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Claiming a Space in a Changing South Africa: The “Squatters” of Marconi Beam, Cape Town

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There has been much academic speculation on the future form of the post-apartheid city in South Africa.¹ This interest reflects in part the presumption that South Africa’s urban environment will play a crucial role in the struggle for racial and social equality. Given the high rate of urban population growth, this ongoing struggle will be engaged in cities in general, and in the burgeoning squatter camps and informal settlements (which house an estimated 7.7 million people)², in particular.

In most of the recent literature, the post-apartheid city is seen as flowing logically out of urban processes during the 1980s—a period characterized by accelerating black urbanization, rapid growth of informal settlements, increasing de facto desegregation of inner-city areas and some suburbs, and government policies that either facilitated or, at least, tolerated these processes. While these processes crucially influenced South Africa’s urban landscape, the political transition (1990–1994) to the “new” South Africa influenced this terrain in new ways. It was during the political transition that the legal desegregation of South African cities became lawful for the first time since the passage of the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923. This prospect hastened in turn the ongoing, though previously illegal, migration of affluent blacks³ from the townships to the “white” suburbs. The weakness of the central state during the transition period offered equally unique opportunities for the urban poor to subvert the class and racial dynamics of the apartheid city—opportunities that some took by squatting on prime pieces of vacant land in a few affluent white suburbs. That these squatters generally were allowed to stay within these areas represented a clear break with pre-transition government policy.

These urban processes during the transition provide the backdrop for the informal settlement at Marconi Beam, established by squatters in the relatively affluent white suburb of Milnerton in Cape Town. It was these processes that made land occupation a viable option for the urban poor. Following a brief overview of urban dynamics in Cape Town, Milnerton, and Marconi Beam, I examine the interactions that subverted both the apartheid city and the urban land market in Milnerton yet afforded few tangible social and economics benefits to the squatter community.

Urban Processes and Urban Policy During the Political Transition

The National Party government’s reform strategy during the transition period effected some important modifications in urban policy. Two key factors drove government policy: 1) the need to retreat from laws that prescribed land ownership along racial lines; and 2) the need to develop a viable policy with regard to urbanization and informal settlement. In March 1991 the government introduced the White Paper on Land Reform (Republic of South Africa 1991) which set out proposals for repealing laws governing the racial occupation of land and dealing with urbanization, squatting, and informal settlement.

With respect to the first of these, the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act of June 1991 repealed all legislation (including the...

With respect to urbanization and informal settlement, the White Paper set out to revise the policy of Orderly Urbanization that had been in effect since 1986—a policy that had attempted to manage urban growth by channeling it into large informal settlements situated both on urban fringes and near existing black townships (Mabin 1989; 1992). This older policy aimed to provide residents of these settlements with a site to erect a shelter and with basic communal services. The policy also made a distinction between desirable informal settlements (legal site and service schemes) and undesirable settlements (uncontrolled squatting), the objective being to upgrade and expand the former and prevent the latter (Harrison 1992:18). But this subtle distinction blurred as the government legalized many squatter areas. Acknowledging this reality and taking account of the changing political environment, the White Paper on Land Reform (enacted as parts of various pieces of legislation in July 1991) differed from earlier policy in a number of important ways. The White Paper reiterated the state’s duty to protect private property and that squatting could not be tolerated, but it also acknowledged that squatting was the “cumulative result of discriminatory measures and an inadequate housing policy” (Republic of South Africa 1991:10–11). The government committed itself to “giving urgent attention to the provision and development of sufficient urban land” for the establishment of less formal settlements on which “at least rudimentary but upgradeable services are available” (Republic of South Africa 1991:10–11).

The government sought to shift the administration of this policy to the provincial administrations. The latter were advised to identify land for informal settlement in a timely manner so as to forestall uncontrolled squatting (Harrison 1992:19). The government also enacted the Less Formal Township Establishment Act in July 1991 which shortened the procedures for the designation and development of land for informal settlement and gave provincial administrators and local authorities the means to establish informal townships on land at their disposal, provided that the land had been surveyed and a township register opened (South African Institute for Race Relations 1992a:335).

The government’s more relaxed policies with regard to squatting and informal settlement reflect the state’s weakness during the transition period (Price 1991; Adam and Moodley 1993; Stedman 1994; Sisk 1995). The central government, caught up in delicate negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC), was loath to embark on provocative steps in curbing land occupations that could jeopardize the negotiation process. The central government, therefore, lacked the political will (and perhaps the capacity) to carry out openly coercive measures with regard to land occupations (see Sowman and Gawith 1994:6). In practice the central government increasingly shirked its responsibilities for land occupations and deferred them to provincial and local governments.

Provincial authorities were caught in a bind. Faced with increasing urbanization and land occupations, they resorted to ad hoc measures such as making land available for new site and service schemes, seeking court orders to remove squatters to these new areas and, occasionally, the stealthy removal of individual squatters. In general, while the provincial administrations forced municipal areas and local authorities to deal with land occupations in their areas, they did help with the financial costs incurred in servicing the settlements. But because provincial governments in most cases, and especially in the Cape, discouraged forced removals as a method of halting land invasions, municipalities were compelled to negotiate with squatters. The Cape Provincial Administration (1991) recommended that municipalities deal with squatter situations as follows:

Accept urbanization as a fait accompli. It will only increase. ... it should be approached and managed in a positive and pro-active manner. ... Be observant and act timeously—see what your council can do at an early stage—make provision—even though you do not have a problem yet. You can be assured that your area is a possible target! ... Ensure that your structure planning provides specifically for the lowest economic groups. ... NB: It cannot be based on colour, but rather on economic realities ...; communicate with the homeless people as soon as possible ...—before extremist groups scuttle future solutions for the problems which could be to the detriment of your community ...; do not attempt to transfer the problem out of your area of jurisdiction. It will not disappear. ... Involve well disposed service or-
The “Squatters” of Marconi Beam

Urban Change in Cape Town During the Political Transition

The Cape Town Metropolitan area (Figure 1), South Africa’s third largest (Urban Foundation 1990), uniquely lacks a Black majority. In 1990 the metropolitan area’s population of 3.1 million was nearly half Coloured, 27.4 percent Black, and 22.7 percent white (Bridgman, Palmer, and Thomas 1992:31). Prior to the implementation of the Group Areas Act (1950), Cape Town was the least segregated city in South Africa. The implementation of the Act was, however, most severe in Cape Town which had become by 1985 the most segregated major city in the country (Western 1981; Lemon 1991). The implementation of the Group Areas Act created a racially and spatially fragmented city, with the vast bulk of both Coloureds and Blacks residing on the Cape Flats and in the South-East Sector in areas with few public amenities and long commutes to most sites of employment (Palmer 1992).

The repeal of the Group Areas Act in 1991 has had only limited effects in reversing this situation. Inter-racial property transfers registered in the City of Cape Town accounted for just 4.6 percent of all transfers within the Cape Town municipal area between January 1990 and the end of September 1992. A survey of real estate brokers conducted in mid-1992 found much the same, namely that inter-racial transactions amounted to around five percent of all property transactions up until that time (The Estate Agent 1992). As I have estimated elsewhere (Saff 1995a:11), only 3,489 inter-racial property transfers occurred between 1990 and the end of 1994, which translates into roughly 16,364 people moving into areas previously zoned for occupation by members of a different race. Although desegregation is likely to be somewhat higher if one takes into account rental accommodation and purchases of property by companies, close corporations, and multi-racial families, few black people have benefitted. Given the high degree of existing residential segregation together with the extreme income inequality between (and within) races, it is likely that the overwhelming majority of the residents of Cape Town will continue living in segregated areas for the foreseeable future.

During the 1960s and 1970s virtually no formal housing was constructed by the state or local governments who do not pursue political goals. (Cape Provincial Administration 1991)

The document further advised municipalities to proclaim a squatter area as a transit camp in accordance with section 6(1) of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951). This legislation allowed a local authority or the Administrator of the Province to expropriate land or to use land for the establishment of a temporary settlement for homeless persons (Chittenden/Urban Foundation 1993:2). The proclamation of a transit camp freed the municipality from the need to provide housing that met the norms of the surrounding area; moreover it afforded time to negotiate with the squatters without appearing to condone their permanent settlement in the area. This legislation also provided extra control over land allocations and service provision that enabled local authorities to exercise tighter controls over the influx of new squatters into the area.

Within this transitional policy environment, the racial structure of South Africa’s urban areas changed in three important ways. First, class-based desegregation occurred on a limited scale in many formerly segregated suburbs (Cloete 1991; Saff 1990; Simon 1992). Once in the suburbs, the new residents have generally been accepted by the existing residents and they gained access to local facilities, educational institutions, and public amenities (Saff 1995b). Second, the growth of informal housing in and around the Black townships and in the existing informal settlements increased substantially. This growth often resulted in new informal settlements expanding onto land adjacent to suburbs previously zoned for occupation by other race groups. These have often become sites of contentious struggle as property owners in the adjacent areas bitterly resisted the encroachment and creation of low-income informal settlements on their boundaries. Third, a small number of informal settlements have arisen within the boundaries of more affluent “white” suburbs, most notably in Cape Town (see Dixon et al. 1994; Gawith and Sowman 1992; Oelofse 1994; Sowman and Gawith 1994). The establishment of these enclaves, abetted by the state’s temporary incapacity, may prove unique to the political transition. It is the dynamics associated with the establishment and development of one of these settlements, Marconi Beam, that occupies the remainder of this paper.

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private developers for Black residents of Cape Town. As a result and as Black urbanization increased, the three existing townships—Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu (see Figure 1)—became increasingly overcrowded, and this led in turn to the establishment of a number of squatter settlements (see Cole 1987). While squatting by Coloureds in the western Cape was nothing new (Western 1981), the acceptance of predominantly Black squatter settlements was. By 1983, violent struggles over the state’s attempts to remove these squatters finally forced the government to recognize the necessity of making more land available for Black settlement in Cape Town. Most of this new land was in the new township of Khayelitsha (Cook 1991; 1992; see Figure 1), a barren and uninhabited landscape dominated by windswept sand dunes and bush on the southeast edge of the city. With the repeal of influx control legislation (the Pass Laws) in 1986, Black urban migration to Cape Town accelerated dramatically leading to an equally rapid increase in both the number of informal settlements and of informal structures within the proclaimed Black townships. In 1993, the Cape Provincial Administration counted over 42 separate informal settlements in the Cape Town Metropolitan area (Argus June 22, 1993), and the World Bank estimated that 220,095 people resided on unserviced sites (World Bank 1993).

The large increase in the Black population of Cape Town has had two direct impacts on the city’s spatial structure. First, Black population density in the existing Black townships in-

Figure 1. Cape Town showing racial zoning prior to June 1991. Source: Based on Cook 1991.
creased and the number of shack settlements grew. Second, the Black urban poor's search for available land, aided by the particular politics of the transition, occasionally led to the establishment of squatter camps within the boundaries of more affluent areas, thereby altering the racial impress of Group Areas zoning (Dixon et al. 1994; Gawith and Sowman 1992; Sowman and Gawith 1994; Oelofse 1994; Rolls 1991; Saff 1991). By 1991, three informal settlements that had been established within upmarket white suburbs—Imizamo Yethu (Hout Bay), Inthabeni/Site 5 (Noordhoek), and Marconi Beam Site (Milnerton)—were proclaimed as transit areas in terms of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 (South African Institute of Race Relations 1992:339). While the struggles in these three areas differed in their details, their resolutions shared one important commonality: despite much hostility from existing residents over the subversion of property markets, the squatters were allowed to remain within the boundaries of these municipal areas (although in the case of Hout Bay and Noordhoek they were eventually moved off private land onto land owned by the state). The case of Milnerton and Marconi Beam provides some insight into this seemingly improbable resolution.

**Milnerton and Marconi Beam**

**Milnerton**

Milnerton (Figure 2) is a predominantly white, middle- to upper-middle-class suburb situated about 8 kilometers from the center of Cape Town. Since its founding in 1897, Milnerton has grown into a large sprawling low-density suburb containing 1,200 mostly single-story detached residential units and some 30 mostly two-story apartment buildings (Rosenthal 1980; Milnerton Municipality, personal communication 1994). Milnerton became a separate municipality in 1955, and incorporated the suburbs of Table View and Bothasig in 1962 and 1965, respectively (Milnerton Municipality 1994a:19). In addition to the suburbs of Milnerton, Table View and Bothasig, the Milnerton Municipal Area (MMA) also encompasses two industrial townships, Montague Gardens Industrial Township and the Metro Industrial Township. In June 1994, MMA's population exceeded 61,000 (Milnerton Municipal-
Figure 2. Milnerton Municipal Area, showing Municipal Wards in 1994. Source: Based on maps supplied by the Milnerton Municipality.
The “Squatters” of Marconi Beam

Figure 3. Milnerton suburb and Marconi Beam in 1994. Source: Based on maps supplied by the Milnerton Municipality.

cil. Milnerton together with Metro Industrial and Montague Gardens make up Wards I and II. As these wards were delimited before the rapid growth of Table View and Bothasig, the former are over-represented and the latter are under-represented on the Milnerton Town Council. In the last Milnerton Town Council election in 1988, only white residents over the age of eighteen could vote (only 2,349 people in the entire MMA cast votes; Milnerton Municipality, personal communication, June 13, 1994). The Milnerton Town Council sets local policy in the MMA and directs the officials within the Milnerton Municipality. The Municipality, headed by the Town Clerk, employed 627 people in 1994 (Milnerton Municipality
Table 1. School Statistics in Milnerton, 1994.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seamount Primary</th>
<th>Milnerton Primary</th>
<th>Zonnekus Primary</th>
<th>Milnerton High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Marconi Beam (km)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils (1994)</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum number of pupils ever or that school can accommodate</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>850</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average size per class</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Black pupils</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Coloured pupils</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Indian/Chinese pupils</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number from Marconi Beam</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees per year (Rand), one child</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaire completed by representatives from each school, June/July 1994.

Although the Milnerton Town Council’s four-year term expired in 1992, it was extended by government proclamation until a new local government system comes into place. The first non-racial local government elections in the Western Cape are not scheduled to take place before mid-1996.

With the demise of the Group Areas Act in 1991, Milnerton, like other white suburbs, has experienced limited residential desegregation. But as yet, Milnerton has few black homeowners. Based on the combined house sales (52) of two of the most successful real-estate brokers in Milnerton for the period July 1993 to June 30, 1994, only one house was sold to a Coloured family and none to a Black family (personal communication August 10, 1994).

These statistics are slightly misleading however because they deal only with home ownership and not rentals. The racial component of the four Milnerton schools I surveyed report a combined total of 50 Black, 98 Coloured, and 1 Indian pupils, almost all of whom reside within the area (see Table 1). While some of these are undoubtedly the children of domestic workers and many are from the same families, these figures indicate a greater black presence in the area than do data on housing purchases. My survey of Table View residents who attended a Table View Community Association meeting (June 20, 1994) shows that 35 of the 39 respondents (89.7 percent) were aware of “non-whites” buying or renting houses or apartments in their area. While the proportion of blacks owning or renting homes in Milnerton is small, the number is increasing. This process, together with the gradual desegregation of schools and public amenities, has gone generally unremarked and unresolved by Milnerton residents.

What makes Milnerton different from other suburbs undergoing desegregation (Hout Bay and Noordhoek excepted) is the establishment of a Black “squatter” camp across the road from some of Milnerton’s prosperous residents. The establishment of the camp known as Marconi Beam has met strong resistance as compared to the quiet acceptance of class-based desegregation in the suburb’s housing and rental markets.

The Establishment of the Marconi Beam Transit Area

Before the 1991 repeal of the Group Areas Act, Milnerton provided only two types of accommodation for blacks: the numerous servants quarters in the backyards of white residences; and the single-sex dormitories provided by the Cape Turf Club for the grooms and stable hands employed in the horse racing industry at the Milnerton Race Course (Rollins 1991:39). In 1992 approximately 500 workers were employed as grooms and stable hands by the 21 trainers who rented stables from the Turf Club (Chittenden/Urban Foundation 1993:6).

The Milnerton Race Course and its dormitories were located opposite a largely undeveloped tract owned by the Department of Posts and Telecommunications (Telkom). This tran-
gular parcel of land measuring 246.3 hectares was known colloquially as “Marconi Beam,” presumably because it had been used as a radio and telegraph site (Rollins 1991:39). In 1990 Telkom used only 64.3 hectares of Marconi Beam, with the rest being officially vacant (Chittenden/Urban Foundation 1993:8). Facing west, Marconi Beam (Figure 3) is separated from the Milnerton Race Course and from residential Milnerton by a busy four-lane highway (Koeberg Road) which serves as a major through route to Table View and Montague Gardens. To the northeast, Marconi Beam is bordered by the Montague Gardens industrial area, the major source of employment within the Municipality (Chittenden/Urban Foundation 1993); and to the south, Marconi Beam adjoins the suburbs of Tygerhof and Sandrift which are part of the Cape Town Municipality.

Given Marconi Beam’s access to sites of employment, squatters had erected shacks on this land for a considerable period of time (Rollins 1991). The shacks were few, however, and they were scattered around the site and set back from the road behind thick bushes—hence out of the view of the white residents in the area. Most of these early shacks housed the immediate families or relatives of the grooms who worked across the road at the Race Course, but could not live in the Turf Club’s single-sex dormitories. Squatter settlement on Marconi Beam rapidly accelerated during 1990. In August a strike by the grooms at the Turf Club resulted in them being “locked out” from their dormitories (Brooke 1992:1). In response, approximately 200 grooms moved onto that part of Marconi Beam opposite the stables where they either erected new shelters or joined their families in already existing ones. After the strike was settled, many of the grooms remained living at Marconi Beam with their families in preference to the single quarters at their workplace (Brooke 1992:1). By November 1990, the site contained 109 shacks, a figure that had grown to 226 by year’s end (Brooke 1992:1).

Marconi Beam’s initial growth was propelled by local circumstances rather than regional or national ones. That said, continued growth depended on the more relaxed political climate of the early 1990s. It also depended on immigration of refugees from the political and criminal violence prevalent in many of the other

Black informal settlements (particularly Khayelitsha, see Figure 1; Milnerton Town Clerk, personal communication, February 7, 1991). A socio-economic survey conducted in May/June 1993 found that 36.4 percent of households at Marconi Beam came from the informal townships near Nyanga, Guguletu, or Khayelitsha, while 33.5 percent originated from outside of the Western Cape (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:16).

At this stage, shacks were built in an uncoordinated manner and spread out around the site. At the end of August 1990 the Milnerton Town Council served notice to Telkom that as the landowner they were required under terms of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951) to remove any unauthorized structures on their land (Rollins 1991:40). On September 10, 20 to 30 shacks were demolished by Post Office workers before a lawyer representing the squatters got a court order suspending further demolitions (Rollins 1991:40). Despite the fact that the actions of the Milnerton Town Council were the catalyst for the actions of Telkom, Council documents reveal that by this time the Council did not regard the forced removal of the squatters from Marconi Beam as a serious and viable option (Milnerton Municipality 1990d). Two months later at a meeting with the squatters on November 20, 1990, the Milnerton Town Clerk went to considerable lengths to distance the Municipality from the actions of the Post Office and the police who apparently had been harassing the squatters. Doubtless the Municipality was aware of the publicity that the Post Office’s attempted removals had generated in the press and of the squatters securing of legal representation and services of the Surplus Peoples Project, a nongovernmental organization aiding the victims of forced removals (Development Action Group 1994). In November 1990, at the request of the Milnerton Town Council and above the vocal objections of the white Milnerton Ratepayers Association (property owners) and numerous residents, the Cape Provincial Administration declared an 8.02 hectare portion on the northern end of Marconi Beam as a transit area under terms of Section 6(1) of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, 1951 (see Figure 3). In an informational pamphlet to all ratepayers and residents on November 11, 1990, the Town Clerk explained the Municipality’s position on the squatters:
The land on which squatting is occurring is owned by the Department of Posts and Telecommunications. . . . The situation in which the Council and its ratepayers find themselves is primarily due to the failure on the part of the landowner to take effective measures timely to control the illegal occupation of his land notwithstanding repeated notices by the Municipality to do so. The landowner has in more recent times also become hamstrung owing to an agreement made by the government in terms of which certain assurances and undertakings were given to the co-president of the UDF and a representative of the legal department of the ANC (African National Congress). The arrangement was to the effect that forced removal of communities or demolition of shacks should not take place without the prior consultation with the communities concerned. One of the main points of contention in this connection is the question of alternative affordable accommodation, a factor which has also had considerable influence on the Attorney General who has declined to prosecute in instances where prosecutions had in fact been instituted. It is for this reason that the Municipality appointed a town planning consultant to advise it and make recommendations on alternative areas within or outside the municipal boundaries where permanent informal housing can be located. This will also have to be discussed with representatives of the squatters. . . . In an endeavor to resolve the illegal squatting situation . . . acting on their (Cape Provincial Administration) advice, the Council whilst unanimous, very reluctantly, agreed to the declaration of ± 8,02 hectares of the Telkom site as a temporary transit area for the housing of homeless persons. This decision was taken on the grounds that there were no immediate alternatives and was further influenced by the political commitment referred elsewhere herein (Milnerton Municipality 1990e).

The pamphlet went on to state that all costs in connection with the transit area, including all infrastructural servicing, would be borne by the Cape Provincial Administration, that squatters would be required to pay for all services at cost, that Telkom would fence off the remaining portion of Marconi Beam to prevent further squatting, that the anticipated duration of the transit area was 18 months, and that the Milnerton Town Council "had been led to believe" that funding for the acquisition of the new land would come from the Cape Provincial Administration. The Municipality indicated that the new site was capable of accommodating approximately 400 shacks, thereby demonstrating that they anticipated future growth, even while arguing the contrary to the ratepayers (Milnerton Municipality 1991a).

Concurrently, the Marconi Beam squatters established an elected committee to represent the community. Confronted with what they perceived as a unilateral action taken without due consultation, the members of the Marconi Beam Committee were undecided about whether to move into the transit area. To assist in the decision, the Committee brought in the Development Action Group (DAG), a progressive non-governmental planning and community advisory organization, as consultants for the community (Development Action Group 1994). After making sure that the Milnerton Municipality would provide essential services such as water and waste removal, DAG advised the dispersed squatters to move into the transit area. The agreement between Milnerton Municipality and the Marconi Beam Committee was made on condition that "a permanent alternative settlement be identified in a participatory process as a matter of urgency" (Development Action Group 1994). The move to the transit area was completed by January 22, 1991 (Table Talk and Mail, February 14, 1991). In line with the agreement, the Milnerton Municipality provided communal bucket toilets, 15 water taps, and gravel roads. The initial costs for the provision of these services was paid by the Cape Provincial Administration. The Milnerton Town Council also concluded an agreement with Marconi Beam's legal representative; the agreement stated that Marconi Beam residents would enter into informal lease agreements for their sites with the Municipality and that they would pay a service charge to cover the costs of cleaning and emptying the pit latrines and water taps and for refuse removal. Sums of 10c/month for site rental ($0.03) and R14.90($4.12) for services were agreed upon (Brooke 1992:2). As in most other Black townships at the time, the Marconi Beam Committee initiated a rent and services boycott which ensured that few people actually paid these charges (see Milnerton Municipality 1992b).

Somewhat earlier, in December of 1990, the Milnerton Town Council and the Cape Provincial Administration had hired a firm of planning consultants to identify possible sites for low-income housing within the MMA. Conforming to the wishes of the Milnerton Town Council, Marconi Beam was specifically excluded as an option. The Milnerton Town Council settled on Du Noon, an area approximately five kilometers to the northeast of Marconi Beam (Figure 2). From the outset, the Marconi Beam Committee had indicated their opposition to
the alternative site identification process as it ignored their wish to remain at Marconi Beam. In early 1991, in an attempt to resolve the issue of a permanent site, the Milnerton Municipality and the Marconi Beam Committee established a Negotiating Forum chaired by a neutral facilitator from the non-governmental Urban Foundation (Chittenden/Urban Foundation 1993:3–4). By the end of 1992, the Forum's negotiations reached an impasse. The Forum then commissioned the Urban Foundation to undertake a socio-economic survey of Marconi Beam that it hoped would provide the information needed to resolve the conflict. The survey of May/June 1993 found that among other things 67 percent of the Marconi Beam residents surveyed (820 out of a possible 1254 households) wanted to remain on Marconi Beam primarily because it was close to their places of employment (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993). At the beginning of 1995, the Milnerton Municipality and the Marconi Beam Civic Association (which replaced the Marconi Beam Committee in October 1992) jointly agreed to a substantial upgrading project. It is meant to provide formal housing for the bulk of the present households at Marconi Beam (although not on the presently occupied portion of the site), with the remainder of the residents moving to Du Noon (see Development Action Group/Seneque, Smit, Maughan-Brown 1993; Development Action Group 1994; Milnerton Action Group 1994).

While the search for an alternative site for the community was underway, Marconi Beam continued to grow. Whereas in August of 1991, there were around 500 shack housing 2000 people (Table Talk and Mail, August 1, 1991), the socio-economic survey of May/June 1993 found 824 households and 2835 people living on the site (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993). This socio-economic survey also provided a wealth of data about the Marconi Beam community: that the average household income was only R576 ($160) per month, that 33 percent of the residents were dependents (over 65 or less than 18 years old), that 47.1 percent of the potentially economically active population were unemployed, that 14.8 percent of households had no visible means of support, and that 18 percent of the economically active residents worked at the Milnerton Race Course (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993). The latter figure highlights that while proximity to the Milnerton Race Course was important for the initial establishment of Marconi Beam, other factors such as the area's relative stability and its proximity to other sites of employment (especially Montague Gardens) have become progressively more important. The socio-economic survey of May/June 1993 also found that the average household size in Marconi Beam was a relatively low 3.4, which is well below the 6.4 found in more established squatter settlements such as Crossroads (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:7). The survey ascribes this to the recency of Marconi Beam's settlement; few households contained extended families and many young children and people over 65 years of age were sent to live with relatives outside the Western Cape owing to the lack of Xhosa-speaking schools (the home language of most Blacks in the Western Cape) and of care facilities for the aged, respectively (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:6–7). Although the survey did not classify the race of residents of Marconi Beam, estimates suggest that around 9 percent are classified as Coloured (School Principal, personal communication, July 21, 1994), a handful as whites (Cape Times, August 8 and 15, 1991), and the remainder as Black.

Services provided to Marconi Beam by the Milnerton Municipality (the cost of which have been borne by the Cape Provincial Administration) have improved since 1990 (Milnerton Municipality 1994c). In 1994, Marconi Beam contained 73 working toilets and 16 communal taps, providing an average of 22 liters of water/head/day for washing, cooking, and drinking (Milnerton Municipality 1994b). Owing to a spate of destructive fires (caused predominantly by heating and lighting methods used in the absence of electricity), 9 fire hydrants have been installed. Roads within the camp have been upgraded, though they remain untarred. One of the major problems for service provision has been the size of the original site layout which was slated to hold approximately 480 sites, not the 900 or so sites currently in use. Another problem is that much of the site has very poor drainage which results in the flooding of streets and shacks during the Cape's wet winter months. Marconi Beam now has one school, with both primary and secondary classes, and two creches (nursery schools) operating within the camp. In all cases, the school buildings are built out of old
metal ship cargo containers donated by business concerns and refashioned into classrooms. During the transition, the schools' budget has been covered by the Department of Education and Training (School Principal, personal communication, July 21, 1994). Despite the establishment of these schools, the socio-economic survey of May/June 1993 found that 47.5 percent of Marconi Beam's children below the age of fifteen years, and 30 percent of Marconi Beam's children below the age of eighteen years, did not attend any type of school (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:iv, 26). In 1993, 55 percent of the community was classified as functionally illiterate (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:27). Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the socio-economic survey of May/June 1993 found that residents chose access to a school as their first community-development priority (Urban Foundation/Chittenden 1993:26).

Social and commercial activities within Marconi Beam have continued to grow. At present the settlement contains a number of churches (housed in shacks), some small convenience stores ("spazas"), a few informal taverns ("shebeens"), and a few specialized informal services such as tailoring, hair care, and shoe repairs. In 1994 a free mobile clinic provided by the Regional Services Council serviced Marconi Beam once a week.

Despite all of these improvements, Marconi Beam remains under-serviced, over-crowded, high in crime, and prone to winter flooding. The Milnerton Town Council's insistence that Marconi Beam was a temporary site surely played a large role in retarding the areas upgrading (see Milnerton Municipality 1991c). The Marconi Beam Civic Association was thus correct in 1993 to remind the Urban Foundation (SANCO Marconi Beam 1993a) that: "The present living conditions are unacceptable to the residents. . . . It is important that immediate action is taken to redress the state of the community."

The Politics of Interaction: The Municipality, the Town Council and Marconi Beam

The Milnerton Municipality pamphlet sent to ratepayers in November 1990 revealed the strategies that the Municipality pursued with respect to Marconi Beam. The Municipality agreed to maintain and extend services to Marconi Beam even as it insisted on the temporary nature of the transit camp and hired consultants to identify an alternative site. When it did extend services, the Council usually did so grudgingly. Although the Milnerton Town Council and the Municipality entered into negotiations with the Marconi Beam Committee (and later the Civic Association) they remained suspicious of these organizations, often commenting on their hidden political agenda or claiming that they were agents of the ANC. These views are readily apparent in a document (Milnerton Municipality 1992e) circulated within the Municipality in response to a meeting with the Marconi Beam community that had ended with a mass walkout:

Is it reasonable to expect emotionally charged and politically manipulated (sic) the bulk of whom are illiterate to have a grasp of the issue without showing them something tangible. . . . The masses have indicated their preference namely to remain on the Marconi Beam Site—Some could be coerced into a move if HOUSING is provided. . . . Was the good attendance not merely a ploy to make a "statement" through staging a walk-out. Someone definitely gave a command of sorts, because the walk-out was simply too spontaneous. . . . Did the level of communication possibly go over the heads of the people. . . .

The Municipality seemed to feel that they were caught in a bind between an indecisive government, an enraged local community, a divided Council, and a newly arrived and assertive squatter population. The Town Clerk (Milnerton Municipality 1991b) captured some of these frustrations: "If the politicians cannot sort out their differences it should not be for the Council or sectors of the Council to continuously have to be the scapegoat for their indecisions. . . . The Municipality and more particularly the Chief Executive of this Municipality have had to endure many insults and much abuse because they have had to act in what they believe to have been the best interests of the community." The Municipal officials, particularly the Town Clerk, and Councilors suffered much abuse at the hands of some Milnerton residents in 1990 and 1991 (see Argus December 14, 1990). Officials within the Municipality were concerned that Milnerton residents perceived the Municipality as favoring the squatters and being indifferent to the wishes of Milnerton residents—a perception they saw as unfair given the pressure placed on them by the Provincial Administration. In a
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letter to the Department of Community Services (Milnerton Municipality 1990c) the Milnerton Town Clerk expressed his frustration: “It is ironic too that such importance attaches to talks with the squatters but when it comes to the residents/ratepayers who have vested interests and who have spent their life’s savings developing a property in which to reside, they almost become an after thought as they cannot be communicated with until arrangements envisaged have in the first instance been broached with the transgressors and their acceptance obtained.”

The Municipality and Council were, in the words of the Mayor, “damned if we do and damned if we don’t” (Northern Argus August 21, 1991). No matter what action they took, it seemed to them that they were unable to satisfy either the squatters or the most vocal Milnerton residents. This tension was compounded by their perceived impotence to act against the squatters. Consider the comments of Milnerton’s Town Clerk to the Member of Parliament representing Milnerton:

It was also clear that unless a tangible carrot to coerce people into relocating could be offered there will be very little prospect of moving them from the Marconi Beam Site. . . . We appreciate that there is no money, but would reiterate that we are negotiating from a position of extreme weakness, given the present political unrest and the general confrontational attitude of the community. . . . (Milnerton Municipality 1992f)

Given the nature of the political transition, the powerlessness of local officials has more than a grain of truth. But whatever their real feelings and motivations, representatives of the Municipality made no serious attempts to remove the squatters, and they continued to negotiate with them and to provide services (albeit often inadequate ones) despite the payment boycott by the Marconi Beam community. The Municipality, caught up in the forces unleashed by the transition, were pushed into compromises with the squatters that were unlikely to have been made at any previous juncture in South Africa’s urban history.

The Reaction of White Milnerton Residents to the Settlement of Marconi Beam

The most vocal opposition to Marconi Beam was articulated initially by the Milnerton Ratepayers Association (MRA), an officially non-political organization whose main goal was to protect the interests of Milnerton property owners. In a 1990 letter to the Town Clerk (Milnerton Ratepayers Association 1990a), MRA accused the Municipality of deliberately misleading the Association about the extent of the squatter problem and the degree of opposition to the settlement and for its failure to take the Association “into confidence about what is officially being done.” An MRA flyer to all residents (Milnerton Ratepayers Association 1990b) summarized the main complaints:

The increase in petty pilfering; breaking into cars; Trespassing on private property and brazenly collecting water from private garden taps; Intimidation of shoppers . . . ; Taking over of the children’s playground in the area; squatter children playing in Koeberg Road which also represents a danger to the children; Shebeens, drug peddlers with accompanying noise and general disorder, which spreads into the residential suburb; The health risk to both squatters and residents as no asepsis facilities exist; Risk of unrest and fires, and Infringement on private individuals’ property rights.

The MRA document went to great pains to emphasize the MRA’s sympathy to the plight of the “underprivileged” and its desire for the provision of an alternative site with adequate facilities outside of the Milnerton Municipal Area. The MRA also accused the Municipality of being “remiss in its duties” and threatened to take the matter up with the Administrator. In a subsequent flyer (Milnerton Ratepayers Association 1990c), the MRA informed the Municipality that it had formed an Action Committee and was considering taking legal action against “officialdom.” The same flyer urged residents to report and lay charges “in all incidences of trespassing, begging, disturbance of the peace, intimidation, aggressive behavior, as well as theft, assault etc. by calling the Milnerton Police.” The MRA also alleged that Marconi Beam was an orchestrated politically motivated land invasion by the ANC/UDF who were trucking in people at a rate of between 20 and 50 per day (Tygerburger December 6, 1990).

By July of 1991, the MRA relaxed its position somewhat. An information bulletin to residents (Milnerton Ratepayers Association 1991a) declared that the MRA accepted the need to find alternative informal accommodation for the existing residents of Marconi Beam within the Municipal area. The MRA was adamant, however, that the new site should not cater to any new arrivals; those should be housed outside of the Municipal area (see Milnerton Ratepay
ers Association 1991b). The MRA also emphasized that “the issue is non-racial, as this Executive has no objections to anyone buying into any ward at market prices.” Thus while the MRA was vocally opposed to low-income Black presence in the neighborhood, it never publicly opposed residential desegregation. Indeed, when reviewing the stated opposition to Marconi Beam, few overtly racist comments can be found (for some exceptions, see the Annexure attached to Milnerton Ratepayers Association 1991b). Most of the white opposition was expressed instead in terms of fears of increasing crime rates and social disorder and decreasing property values. In sum, the scorn of white residents was mostly directed at the Municipality and Councilors whom they felt had lied to them, betrayed their interests, and were incompetent.

The fears expressed above seem unfounded. According to the Milnerton police, while crime in the suburb did increase, the increase was not out of line with national trends; nor was there a correlation between increased crime in Milnerton and the establishment of Marconi Beam (Milnerton Police, personal communication, June 21, 1994; Northern Argus March 25, 1992). The same holds true for property values within Milnerton which, thus far, have followed general regional patterns. There is, however, some anecdotal evidence from realtors who note that a few houses closest to Marconi Beam have proved more difficult to sell (personal communication, August 10, 1994). With this one exception, it seems fair to say that Marconi Beam has had very little direct impact on Milnerton’s property values.

The controversy over the proposed resettlement of the Marconi Beam squatters to Du Noon highlighted another division, this time between the residents of Milnerton and Table View, with the latter seeing the choice of Du Noon as an attempt by the Milnerton Town Council to foist the perceived social problems associated with the informal settlement on them. This controversy exposed longstanding grievances harbored by many of the residents of Table View toward the Milnerton Town Council, which they saw as favoring Milnerton’s interests at their expense. It is thus somewhat ironic that from 1992 onward, the heated debates between the white residents of Milnerton and Table View over the location of squatters in the MMA highlights the fact that residents had by this time accepted that the squatters could not be evicted from the MMA.

Yet throughout this process, most residents of Milnerton responded with apathy rather than activism. Even those residents who initially had been most active in their opposition to Marconi Beam soon adjusted to the new realities and learned to live with them, precisely because the squatter settlement had so little effect on their daily lives.

**Marconi Beam: The Politics of Representation and Exclusion**

The members of the Marconi Beam community were not passive observers of the debate over their fate. The community was represented by the Civic Association (colloquially known as “the Civic”) which engaged the aid of professional, legal, and political organizations. The extent of community support for the Residents Committee and later the Civic is, however, a matter of dispute (see Brooke 1992:3). According to the Chittenden/Urban Foundation report (1993:14), the Civic seemed more responsive and representative than the old Committee. The report noted that residents still “feel that the Civic does not consult or communicate as often as necessary; that the same people appear to be singled out for negotiations by the NGOs and the Municipality, further isolating ordinary residents. This has led to feelings of suspicion and ill will.” DAG offers the rationale (Development Action Group 1994) that:

- it was difficult for the Civic to keep organization going while not being able to make significant headway in the land struggle. . . . In general community organisations weak in (sic) and very few people attend general meetings. This can be attributed to the attrition during two years in which living conditions have worsened without hope or direction for change being clear, as well as the fact that there are no widely respected and prominent community leaders. There are small pockets of organization in the Civic and ANC which do carry influence.

One consequence of the Civic’s understandable lack of technical knowledge and administrative capacity has been that DAG has increasingly acted as a secretariat on the Civic’s behalf. This has caused both resentment and suspicion among the Milnerton negotiators (a senior member of the Milnerton Negotiating
Forum, personal and confidential communication, July 26, 1994; Milnerton Municipality 1992c) who frequently charge that DAG rather than the Civic have formulated negotiating strategies and policies on behalf of the community.

Although the Civic participated in negotiations about the community’s future, it had no formal representation on the Milnerton Town Council and until recently the community had no right to vote in local or national elections. From these inauspicious circumstances, the community successfully managed to resist all attempts at removal and it gained a position of relative strength vis-à-vis the Municipality. For example, when in 1992 the Municipality tried to evict some members of the community who had erected unauthorized shacks, the Municipality was forced to back down in the face of concerted legal and community opposition (Milnerton Municipality 1992g). The Civic (and their consultants) also took the lead in demanding better facilities from the Municipality (SANCO Marconi Beam 1993b). On June 16, 1993, about 200 residents marched on the municipal buildings and demanded better facilities for Marconi Beam (Table Talk and Mail July 1, 1993). This march together with the threat of further “mass action” caused members of the Milnerton community to put pressure on the Council to start resolving the problems at Marconi Beam. The threat of “mass action” together with the vocal objections by Table View residents to the planned establishment of Du Noon provided the catalyst for the formation of the Milnerton Negotiating Forum. The Forum, made up of ratepayers’ associations, the Marconi Beam Civic Association, political organizations, business people, and so forth, became an important vehicle for the eventual decisions to accept the right of residents to remain on an upgraded Marconi Beam site and also to develop an informal settlement at Du Noon.

The residents of Marconi Beam were greeted initially by much hostility from the Milnerton residents and by harassment from the police. While harassment and hostility have diminished, the general indifference of most Milnerton residents to the squallid living conditions at Marconi Beam persists. Charitable acts such as Christmas parties, the establishment of a soup kitchen, and the donations of food and blankets notwithstanding, Milnerton residents have not encouraged the authorities to provide Marconi Beam with facilities such as electricity or tarred roads. Conversely, Marconi Beam residents were not entirely blameless for this lack of sympathy. Highly publicized events such as the occasional stoning of vehicles on the highway (one of the cars that was stoned belonged to someone running the soup kitchen which resulted in the closing of that facility; see Northern Argus August 19, 1992) and the stabbing of a white cyclist which was cheered on by some Marconi Beam residents (Table Talk and Mail June 2, 1994) have lessened the sympathy of many Milnerton residents.9

The Marconi Beam community together with the municipality have also actively discouraged further migration into the area (Argus August 18, 1994). There is also evidence of landlordism within the community, with some sites rented out for all or parts of the year. The residents of Marconi Beam were not slow it seems to protect their position of relative privilege vis-à-vis other informal settlements in the Cape. Nor, as the signs of incipient landlordism suggest, were some members of the community adverse to exploiting the scarcity of well-located accommodations for Blacks for their own financial gain.

While the Marconi Beam Civic and the residents of Marconi Beam continued pushing for more and better facilities, they did not make a concerted drive to force Milnerton to share theirs. Thus, Marconi Beam residents agitated for their own school until one was established in the area. This school, which currently has four classrooms accommodating 348 pupils ranging in age from 7–22 years (Mahlente, Elda, School Principal, personal communication July 21, 1994), was established despite the presence of an underutilized primary school located just under 1.5 kilometers away and an underutilized High School 2.5 kilometers away (see Table 1). That said, the four already existing schools in Milnerton were not really accessible to Marconi Beam. All had opted for Model C status (South African Institute of Race Relations 1994:695) in 1992—a status that while allowing these formerly all white state schools to start admitting black pupils, also permitted the schools to set high fees and establish rigorous entrance exams which prevented “undesirable” children from entering the schools.

The local schools, with the notable excep-
tion of Zonnekus, have used their Model C status to prevent attendance of children from Marconi Beam. Seamount, for example, initially accepted two children from Marconi Beam but had them transferred to Zonnekus because "their English was too weak" (Goosen, Nikki, School Secretary, personal communication, June 15, 1994). The schools also continued to raise annual fees despite a shortage of pupils. In 1994 Milnerton High refused admission to children from Marconi Beam on the grounds that they did not meet academic requirements. The Deputy Headmaster commented that we are "not compelled to take kids" even though they were the only high school in the area (personal communication, July 26, 1994). One can only guess why Zonnekus, a predominantly Afrikaans school with the most conservative reputation of the schools in the area, has been the most receptive to children from Marconi Beam. The threat to Zonnekus's survival caused by rapidly declining enrollments since the early 1980s surely played a role in this decision (see Table 1). The school principal's welcoming attitude to low-income pupils of all races also played an important part; he investigated ways of making the school more accessible to low-income families, advising parents of the availability of state subsidies, and simplifying the school uniform so as to lower these costs for parents (for example, school blazers were abolished) (personal communication, June 14, 1994).

The Marconi Beam Civic mounted no campaigns to force any of Milnerton's schools to lower entrance requirements or fees. The Civic instead pushed for separate (and inferior) facilities in Marconi Beam. The Marconi Beam school principal (personal communication, July 21, 1994) offered two explanations for this decision: first, because the majority of children at Marconi Beam are Xhosa-speaking, they could not have coped in schools that teach in English, Afrikaans, or both; second, it was better to have a school in the settlement because crossing the main road was dangerous for the students. The first point, while valid, could have been overcome through the provision of Xhosa-speaking teachers in the existing schools; and the second could have been overcome by the provision of a pedestrian crossing (in any event, children cross the road all the time). A more compelling reason for the Civic's lack of action may have been that the local school principal—who has a vested interest in maintaining a separate school—was then the head of the Civic.

Similarly, during the transition, the modern Milnerton library had no members from Marconi Beam (Library, confidential personal communication, May 24, 1994). While in theory nothing stopped residents of Marconi Beam from joining, the library did not go out of its way to recruit members from the community. Nor did the Civic encourage residents to join. The low level of literacy in Marconi Beam and the fact that the library has few books in Xhosa also contributed to the lack of library members from Marconi Beam. It is likely that only pressure from the Marconi Beam community will effect changes in the library's book-buying priorities.

In practical terms, the residents of Marconi Beam were excluded from the most important social facilities in Milnerton throughout the transition period. Most surprising perhaps is the weak pressure that they exerted on Milnerton to facilitate access to its facilities. While the Civic may have thought it best to wait until the conclusion of national political negotiations, there is little evidence to support this view. Indeed when the Civic led the march on the Municipal buildings demanding better services, action followed almost immediately. That such marches and threats of mass action did not occur over access to local schools points to a conflict of interests between the Civic's leadership and community interests. In this regard, it is thus not surprising that the latest plans for upgrading Marconi Beam still make provision for separate educational facilities (Development Action Group 1994; Planning Partnership 1994). Nevertheless, the community and the Civic have joined arms in fighting off attempts to evict residents from the site or to entice them to another site. These victories have enabled Marconi Beam residents to remain on a prime piece of urban land which is close to jobs and adjacent to a well-serviced middle-class neighborhood. While this in itself is a great victory, the residents of Marconi Beam continue to be economically deprived and socially and politically isolated from the surrounding suburb.

**Conclusion**

The weakness of the state during South Africa's political transition provided a window for a small minority of urban poor to seize prime
Land previously off limits to them. These seizures have, in a number of cases, resulted in the establishment of informal settlements within affluent previously white suburbs such as Milnerton, Hout Bay, and Noordhoek. While local events such as strikes and layoffs provided the initial catalyst for these settlements, their viability within prosperous communities hinged on the more relaxed political climate of the transition. Perhaps the most crucial condition for the eventual success of these seizures was the presence of vacant, state-owned land within their Municipal areas, which could be allocated to the squatters, first as transit areas, and then as places for permanent settlement. In each case, the initial establishment of these settlements provoked considerable opposition from ratepayer organizations and local white residents. While these opponents expressed public sympathy for the plight of the squatters, they also wanted them resettled outside of their municipal areas. But in these cases, the power of the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome was blunted by the nature of South Africa’s political transition.

In Milnerton (and in the other cases mentioned above), the perceived illegitimacy of all government structures and the segregated nature of the suburbs in question clearly worked to the benefit of the squatters. In such circumstances any large-scale eviction of squatters was bound to have both racial and political implications, something that both the central government and local municipalities were desperate to avoid. It is thus ironic that the establishment of more legitimate government structures together with the desegregation of suburbs are likely to undercut the bargaining position that many squatter settlements enjoyed during the transition. As the case of Marconi Beam illustrates, it was the politics of the transition that enabled the urban poor to maintain their presence within an affluent area such as Milnerton. Yet these squatters have been largely excluded from important social, educational, and political institutions within the white area. The racial nature of local government structures has also excluded Blacks from the official town councils in these areas. In the case of Milnerton/Marconi Beam, ten white Milnerton town councillors—elected by a small proportion of the registered voters in 1988—continued to make decisions on all issues affecting Marconi Beam long after major political and constitutional changes have occurred in the central government. Nor necessarily will the first non-racial local government elections have a major impact on small isolated communities such as Marconi Beam. A provision in the interim constitution requires a town council’s budget to be passed by at least a two-thirds majority, thus ensuring that vested interests will retain considerable power over fiscal allocations (see South African Institute of Race Relations 1994:556).

The experiences of Milnerton and Marconi Beam pose larger questions about the future form of the South African city. The distinctive spatial structure of the segregated South African city has long been a subject of debate among South African geographers (Crush 1992). Davies (1976; 1981) has persuasively argued that the spatial structure of South African cities, though related to a variant of colonial cities, was distinctive owing to the application of urban apartheid. Given the types of urban changes outlined in this paper, however, one must question whether this is still the case. As Dewar (1992:244) has pointed out, the three most important spatial patterns of South African cities—low-density sprawl, urban fragmentation, and urban separation—can be found in many Third-World cities. It is likely that South African cities over time will increasingly resemble cities in other areas of the developing world. This implies that, notwithstanding the government’s laudable commitment to ensure that in the future all South Africans will have access to formal housing, we might expect to see the continued proliferation of informal settlements.

It is likely therefore that South Africa’s urban form increasingly will be shaped by the market-based dynamics that prevail in most capitalist countries. In such a scenario, squatters will continue to occupy the lowest rung on South Africa’s new non-racial urban hierarchy. Less certain is the attitude of South Africa’s new non-racial elite as it settles into the desegregating, formerly white suburbs. Will this new elite tolerate the establishment of informal settlements such as Marconi Beam in these areas? I have my doubts. Under the new democratic urban regime, local governments are unlikely to face the same political constraints that confronted Milnerton and, given their more powerful position to deal with land occupations in their areas, it is as unlikely that they will ignore the wishes of their ratepayers to the degree that occurred in Milnerton.
To be sure, some squatting on the urban fringes and within designated townships will continue to be tolerated, but it is hard to imagine that affluent suburbs will accept land occupations. The establishment of other Marconi Beams in the new South Africa is doubtful indeed.

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Notes

3. In this paper the term Black (uppercase) excludes Coloureds and Indians. The term black (lowercase) is used to include all race groups not classified as white.
4. Many of the areas of greatest resistance to these informal settlements have been desegregating suburbs or relatively more affluent Coloured or Indian areas (see Sapire 1991; Soni 1993).
5. The small Indian population, estimated at 25,023 in 1990, is included within this figure (Cape Town City Council 1992).
6. I am most grateful to Professor Wilmot James who headed the Group Areas Research Project at the University of Cape Town for making available to me the data collected as part of this Project, and to Clive Moses a researcher on the Project for sharing both his work in progress based on the early data and his insights on the data-collection process. This study contains data on property transfers up until September 1992. There is as yet no systematic study of the extent of residential desegregation in Cape Town during the transition period.
7. In 1995 $1 = R3.60 (approximately).
8. The United Democratic Front (UDF) was an umbrella organization of nominally ANC-supporting community organizations and Civic Associations.
9. In the stabbing case, two suspects were apprehended and handed over to the police by members of the camp's ANC Youth League (Northern Argus June 8, 1994).

References


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——. 1990b. Notes of a Meeting Attended by Representatives of the Cape Turf Club and the Milnerton Municipality with the MEC of the Department of Community Services of the Provincial Administration Held in Cape Town on November 7, 1990.

——. 1990c. Minutes if (sic) the Special Meeting of the Council Held in the Council Chamber, Pienaar Road, Milnerton, on Tuesday October 30, 1990 at 17:00.


——. 1992a. Minutes of a Meeting Held with the Marconi Beam Community on December 8, 1992 in The Milnerton Library.

——. 1992b. Minutes of The Meeting with the Marconi Beam Transit Area Committee Held in the Activities Room at the Library, Pienaar Road, Milnerton on Tuesday May 5, 1992 at 18H10.

——. 1992c. Minutes of the Meeting held between the Negotiating Panel and Members of the Marconi Beam Transit Area on Thursday August 27, 1992 at 18:00.

——. 1992d. Minutes of the Meeting Held with the Marconi Beam Community on December 8, 1992 in the Milnerton Library.


——. 1992g. Marconi Beam Squatters. Letter from
Town Clerk to Development Action Group, October 9.


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The urban policies and processes during the political transition (1990–1994) in South Africa were more than a continuation of those employed in the late 1980s. These new policies together with the nature of the political transition created the conditions for two important changes in South Africa’s urban environment: 1) the *de jure* desegregation of some formerly segregated urban areas; and 2) the seizure by small numbers of the urban poor of prime land within some previously “white” suburbs. This paper investigates these changes through a case study of the establishment of an informal settlement within a “white” suburb in Cape Town.

In 1990 black squatters erected shacks on Marconi Beam, a piece of state-owned land within the white suburb of Milnerton. While these squatters managed to maintain their foothold in the area, they gained little access to the suburb’s social and educational facilities and they were excluded from official local government institutions for the duration of the national political transition (and beyond). I argue that it was only through the unique politics of the transition that local governments—largely in defiance of the wishes of their white voters—permitted settlements such as Marconi Beam to remain in these locations. As class replaces race as the driving force behind South Africa’s city structure, and as new democratically elected local governments assert more control over the urban environment, it is unlikely that relatively affluent desegregating suburbs will tolerate similar informal settlements. **Key Words:** apartheid, Cape Town, desegregation, informal settlement, South Africa, squatters.

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