has developed. While not wishing to perpetuate the iniquitous system of racial classification of the apartheid era, an understanding of the socio-spatial patterns which are evident in South Africa requires such a classification. This paper differentiates between white, coloured (mixed race) and black (African) people.
2. Ratepayers is the term used in Hout Bay for the formal residents (predominantly a white group). The harbour community form a subset of this group, but have been identified separately in the analysis because of their different socio-economic and political position. The harbour community pay rates and taxes in Hout Bay.

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