

Middle Class Neighbourhoods or ‘African Kraals’? The Impact of Informal Settlements and Vagrants on Post-Apartheid White Identity

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In the slum, the bourgeois spectator surveyed and classified his own antithesis (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 128).

Young married men from 500-odd homes loaded the guns they kept hidden in their sock and handkerchief drawers. Some, like Stuart Smith, sent their toddlers to relatives ‘just in case’. They took leave from work, mounted a control centre, hired a batch of two-way radios and are keeping an eagle eye on the 44 ha open patch earmarked for Zevenfontein’s squatters—land that is only metres away from their pristine new houses. Neighbours who were strangers are suddenly brothers and buddies in arms in an around-the-clock military-style operation, aimed at defending their castles. They communicate vigorously by two-way radio. They urgently summon, not John, Joe or Bert, but Echo One, Two or Three. They have dug trenches across the roads, and it is rumoured, mined a low-level bridge leading into the suburb. The women, including the wives of black Bloubastrand homeowners, rotate in shifts preparing food for the men on patrol. Yuppie accountants with clipped English accents and Paul Simon T-shirts have thrown up roadblocks to keep out squatters who might creep in at night with corrugated iron and cardboard (Business Day, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the generally hostile response by many white people to the arrival of informal settlements and vagrants who are, in various ways, portrayed as a threat to the formal neighbourhood. The most difficult challenge facing the analysis of exclusionary discourse in post-apartheid South Africa is attempting to understand the role of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ as a motivating force in segregation (Dixon and Reicher, 1997: 371). Saff argues that although ‘racial prejudice’ could be the basis for some exclusionary discourse, the dominant underlying cause of such responses by whites to groups such as informal settlements is the defence of their private property and ‘relative privilege’ (2001: 102). The link between privilege and exclusion is, for Saff, illustrated by the fact that groups other than whites express similar rejections of informal settlements:

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[T]here is an attitudinal convergence across space when it comes to opposition to squatters, and that this can only be satisfactorily explained by referring to the mutuality of interests that relatively privileged groups, irrespective of race, have in protecting 'their' space from the encroachment of those lower down the urban order (Saff, 2001: 91).

Hostile responses to informal settlements are indeed not limited to whites nor should it be seen as a necessary attitude of all white people. Furthermore, this attitudinal convergence is not new, and predates the 1950 Group Areas Act (Maylam, 1983: 416). It is crucial, when explaining this convergence, to consider holistically a full understanding of 'privileged' subject positions which extends beyond the defence of material interests and property values. This expanded understanding should include the value people place on living in certain kinds of neighbourhoods that are seen to exclude the wrong kinds of people.

As part of a broader study on white identity in Durban (Ballard, 2002), this paper is confined to one set of suburban residents. The study draws on interviews conducted with white people in the Berea in 1996-7 as well as newspaper material on the study site and relevant examples from around the country throughout the 1990s. I argue that while the instinct to defend property value is indeed at the core of white resentment of informal settlements, this is an inadequate explanation *on its own* for this resentment. Informal settlements impact on more than the bank balance: they impact on residents' sense of place and therefore on their self-perception as western, modern, civilised people. This analysis could equally be extended to Indian and black middle classes although that is beyond the scope of this paper. The role of identity cannot be diminished in comparison to, or even separated from, the role of the defence of material interests. Put in this way, the debate should not revolve around the relative impact of race and class in motivating the dislike of informal settlements and vagrants, but should rather concentrate on the way whites construct value and on the way informal settlements are seen to threaten that value. The empirical material from interviews and newspaper articles is organised around a series of perceived 'threats' associated with informal settlements. These threats include tangible material threats to safety, property values and political power, and less tangible, non-material threats to values, morals, norms, and a certain suburban sense of place.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, URBAN PLANNING AND WHITE IDENTITY

Contemporary responses to squatters need to be situated historically within the kind of cities white governments in South Africa have tried to create—cities within which squatters were seen as highly problematic. Squatter settlements were con-

stantly pathologised, and were presented as dysfunctional and problematic. According to Maylam, the slums were associated with 'disease, crime, drunkenness and vice' (1982: 10). Legislation in the early part of the century such as the Public Health Act of 1919, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, and the Slums Act of 1934 concentrated on the management of 'slums' in order to ensure public health. These Acts had been preceded by the Assaults on Women Commission (1913) and the Tuberculosis Commission (1914) and appeared in the context of a fear of diseases and plagues (Davenport and Saunders, 2000: 272; Robinson, 1996: 59; Swanson, 1977). Cumulatively, concerns about disease, crime and immorality produced images of a city under siege. By the 1930s, the municipality became concerned about a 'black belt' of shacklands 'hemming' Durban in 'on nearly every side' (Maylam, 1982: 413).

Along with concerns about public health, slums were a source of worry because of the difficulty of controlling and administrating them. Much of the logic behind the provision of planned locations, townships, compounds and hostels was to enable surveillance and control (Crush, 1994; Maylam, 1982: 11; Robinson, 1996: 158). Slum areas, Robinson states,

make it very difficult for authorities to perform a wide variety of tasks, from service provision to policing and political control. And in South Africa, where detailed supervision of black people was considered the norm, shack settlements were a positive hindrance (Robinson, 1996: 159, also see Maylam, 1983: 419, Edwards, 1994: 418).

From 1948, apartheid policies came to the aid of those who wanted to deal with squatting with an even more systematic and stringent set of legislation to confront squatter settlements than had been available until then. For example, the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951) enabled the Native Affairs minister to evict squatters from public and private land more easily (Davenport and Saunders, 2000: 390). Many of the squatter camps which had been a menace to white residential areas, such as Cato Manor, were cleared under the 1950 Group Areas Act, and prepared for white suburban occupation or left vacant as 'buffer zones' intended to be 'neutral territory' which would function to keep race groups apart. As with locations around the turn of the century, planned formal townships became the mechanism for attempting to gain control over these populations (Popke, 2000: 242, Robinson, 1996). Formal townships were built so that squatters could be relocated from disorderly slums and properly regulated.

In the final decades of apartheid, the state began to lose its battle with unplanned urban settlement and the instruments used to keep poor blacks out of white people's urban lifeworlds collapsed. One form of the growth of squatting was in or along-

side formal black townships so that black urban areas became patchworks of formal and informal housing as squatters began 'in-filling' into vacant pockets of land. These informal areas consisted of residents born in urban areas unable to live in formal areas due to 'chronic housing shortage, low wages and high unemployment' (Crankshaw, Heron and Hart, 1992: 136, also see Boaden and Taylor, 1992: 146). Another form was the appearance of squatting in vacant land that was close to other formal residential areas zoned for Indian, coloured and white use such as Cato Manor west of the city of Durban (see Figure 1). Much of the original influx into Cato Manor was prompted by violence in townships and the rural areas between the ANC aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) and the conservative Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which had a predominantly Zulu constituency (Popke, 2000: 246). In 1990 there were an estimated 300 shacks in Cato Crest—the area immediately adjacent to the white Manor Gardens residential area. By 1995 there were 30600 residents in Cato Crest.

As well as refugees fleeing violence, squatting also came about through opposition political groups mobilising their supporters to seize land. During the early 1990s, newspapers carried reports of 'land invasions', which involved the organisation of groups of poor black people to occupy vacant land (e.g. *Daily News*, 1990a&b; *Natal Witness*, 1990; *Post*, 1990; *Sunday Times*, 1990). The perceived threat to 'established areas' is exemplified by the following newspaper extracts:

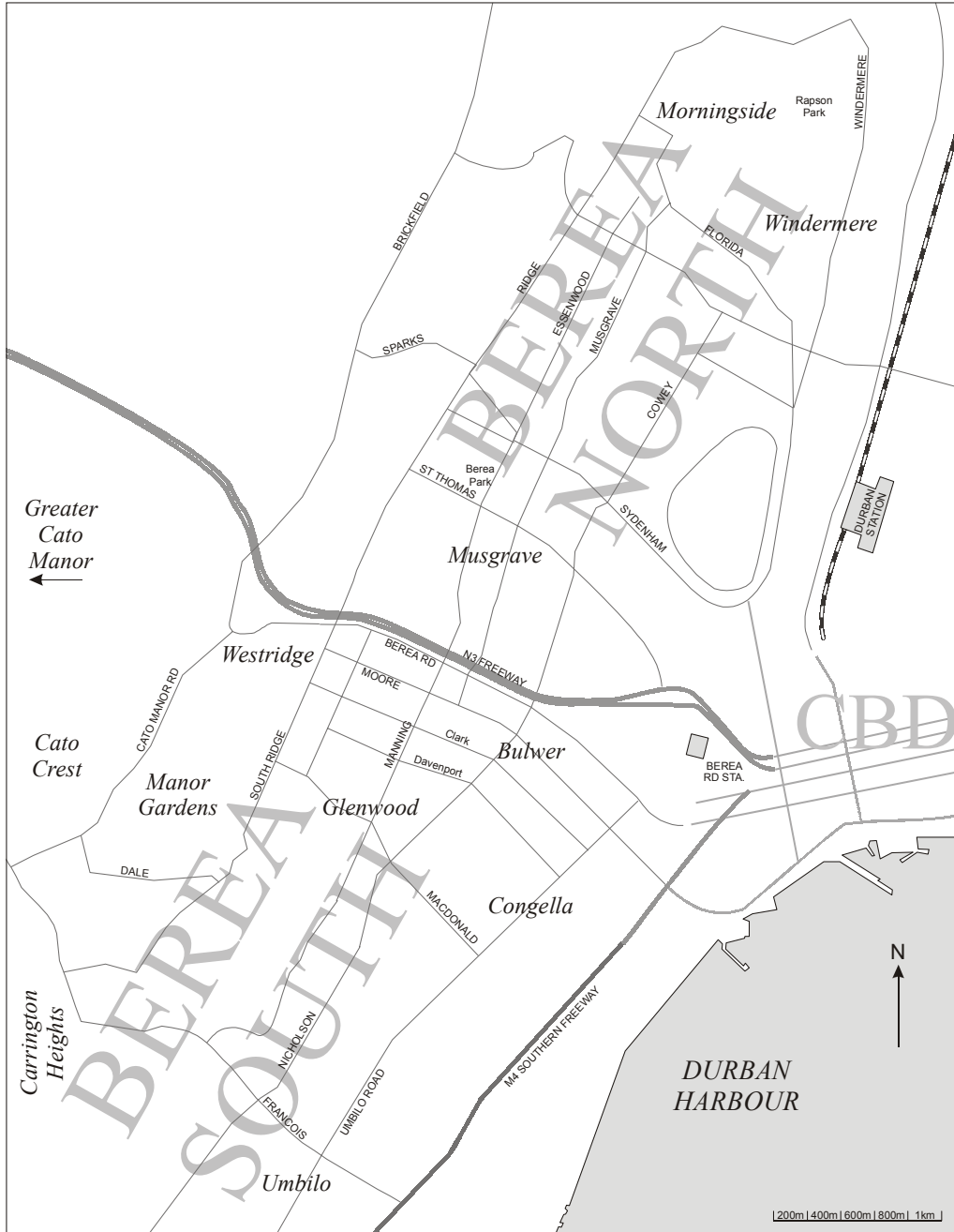
Speculation in the greater Durban area is rampant, with many people in squatter areas claiming they have been told of plans to move them on to vacant plots in the city and its surrounding suburbs (*Daily News*, 1990b).

Since the UDF campaign will be national it is expected that some of these squatters would also move onto vacant white land and dwellings around Durban. (*Post*, 1990).

Much of the controversy was sparked by Ronnie Mamoepa, the publicity secretary of the Southern Transvaal United Democratic Front (UDF), who announced that his organisation would be embarking on a nation-wide campaign to occupy vacant urban land. Mamoepa's announcement followed a series of government 'crack downs' on informal settlements in various parts of the country. In his speech he invited 'all interested parties' to move on to areas of residential land, including white areas as part of a 'democratic initiative to provide homes for our homeless people' (*Natal Mercury*, 1990). He justified it as a solution to the homelessness and landlessness experienced by many people in the country. From the point of view of the UDF and ANC and similar bodies, land invasions also performed an impor-

Figure 1

The Berea in Durban, Study Site



tant symbolic role whereby people were reclaiming land from which they had been excluded under apartheid.

Needless to say, the reaction from nearby formal residential neighbourhoods was characterised by outrage and horror rather than democratic optimism. In the following extracts, two residents of Manor Gardens recount their experiences of having a squatter settlement establish itself over the road from where they lived.

Caren: [When we first looked at buying the house] we couldn't see anything over there. The people that were moving out were nervous that something would start and we didn't believe it would. ... We knew there were the odd few people living in there like vagrants and we didn't know... We were taking a bit of a chance I think but—looking back on reflection—but we really felt we were near town, its got potential... Um then literally within about a year and a half they [squatters] started pouring in. In fact over a three week period its just a nightmare watching them pouring in. And there was *nothing* we could do about it.

John: I was leaving to go overseas on business and I was overseas for two weeks, three weeks. I couldn't believe it when I got back (laughs). I heard knocking and banging the night I left. Three weeks later I got back—there was just this total influx of people into the area.

White people's experience of informal settlements varies considerably. People such as Caren and John who live on the 'edge' of suburbs experience informal settlements at close quarters since they are adjacent to more open land which is susceptible to occupation. On the other hand, those who live in the middle of built up areas such as the Berea feel that they are not exposed to this contingency since there is no vacant land on which informal settlements could establish themselves. As one resident explained, 'the older areas also have less chance of being inundated by squatter communities; people want to buy here because there's no vacant land'. Such people are still affected by informal settlements, however, and can be said to experience squatters from a distance, for example, driving past squatters in the car. Their experience of informal settlements can affect their sense of place at a broad city-level, but does not particularly alter their feelings about their immediate neighbourhood in the same way that people such as Caren and John might experience a change in their living space.

Furthermore, this does not rule out contact with the city's 'underclass', which can come into contact with middle class residents right in the heart of the suburb. 'Vagrancy' and 'loitering' have been identified in various press articles as a major cause for concern for suburban residents, and although a built-up environment can prevent squatting it cannot prevent the occupation of suburban spaces such as roadsides, parks, vacant lots, and bus shelters by groups seen to be problematic. As the discussion will show, vagrants have been associated with various problems including crime, sexually immoral behaviour, littering, defecation and urination.

PERCEIVED THREATS

Whether near or far from informal settlements, formal residents often expressed a dislike of, or at least a discomfort with, this urban phenomenon. Even if people did not have squatters near their homes, they disliked their presence elsewhere in the city because they would have to encounter them when moving around. People either said that they would not want informal settlements to establish near their homes, or if they were already established near their homes, they said that they wanted the squatters to be moved. The reasons given for the dislike of informal settlements present the squatters as a threat to established formal residents, especially in terms of crime, health, and decreased property value. Less tangibly, informal settlements are also disliked because formal residents have an altered sense of place, with which most are uncomfortable. Each of these threats will be examined in turn, but in order to set the scene, the atmosphere of fear is dramatically illustrated in one newspaper article which focused on an affluent white married couple, Dennis and Val, objecting to a local government decision allowing informal settlements to live near their green-belt home on the outskirts of Johannesburg (*Sunday Times*, 1992). In the article, Val said 'When this started my son wouldn't go to school because, he said, he had to look after his pony in case the squatters came and tried to eat it'. While there are many 'rationalised' explanations that squatters are dangerous, this surreal, nightmarish scenario illustrates the visceral level of fear attached to squatters. These may be informed by actual politicised animal maiming which occur in various parts of the world and has occurred in South Africa (Swart, forthcoming). Symbolically, though, the feared attack on the pony represented an attack on their middle class lifestyle in which ponies are the quintessential suburban pet. Val, his mother, provided us with an example of this sense of overwhelming threat elsewhere in the article when she said that 'if those squatters come in I will do everything in my power to defend my property and my family', as if they were essentially going into a war. Her husband, Dennis, had indeed gone into full bunker-mode by joining his neighbours in patrolling the streets and setting up roadblocks 'to keep squatters out'. Dennis said that he had always been politically progressive but that he was now reconsidering his stance because of these developments. He said that he was beginning to realise that Africa was about the 'survival of the fittest'.

CRIME AND THE THREAT TO SAFETY

In her objection to the council's decision to locate squatters to empty ground near her home, Val said:

We already have a pilfering problem here. We can never get the police out here as it is. Once a woman was being raped down the road and it took the police hours to arrive. Now we'll have to get double barbed wire fences and Rottweilers (*Sunday Times*, 1992).

Implicit in Val's statement is that the presence of squatters will increase crime. Although there was already a crime problem, she believed that the arrival of squatters would exacerbate the problem and that they will have to improve the security of their property. The association between informal settlements and an increased likelihood in crime and a threat to personal security is a widely-held view. It is generally understood that formal residential areas adjacent to squatter settlements have higher levels of crime, and that they are a likely source of crime in the neighbouring suburbs. This is a view even held by those who live in the centre of built-up areas who live nowhere near informal settlements, as the following extract shows:

Karen: I understand that people have to have a place to live ... but, it would bother me if it was home alone in the evening, and it was nine o' clock, and I knew there was a squatter area sort of a hundred metres down the road.

Despite Karen's sympathy for informal settlements, she clearly felt uncomfortable about the prospect of having squatters living nearby because she felt it could jeopardise her personal safety. James felt threatened by the presence of informal settlements elsewhere in the city and this affects his mobility:

James: I think it's [the development of informal settlements] dreadful. And it's not safe, that's the other thing. It's not safe for motorists because if [you're] on that road it's an absolute hazard. You actually have to avoid those sort of areas at night.

As James illustrates, squatters affect even those who did not live near informal settlements.

A positive link was also made by some residents between the increased presence of vagrants within the suburbs and crime. One local conservative agitator was quoted in one article saying that 'the crime rate had risen from the time of the influx' of street traders, vagrants and beggars onto the Berea (*Berea Mail*, 1996a). Certain spaces frequented by vagrants became associated with crime in the local media. Rapson Park in Morningside, Durban, became known as a place 'where rape, murder, assault, prostitution, and the consumption of alcohol had become rife' (*Berea Mail*, 1995a). An 'overgrown plot' in Morans Lane, Umbilo,

... provided a good hiding place for thieves, muggers, prostitutes, drug pedlars (sic) and liquor sellers.

‘We see men sit down in the grass—and when they stand up, they carry off a microwave or television,’ they said.

The residents said about 25 people of all races gathered on the plot, drinking, smoking drugs and making a noise.

‘We once had two break-ins in one week,’ one of the residents said.

‘They stay there all day and all night, and there seem to be more and more of them every day,’ they said (*Berea Mail*, 1996b).

The automatic association between crime and informal settlements and vagrants is not always explained. For some people, there is a racial causality, crime being a consequence of the squatters being black. The following newspaper article quotes a woman who drew on this logic:

‘But the biggest concern is our safety and security. The land that has been set aside for them is just opposite us. There are no fences. What is going to keep them out?’ When asked why she considered blacks to be a threat, the woman appeared surprised by the question: ‘You don’t know them—that’s all I can say. You don’t know them. They don’t work, all they do is steal. If you’re not wide awake, they’d steal the bed from under you (*Weekly Mail*, 1992).

As Davenport and Saunders explain, the urbanisation of black people ‘has long been assumed to result in the increase of crime’ (Davenport and Saunders, 2000: 356). Today, of course, this is a discredited explanation, which means that people would mostly talk in such terms when they are in familiar company, making quotes such as the above somewhat unusual. Many of those complaining were keen to stress that problematic vagrants were people ‘of all races’, an attempt to avoid the impression that their complaints were racially motivated. For some respondents, the reason why squatters are likely to steal is quite simply because of their poverty.

Kevin: What one needs to do is take a human perspective um the poorer people are, the greater the want and the need. The greater the need, the greater the temptation is to [steal].

Lindsay: [I]f these people want food they’re going to steal.

In both of these comments, squatters’ need is emphasised while the relative affluence of formal residential areas is treated as normative and unproblematic. It is the poverty of the squatters, rather than the affluence of the formal residents, which causes squatters to steal. In other words, although social inequality is seen to be the problem, these two speakers problematise poverty which is only one side of social inequality.

Another popular reason used to show that crime is associated with informal settlements is that squatter settlements are seen to be spaces where criminals can

evade the police who are reluctant to follow them there or go looking for them. As one participant put it, squatter settlements are so dangerous because 'they harbour all the criminals'. One couple living within metres of Cato Crest squatter settlement elaborated this danger posed by squatter settlements:

John: One of the problems is that people who rob in the area, just run across there to hide because nobody's going to follow them there.... The police won't even go in there without an armed vehicle. So ... all you've got to do—if you have the right shade skin—is just run across the road.

Alice: You just disappear.

The 'danger' of squatter settlements is that they are seen to be zones in which formal residents and police lack control. They are a convenient way for criminals to access formal residential areas and an easy place for them to hide. Formal residents feel exposed and vulnerable when they are living in close proximity to relatively untouchable people who have a reason to threaten them, not the least of which is their poverty. Skin colour functions as camouflage. Although not all squatters are thieves, rapists or murderers, it is impossible to tell harmless and innocent squatters from criminals, with the result that every squatter is a *potential* threat.

The crime to which people refer does indeed have a basis in people's everyday experiences. Participants who live near Cato Crest squatter settlement related experiences of thefts, robberies and other crimes and said that these crimes have increased since the arrival of informal settlements.

Chris: When we moved here, you could still park outside, but [since then, our] daughter's friend had his car stolen here.

John: Um because of petty theft, we've had to put up that fence across there....

Alice: Because we had three cars were broken into. Three different cars during a week—one week (laughs).

Notwithstanding actual crime that takes place across South Africa, the perceived criminality of squatter settlements posits them as fundamentally threatening, while the formal neighbourhoods are shown to be vulnerable, passive, essentially innocent victims of this new urban menace. This is demonstrated in the following extract of a *Berea Mail* newspaper article reporting on the comments of a local right wing politician Brendan Willmer (chairperson of Glenwood and Umbilo Ratepayers' Association and the United Ratepayers' Federation):

Let the message go out to all the low-life scum who infest our suburbs—we've had enough and we're fighting back! ... 'If the state will not protect us, if the police cannot clean-up our streets, then we must do it ourselves' said [Mr Willmer]... 'A tidal-wave of crime has engulfed us and its up to us to fight back'.... Mr Willmer said as a result of crime-infestation, property values were dropping, insurance premiums had rocketed and law-abiding citizens were living behind bars (*Berea Mail*, 1997).

Here we can see that the fear of crime is a tool of reactionary politics, whereby residents of formal areas are posited as innocent law-abiding citizens struggling not to drown in 'a tidal-wave of crime'. In reality, of course, squatters themselves are far more susceptible to crime since they do not have access to security systems and assistance from security firms and police (Robertshaw et al, 2001: 59). It would be inaccurate to assume, as Willmer seems to, that the residents of middle class suburbs were the only or even the main victims of crime.

Furthermore, concern about crime can easily become an expression of a generalised fear of squatters and other aspects of urban change. Emmett has found that increasing crime levels in the country only exacerbate already negative perceptions of squatters.

The threat inspired by shack dwellers appears ... to be related more to an underlying sense of insecurity based on escalating crime rates and political violence in general, than on a specific threat posed by the shack dwellers. Generalized images of violence which were often politically-based recurred when formal residents discussed their fears in relation to the shack dwellers (Emmett, 1992: 82).

This is not solely a characteristic of South Africa, as is conveyed by an incident concerning the public reaction to the murder of two elderly white residents of an affluent area of Baltimore in the USA (Harvey, 1996: 293). Before it was known who the killers were, general consensus was that the perpetrators were from the underclass of the city, and the affluent suburb needed to be protected. It transpired, however, that the killer was a grandson of the victims. Harvey cited the following comment made in a local newspaper by an academic exploring this false assumption:

What's happened is the word 'crime' has become a receptacle for a series of concerns we cannot mention, the unmentionables; class and race. ... [It] has become a euphemism. It is easier to speak about crime, to speak about larceny and burglary and murder than to evoke the images of class and race. That is very, very telling. This is truly Orwellian, a kind of doublespeak. It is an alternative language we have to refer to the problems we see in society. We cannot use the old language of racism. We come up with all sorts of politically correct terms to refer to the same problems. When we say 'crime' we're really saying we are afraid of lower-class black people (Fernandez-Kelly quoted in Harvey, 1996: 293; also see Davis, 1990: 226, Taussig, 1987: 121).

It would be a gross oversimplification to say that the fear of crime is simply a euphemism or vehicle for old racisms since crime is an everyday reality in South Africa. However, there is also no doubt that the fear of crime has the potential to convey other fears about social change and uncertainty. For example, an editorial of *The Hilltop*, a free weekly newspaper in the Durban area stated 'The anarchic crime rate throughout the country is symptomatic of a breakdown of law and order, general morality, and common decency' (Hilltop 1998). Crime is seen as just one particularly bad aspect of a range of ways in which South African society is changing for the worst and is taken to be symptomatic of this deterioration. Not all squatters may be seen as criminals but they represent a physical embodiment of what is the otherwise invisible but ever present threat of crime. Consider the following newspaper extract:

Mrs Caro Smit, formerly of Guinea Fowl cottage in Chasmay Road, said yesterday that she and her husband Mike had decided to leave because they had been worried for their children. Their squatter neighbours had not been malicious, but they just had a different culture, she said. 'For example, they might mark some happy occasion with dancing and the drums go on until 4am' (*Cape Times*, 1992a).

The reason first provided for their departure is a concern for their children, and one assumes that they are concerned about the safety of their children. However, reading on, it transpires that there was no actual security threat from the squatters and the main problem was that they had a 'different culture' involving practices and customs such as dancing and drumming. The Smiths' therefore conflate the cultural difference of the squatters with a threat to the safety of their children. Safety is the excuse for leaving but the actual reasons involve a whole set of problems with squatters revolving primarily around their supposedly different and disruptive culture.

THREAT TO HEALTH AND HYGIENE

The threat of crime is not the only way in which informal settlements are seen to be a danger to formal residents. Some residents expressed concerns that squatter settlements were unsanitary and could pose a 'health threat' to adjacent areas. John and Alice described their concerns about living within metres of Cato Crest squatter settlement in the following way:

John: [T]here's always the fear of a health hazard, I mean this little bit of path-way here is the public urinal.... I don't know where they go to the john up there, but they'll walk all the way down here, stand here, or squat here and do whatever they have to do right across the road. Now if you've got visitors or if you have children....

Alice: They go down to that valley, you see them run down, that where they go to do their business...

This couple here expressed concerns about living adjacent to people who do not use toilets in order to defecate or urinate but instead use open areas such as the pathway near their house, over the road from them or down in a nearby valley. Children were identified as being particularly vulnerable to this threat.

It is not only those bordering squatter settlements that fear being exposed to the 'health hazards' of those without formal housing. Residents in the heart of built-up Glenwood, Durban, complained in one newspaper article that they had now had enough of the approximately 20 'vagrants who have been drinking, defecating and sleeping behind their house' (*Berea Mail*, 1998a). They explained that:

Washing, broken glass and empty beer cans adorn the avenue and sometimes the Amorim's backyard.

'The worst of it is that they have removed the manhole covers and are using the manholes as toilets,' said Mr George Amorim.

Mrs Magda Amorim said, 'I do feel sympathy for these people but they are a health risk.'

Flies plague their house and they fear that next it will be cockroaches and rats. Mr Amorim said they had considered buying the house as they were happy in the neighbourhood, but they were not prepared to put up with the stench and rubbish.

A follow-up article quoted one resident of an area nearby the above case of vagrants as saying that 'we have had the same problem in varying degrees for the past five to six years. It appears there is a mini-tribe of vagrants moving about the lower Glenwood area' (*Berea Mail*, 1998b). The resident stated that these vagrants were responsible for littering, urinating and defecating outside his home. Clearly the use of the word 'tribe' is important as it racialises the vagrants and positions them in opposition to the modern, western suburb. Under apartheid, the term 'tribal' came 'to be used as synonymous with 'less developed', 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' (Skalník, 1988: 70). The notion that this 'mini-tribe' is 'moving about' the area is at odds with the stability of sedentary suburban living. The idea of a nomadic group setting up camp wherever they please contradicts the expectation that one's neighbours live at fixed addresses. Through mobility, vagrants appear less controllable—how does one write them a letter of complaint, or report them to the police?

The symbolism of vermin and disease are closely associated with pollution and filth. One respondent, Anthony, stated that 'it's not just squatters moving into town there's been a lot more rats and cockroaches'. His wife used adjectives such as 'frightening', 'shocking' and 'disgusting' to convey the powerful sense of revul-

sion she feels in response to squatters. Anthony's concerns about rats and cockroaches suggests that even though they are some distance from the nearest informal settlements or vagrants, they may be affected by vectors of disease. Even squatters themselves have been identified as such vectors, as demonstrated by the following resident, who lives in the heart of up-market Morningside:

Mel: [squatting is] causing a lot of unhealthiness, you know, from the germs and stuff, because those people who live there and often come in to work in kitchens and places where they're spreading germs and apparently the incidence of um all sorts of....

James: Disease....

Mel: Tummy bugs and germs and disease are on the up and up and I've read in the paper and I've heard people say it's because of these people who come into work.

For Mel, the impacts of the unhygienic conditions of squatter settlements are not limited to the settlements but can also penetrate the suburbs. One of the newspaper articles Mel may have read in order to form the opinions may have been the *Daily News* 20 May 1997 entitled 'Squatter Camp Pollution "Appalling"'. The opening sentence of the article paints a dramatic image of 'a ring of disease closing in on Durban'—an almost military metaphor of a town under siege defending its perimeters from a hostile enemy. The sense of threat and danger is strong, and there is a clear understanding as to the source of the danger, namely squatter camps, which are not serviced by toilets and sewage systems. The pathogens created in squatter camps can *leak out* and affect other areas because they have contaminated the rivers that flow through them. Many of the squatter settlements in Durban are inland of formal residential areas and business districts that occupy the more desirable land adjacent to the coast, and the latter are therefore subjected to deluges of faeces coursing 'through a network of culverts and canals' on their way to the sea. Not only can disease reach out of squatter camps and penetrate other *innocent* areas via the squatter residents who act as agents of disease, but it can also do so via rivers that flow through or under 'our' neighbourhoods. There is clear moral condemnation of squatters for living in 'grossly unsanitary conditions,' which increases the potential for food poisoning and diarrhoeal disease for others. The impression created by the first sentence of the article, and then later verified by quotes from a health official, is that the primary threat is to those not living in such conditions but to those who are living in formal areas. In his assessment of the discourse of hygiene as used by Americans in the Philippines, Anderson (1995) established that danger was seen, not so much as a threat to the reckless transgres-

sors (those who defecate dangerously), but to the lawful and innocent. In the South African context, this distinction between lawful and unlawful extends to the lawful occupation of land by formal residents and the unlawful occupation of land by squatters. The moral topography of the *Daily News* article is clear: the ill health of informal settlements was only a problem in as much as it affected other residents of the city. It was only in the last sentence that the article conceded implicitly that the problem was with sanitation provision, not with those urinating and defecating. However, the fact that there is a 10 to 20 year sanitation programme appears to be for the benefit of the city rather than the residents of the informal settlement.

Not only are informal settlements portrayed as a threat to the suburbs, but they are also presented as a threat to the greater urban environment. The right-wing newspaper—*Die Patriot*—argued that by the late 1980s in Durban every second person in the metropolitan area was a squatter,

and land simply collapsed under ecological battering. Typhoid, dysentery and other diseases appeared, rivers and streams became polluted and forests were cut down for firewood (Patriot, 1994).

As well as perceived generalised pressure on the land, specific concerns have been raised about threats to the marine environment. Concern was raised that ‘Tons of rubbish being dumped in a canal near the Cato Crest informal settlement in Durban almost every day would be washed down into the harbour when heavy summer rains start, resulting in the deaths of countless fish’ (*Mercury*, 1998). The article included warnings from the port officials that the garbage and sewage washed out of squatter settlements was creating a burden for the port, which should be prevented upstream. Later in the article it transpired that the main problem was the lack of dumping facilities and refuse removal systems in Cato Crest squatter settlement—a problem that was in the process of being rectified by the city council.

That formal residents express a fear of informal settlements and vagrants in terms of hygiene should come as no surprise. Medical discourses about public health have been used in various colonial contexts and even within so-called civilised countries as a way of distinguishing civilised and uncivilised people. In nineteenth century European cities, excrement was used to mark the poor as residual:

The significance of excrement in this account is that it stands for residual people and residual places. The middle classes have been able to distance themselves from their own residues, but in the poor they see bodily residues closely associated with residual matter, and residual places coming together and threatening their own categorical schemes under which the pure and the defiled are distinguished. The separations which the middle classes have achieved in the suburb contrast with the mixing of people and polluting matter in the slum.

This then becomes a judgement on the poor. The class boundary marked out in residential segregation echoes the recurrent theme: 'Evil ... is embodied in excrement' (Sibley, 1995: 56).

Mel's fear of the ability of domestic workers to bring disease into middle class areas bears a striking resemblance to the fear of transgression between the slum and suburb in Victorian Britain as discussed by Stallybrass and White (1986; also see Pile, 1996: 180). In the colonial context, the medical discourse was not only an expression of the coloniser's fear of their new environment but one of the key justifications of their regulation of that environment. In an exploration of this theme in the American colonisation of the Philippines, Anderson said that:

Out of place themselves, American colonial health officers used the body's orifices and its products to mark racial and social boundaries in the Philippines. Waste practices offered a potent means of organising a new, teeming, threatening environment. In this new official order, American bodily control legitimated and symbolized social and political control, while the 'promiscuous defecation' of Filipinos appeared to mock and to transgress the supposedly firm, closed, colonial boundaries (Anderson, 1995: 643).

Whether in the Western, colonial or postcolonial context, arguments about hygiene have been central to the construction of a geographical imagination in which threats to civilisation—identified as unhygienic people—are spatially separated from the threatened elite who place themselves on the moral high ground of responsible hygiene. When members of 'the great unwashed' are seen to breach their containers, even in the legitimate behaviour of going to work, they are imagined as an infection, bringing disease and poison to healthy normal people and threatening the integrity of the modern city. The association between pollution and squatters acts as a metaphor for displacement (Popke and Ballard, 2004). In a pragmatic sense, the argument can be made that squatters should not be where they are because there is no sanitation for them. At a metaphoric level, dirt as matter-out-of-place means that informal settlements themselves can be made to seem out of place if they can be associated with filth and pollution. Being out of place is expressed as 'disgust' and 'revulsion', where people find the mere sight (or smell) of informal settlements or squatter settlements to be abhorrent.

To depict squatters as 'dirty' remains, therefore, a viable way to discredit squatters even in the post-colonial, post-apartheid context. The contention that squatters are dirty, that they do not take responsibility for the dangerous excrements that they produce, even let their children play in such excrements are all moral judgements which serve to erode their status as worthy residents of the city. The result is that squatters are shown to be inferior and implicitly are proven to be uncivilised,

thereby weakening their claim to citizenship (Jacobs, 1996: 127). It has not been my contention that there is no physiological basis for arguing that there should be good sanitation in squatter settlements. Rather, what I have been trying to demonstrate is that 'scientific knowledge' is seldom objectively deployed. In the above cases it has reflected established residents' fears rather than concern for the sanitary conditions of the squatters themselves. The 'purpose of our knowledge' that pollution is bad is not necessarily to improve the living conditions of all citizens and can be used to judge and discredit others and to legitimate 'our' management or removal of 'them' (see Chakrabarty, 1991: 30).

MORAL THREAT

While the moral outrage is the unspoken undertone of the fear of squatter's pollution, it is deployed in a more explicit way with regard to other understandings of informal settlements and vagrants. In the following, a resident complained that vagrants were using drinking fountains for washing purposes and exposing themselves in public.

Morningside residents taking a walk through Berea Park in the mornings have complained of vagrants washing themselves in the open.

According to resident, Mrs Glenda Symons, there is a queue every morning at around 5.15am to use the taps, originally intended for jogger's use.

'They are there every day and as one finishes, so more come in,' she said....

'Runners can't stop at the taps—they're being used by men washing themselves in the open.'

Mrs Symons said a man had taken off his shirt and pants and washed himself in front of her last week (*Berea Mail*, 1995b).

Mrs Symons felt here that a facility originally intended for use by herself and other joggers had been wrongly commandeered by vagrants. She was also clearly scandalised by the nudity of those washing themselves under 'her' tap. Private activities such as washing, sleeping, defecating, urinating are grossly out of place in formal suburban public space not intended for such uses. The complaints about vagrants cleaning themselves contradict the gist of the above contentions that informal settlements and vagrants were unclean. This supports my interpretation that the perception of such groups as unclean has less to do with their personal hygiene and more to do with their transgression into what the critical observers consider their space.

Moral outrage of vagrants extends beyond outrage at nudity and includes sexual activity, drinking and drug taking. One article described a petition organised by residents around Rapson Park (in Morningside, Durban) in order 'to force authori-

ties into action over the park where rape, murder, assault, prostitution, and the consumption of alcohol had become rife' (*Berea Mail*, 1996c). Another article referred to a vacant plot being used by 'people of all races' who 'gathered on the plot, drinking, smoking drugs and making a noise' (*Berea Mail*, 1996b).

Sex, squatting and boozing *in public* and residential areas is just not on! The park opposite the Winston Hotel in Clark Road is becoming a menace to residents. According to Umbilo Community Policing Forum member, Mr Tony Blaunfeldt, vagrants are taking over the park and 'fouling it up'. 'They are fornicating *in broad daylight* and distributing alcohol. They hide it in drains, foliage, gutters and rubbish dumps. 'This is unnecessary, unacceptable behaviour from any culture. They are even defecating here.' This is certainly a negative environment for young, impressionable children (*Berea Mail*, 1996d emphasis added).

Once again, as the highlighted words show, there is a strong emphasis on the miss-match between what should be the private nature of activities like consuming alcohol and having sex and the park intended as a public recreational space. The park is no longer an 'innocent space' fit for children, but is now one rife with a variety of sins and transgressions.

THE THREAT TO PRIVACY AND THE ESTABLISHED SUBURBAN SENSE OF PLACE

It should be clear by now that a number of rationalisations of the dislike for informal settlements and vagrants are part of a broader network of meaning about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. This speaks to the relationship between space and identity; between one's surroundings and one's sense of self. If, as Stallybrass and White (1986: 128) suggest, bourgeois surveyors saw their own antithesis in the slum, what does it do to the bourgeois sense of self to have its own antithesis on its doorstep? According to Emmett (1992: 85), 'squatting is seen as a threat to the conception of an ideal environment'. Perhaps most obviously, residents of formal areas are no longer able to consider their neighbourhoods 'elite' or 'up market'. One interviewee stated that she would not want squatters living near her and that she agrees 'with the people who have been affected, that it must downgrade an area'. Val indicates in this next extract how the sense of place that she expected—horse riding country, rurality—was being challenged by the presence of informal settlements.

We moved here 11 years ago from Bryanston [a suburb of Johannesburg] because we wanted to be in the countryside. I've created a world for myself and my family. I don't know about politics, I don't even go to the shops, all I do is ride in the greenbelt. Now they want to change it all and turn it into a dump (*Sunday Times*, 1992).

Having tried to find a place where she and her family can live out their affluent lifestyle, one of Val's worst fears was that this 'world' which she had created would be ruined by 'they' (the government) who wanted to turn it into a dump. The squatters, for her, were the antithesis of the affluent world that she has 'created' for herself and certainly the last thing she wanted to see when she goes horse riding.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to simply say that the altered sense of place experienced by whites as a result of informal settlements can be reduced to snobbery. Caren, who lived on the interface zone of Cato Manor Road (between the formal suburb of Manor Gardens and the squatter settlement of Cato Crest) explained that her daughter refused to bring school friends to their home to visit as she was embarrassed by Cato Crest squatter settlement bordering their property. There is therefore a deep sense of inadequacy or failing in being near informal settlements. For Caren, informal settlements contradict in every way the characteristics of suburbs. Such oppositions include the fact that the informal settlements use public transport (noisy taxis) as opposed to the private transport of the residents of Manor Gardens, that many of the squatter children do not go to school, that squatters talk at a much louder volume ('they don't know how to talk quietly'), that squatters get drunk and shout, that women scream (probably because they are 'being abused'), that there are gun shots, that squatters do not have access to electricity and therefore produce smoke and pollute the air, and that there is no refuse collection in the settlement resulting in there being garbage everywhere.

No doubt these are all grievances with which most middle-class suburban dwellers in the world would sympathise, since the suburbs represent the quest for a good standard of living and a bit of peace, quiet, and privacy (Silverstone, 1997: 5). In particular, suburbs epitomise 'sanctity of the private realm' so treasured in Western culture (Dixon and Reicher, 1997: 374). An interview respondent in Dixon and Reicher's study of Cape Town inferred that there was a 'cultural' basis for squatters' behaviour saying 'it seems to be part of their culture that they don't have fences' which means they 'come and go as they please' (also see Bauman, 1993: 159 on loitering). As Dixon and Reicher state the 'uninvited breach of the individual's 'fence', or 'territorial boundaries' assumes the status of moral transgression' (1997: 374). Here the psychoanalytic notions of spatiality are useful, highlighting the way people imagine or infer 'zones' which are in some way extensions of the body (Wilton, 1998: 176). People's homes can to a greater or lesser extent become extensions of themselves and—given limitless resources—are a fundamental reflection of an individual's self perception. Regulation of boundaries is therefore crucial to a secure sense of self and individuality (Sibley, 1995: 94). Conversely when control of the boundaries of the home slips from the control of its occupant, they are no longer secure in their sense of individuality. People con-

sider privacy and the desire for a quiet environment to be their right having purchased an expensive property in an area with town planning regulations and law enforcement which are designed to prevent, as Caren pointed out, smoke from fires, loud noise or disturbances, and an accumulation of refuse. Squatters' transgressions across the perimeter boundary of the suburban plot, such as 'noise', and 'pollution', not to mention wandering people, as perceived violations of that privacy.

The result of being exposed to these noises, sights and smells is that Caren finds it very difficult to maintain a perception of her home as located in a 'normal' suburb. The perimeter of her land has become permeable and her home is constantly being assaulted by noise, smoke, drifting garbage, and unsightly scenes. She argued that is impossible to do normal suburban activities like have a cup of tea outside, or do gardening without feeling like she is living 'right in the middle of a *kraal*'. The 'Zulu *kraal*' or the 'farm' are places which most whites have never personally experienced, other than from their cars, but which exist in their imaginations as the source and vessel of the 'traditional African way of life'. Black people, whites have been taught, lived in *kraals* (homesteads) before Europeans came to the region, where they lived a traditional rural lifestyle surviving through pastoralism and involving cultural structures such as the rule of the chief, polygamy, and other trappings of Zulu culture. The word *kraal* acts as a marker of a foreign environment which belongs to rural traditional black people, the characteristics of which are out of place in the suburb.

A further example is a resident in Cape Town, Mrs Coeshall, who bought an up market house in an area that was subsequently taken over by a squatter community. Mrs Coeshall successfully sued the former owners for more than half a million Rand in damages, proving that they had knowledge of the impending arrival of squatters and failed to disclose this knowledge at the time of the sale. Of living near squatters she said, 'It's like living in the middle of Africa with singing and drumming at night.' (*Cape Times*, 1992b, also quoted in Saff, 2001: 87). The major offence of informal settlements, it appears, is bringing 'Africa' into the suburb—'Africa' being the last thing formal residents want in a suburb since they have worked so earnestly to rise above the continent upon which they are located.

The fact that there are people who lead different ways of life is not *in itself* problematic for many white observers; the problem comes when it occurs within or adjacent to their way of life and their familiar comfortable places. The presence of this 'difference' represents both the destruction of the established social order and a threat to the 'integrity' of individual and collective identities (Wilton, 1998: 174). In a letter to the editor of the *Daily News*, one resident identified the juxtapo-

sition of the first world and squatter settlements to be disturbing, stating that 'it is the sharp contrasts of the unsightly and unsanitary conditions on the periphery of a recently renovated 'first world' shopping complex that disturbs me' (*Daily News*, 1999). While the letter writer expresses sympathy with squatters, she appears to be wishing that they would go and be homeless somewhere else, for it is the 'sharp contrasts' between the squatters' 'unsightly and unsanitary conditions' and a 'first world' mall that is the source of her discomfort. Put another way, there is a place for poverty and a place for affluence, and if poverty breaches its allotted space it is criticised for creating this disturbing contrast. Poverty is enough of a problem in itself without compounding the situation by locating itself in a place that should not be characterised by poverty. The problem, as this person sees it, is that a space with which she is familiar (a first world shopping complex) is being claimed by other people for another use with which she is uncomfortable. The impoverished are worthy of sympathy but should not push their luck by occupying and thereby soiling 'first world' spaces.

One useful way to interpret these expressions of unfamiliar or unexpected senses of place in the suburb is to turn to Gelder and Jacobs' (1995) use of Freud's concept of *the uncanny* (also see Wilton, 1998). This describes the anxiety created when a place seems to be both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The paradox of the uncanny is that 'we inhabit the same place, yet we seem to inhabit places which are *not* the same' (Gelder and Jacobs, 1995: 178). Caren's interview and Mrs Coeshal's comments all contain references to places which are foreign to the suburban environment so that, while they are aware that they are living in a middle class suburb, they also feel, *at the same time*, that they are living in a 'kraal', or 'Africa'. Ms Fuller's letter states that it is the combination of the familiar shopping mall and the unfamiliar, unexpected squalor of a squatter camp which she finds disturbing. Therefore the existence of foreign and different 'African' spaces such as 'the *kraal*', are not so much a problem in themselves but become a problem when they bleed into 'our' own familiar domestic surroundings from which we have come to expect the exclusion of otherness.

This is a Freudian interpretation of the basic socio-geographic problem confronted by whites, which is that social distance no longer equates to spatial distance in that 'the other' is now living on 'our' doorstep (Bauman, 1991: 60). The squatters living over the road from formal suburbs are no less alien than they were when they were living in their proverbial *kraals* and yet the residents of the suburb now have to see them, hear them, and smell them every day. This new physical proximity between these groups of people is not matched by social proximity, whereby people know their neighbours, greet each other, socialise together or at least think of themselves as similar types of people. Conversely, the social distance

which continues to exist does not equate to spatial distance, which was the case under apartheid.

CONCLUSION: IDENTITY, PLACE AND MATERIAL INTERESTS

Where once bank valuers would have run a tape measure over a house, counted the bathrooms and bedrooms, and written down a price that took into account features and extras, they are now guided by three considerations—position, position and position (*Sunday Star*, 1993).

For a variety of reasons, therefore, living near squatters is seen as undesirable and has resulted in a fall in demand for houses near squatter settlements. Perceived criminal, health, political, moral threats, and an altered sense of place with the presence of 'others' all culminate in a financial threat manifested as a fall in property prices. Even if a particular formal resident does not personally hold negative views about squatters, they can suffer the effects of falling property values simply by being located near to them (Emmett, 1992: 75).

Caren: [W]hat annoys us is that no one wants to buy our place, because they don't want to live opposite that either... We've had lots of black people coming here, and they love our house, they think it's great, yes, love it, want to live here, and then they take one look at that and say 'no we don't want to live opposite squatters' ... they say they don't want trouble. ... Anyway so we are prisoners, and I'm very angry at the government because they just do nothing about it.

Caren went on to explain that their house had been on the market for years but without a successful sale. They had enlisted the services of an estate agent to help promote the house. The agent valued the house at R 270 000 if it were not located next to a squatter settlement but said that the squatters brought the value down to R 185 000. After attempting to sell at this price they dropped to R 150 000, less than what they paid for it 5 years previously in absolute terms, let alone inflation adjusted losses. Although they had numerous telephone enquiries, from whites, Indians and blacks, most people would not even come and see the house once they found out where it was located. One white couple were keen to buy the house but the banks declined their application for a bond (mortgage) because of the location of the house.

Informal settlements are frequently 'blamed' for being the reason for the decline in adjacent formal residential property prices. Yet the property market is merely a representation of potential buyers' perceptions of certain types of properties which

in turn feeds into spirals of falling demand and even red lining. Therefore, lower property prices are first and foremost a result of the negative perception of squatters by formal residents. As Emmett explains,

property values in areas near shack settlements fall not so much as a result of specific problems experienced with shack settlements, but rather because shack dwellers are now almost universally regarded as undesirable neighbours. ... In other words, shack dwellers have been stereotyped as universally 'bad' irrespective of their actual behaviour (Emmett, 1992: 89).

Falling property prices need to be fully situated, then, with the context of perceptions of social difference. Sibley states that 'hostility to others is articulated as a concern about property values but certain kinds of difference, as they are culturally constructed, trigger anxieties and a wish on the part of those who feel threatened to distance themselves from others. This may, of course, have economic consequences' (Sibley 1995: 3).

Amongst many of the people cited above, care is taken to ensure that negative reactions are not construed as a racist response. For example, one observer commented that 'Financial institutions and property fundis [experts] alike are all at pains to emphasise that this is not a racial issue but a question of clashing lifestyles and socio-economic expectations' (*Sunday Star*, 1993). When abstracted from broader systems of meaning of space, place and identity, it is possible to conclude that class is replacing race as a dominant factor in negative reactions. I believe that key to understanding falling demand for houses in areas near informal settlements is a recognition of the kinds of urban environments that formal residents have attempted to create. The presence of squatters—whether defined in class, race or any other terms—undermines claims that these formal suburbs and their residents are modern citizens of the western world.

I have argued that these social processes have a complex relationship with the objective reality of the impact of informal settlements on suburbs. While there are indeed important physical impacts on suburbs such as noise, increased crime and other changes, the negative perceptions of informal settlements amplify these changes into an overwhelming sense of difference, which submerges any sense of common interest and potential reconciliation. Cause and effect are not adequately understood, and certain negative aspects of squatter settlements such as unsanitary conditions and pollution are used as evidence of the inappropriateness of informal settlements, rather than being acknowledged as the product of underdeveloped infrastructure. It is ironic, as Emmett (1992: 91) points out, that the very people who have lost the most in terms of falling property prices have also contributed to

this drop through their hostile response to informal settlements which has only served to accentuate negative perceptions.

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