

**White poverty in post-apartheid South Africa: The case of West Bank
in East London**

by

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**Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Social
Anthropology) at the Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic
Research, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of
Fort Hare.**

2014

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Declaration

I, Octavia Sibanda, declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at this or any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Fort Hare, East London.

Signature

Date

Dedication

To my family: for all their patience, love and sacrifice.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the question of poor Whites in the South African context using the case study of a predominantly working-class suburb of West Bank in East London. This study is written within the context of a global and countrywide recession, and within a dominant discourse that portrays White poverty as non-existent and that views White people as predominantly wealthy and 'normal'. Within this discourse, the benefits and privileges extended to White people during the apartheid era are viewed as having transferred property to Whites, whilst dispossessing Blacks. As the White middle-class retains and expands its dominant position in the economy in contemporary South Africa, poor Whites have become overshadowed, invisible and unwanted. This ethnographic exploration focuses on the existence of poor Whites that dwell on the margins of society. The existence of poor Whites is severely stigmatised because it contradicts the perfect images of 'normal' Whites who are not poor. As such, poor Whites suffer from being stereotyped as lazy, drunkards, abnormal, dishonest and trash. This study seeks to understand the social meanings of White poverty and offer a clear interpretation of why it remains invisible and stigmatised.

This study details the historical background of poor Whites in order to shed light on how their negative identity, which has been inherited from post-apartheid South Africa, evolved. White poverty is a genuinely feared condition amongst White people as it carries distinct negative connotations. As such, the subject of poor Whites has for a long time been a sensitive issue. Historically, concerted efforts to deal with and cover up this 'White shame' were made in order to shield it from the public gaze. If Whites had been allowed to fall into this abhorrent category of poor Whites, what then would have differentiated them from poor Blacks? The colonial and the apartheid mentality influenced the diagnosis and the treatment of poor Whites. I argue that, although there were measures put in place to deal with the plight of poor Whites, their poverty was not eliminated. The poor Whites during that period were uplifted through a wide range of social nets that kept the shame of poverty contained. Job reservations, priority education, and subsidised housing kept White poverty under control. This strategy

generated a 'normal' image of White lives to the outside world in order to justify White domination and White privileges.

Historically, making Whites appear as different and having privileged access to a range of social capital reflected a picture of life filled with abundance. However, the collapse of racial-Fordism, de-industrialisation, the end of racial-based governance and the neo-liberal economic framework in South Africa has re-introduced the poor Whites back into the dreaded reality of White poverty. While it is historically acknowledged that Whites dominated the social landscape in the South African context through the processes of colonialism, settlement and apartheid, thereby leaving a large foot print in the economy and politics, a section of Whites (not so privileged) has continued to exist alongside the mainstream White communities. I therefore argue that in contemporary South Africa the experiences of poor Whites who have been dispossessed through economic fluctuations and changes in socio-political make-up of South Africa have not been fully explored.

In the case of East London, the contemporary experiences of poor Whites have overridden the dreams of coastal Whiteness driven by the previous industrial expansion and accumulation of White difference and privilege, and have pushed poor Whites into renegotiating their lives within the rapidly integrating poor sections of previously mono White suburbs. The poor Whites who are mainly working-class casualties have had to adjust and invent creative ways of existing within the informal sections of the economy. It is noted in this dissertation that little pity is given to poor Whites; in fact their condition carries shame. As such, poor Whites have been marked as 'different' and referred to as the 'Other'. The deliberate social exclusion of poor Whites from normal life processes is also a reflection of the boundaries that have been created by the formation of social and cultural fences targeted at keeping out perceived 'social deviants'. Those excluded from participating in what is considered to be 'normal', such as having a job and money and subscribing to middle-class values, have negative labels affixed to them and they therefore carry an identity of rejection, and are the new wounded citizens. Wacquant (2008) in his theory of advanced marginality explains that this state of affairs is common

in many urban areas that have or are de-industrialising. I argue that the term 'poor White' indicates that its existence is in opposition to the normal/middle-class values and that attracts castigation and despise.

This study also seeks to close the literature gaps on poor Whites. Anthropological research that links White poverty to deindustrialisation and neo-liberalism is limited, and smaller cities like East London have not drawn much inquiry. The main aim of this work has, therefore, been to explore and understand the marginal voices of the poor Whites within a context where their very existence is questionable. Drawing from empirical data gathered through ethnography, in-depth interviews and observations, I have constructed a narrative of poor Whites, detailing their experiences in contemporary South Africa. There is an untold story of White poverty which this study seeks to highlight. The dissertation concludes by discussing the paradoxes of citizenship as reflected in the lives of poor Whites.

Acknowledgements

My greatest gratitude is extended to Professor L. J. Bank for assisting me in each and every stage of this dissertation. Even when the process was at times tough and challenging, he encouraged me to hang-on believing in my potential to accomplish this laborious task. I appreciate the immense effort he put into this work. The constructive feedback I received from him developed me intellectually and I will never be the same again. This would not have been achieved without Prof. Bank's patience, understanding and trust in my work. May God bless you, Prof; I sincerely appreciate all your efforts throughout this work.

I am grateful for the funding I received from the Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research to conduct this study and the supervisor-linked bursary I got from the University of Fort Hare through Professor L.J. Bank. Thank you to Professor Gary Minkley for assisting me in the initial stages of this work. I owe appreciation to the Dean of Research, Professor G. de Wet, for the GMRDC funding. Thank you to Rina Flanagan and William Awusi for awarding me 'Govan Mbeki' supervisor-linked bursaries, fee waivers and financial support to attend all relevant conferences. I also acknowledge the FHISER family for all their support. All 2009 FHISER students are greatly appreciated for the academic atmosphere that prevailed at the Institute; it was real fun to discuss my initial ideas with an amazing group of PhD students. Finally, like we used to say 'the road has come to an end' and I say thank you to all of you. A special thank you goes to the Assistant Research Manager at FHISER, Nkosazana 'MaNko', for keeping me motivated and smiling throughout this study through friendly administrative support. Thanks to Dr Teresa Connor for editing the initial draft of this work and for being supportive throughout this study. I also thank my second editor, Brian Carlson for going through this work. I extend thanks to Dr Luvuyo, Laura, Shasha and Adam for all their assistance. The fieldwork assistance received from Noluto, Tendesai and Francis is greatly appreciated. I also acknowledge the Anthropology Southern Africa Association for all the stimulating ideas that were exchanged at the annual conferences. It was a wonderful experience to be among such an inspiring group.

My special thanks go to Mariette Lotter and her family for all the social events that took place at their home. They made me feel at home away from home. I also thank the East London Librarians for always being willing to assist me with a smile. Thanks to Karen at Xerox for all her printing services.

A special thank you is extended to my husband and best friend, Francis, for all his intellectual and moral support and sacrifice. To my children, thank you for waiting for me patiently as I spent long hours at the office in order to attain this qualification. I also thank my parents, who always encouraged me to study further and believed in my potential to reach greater heights. I thank my sisters, Innocencia and Anoldis, for always stepping in when I needed their assistance. All family members that played various roles in this study, I appreciate and thank you. To my friends in different countries, thank you for the emails, phone calls and whatsApp messages of encouragement.

I thank all the participants in this research. Without their involvement, this work would have been impossible. It is my hope that this work will make a difference in the lives of many people, especially to the poor and vulnerable.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Pictures	xii
List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables	xiv
List of Abbreviations	xv
Chapter One	1
Whiteness, poverty and the city	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The city of East London	3
1.3 Creation and consolidation of West Bank	9
1.4 Access to the study area.....	15
1.5 Profile of West Bank community	19
1.6 Initial encounters.....	23
1.7 The invisibility of White poverty	25
1.8 The Rise of Whiteness Studies	31
1.9 Whites and anthropological studies in South Africa	34
1.10 Urban anthropology and other studies of East London	38
1.11 Anthropology of urbanism	45
1.12 Conclusion	47
1.13 Outline of Chapters	47
Chapter Two	50
Historicising White poverty	50
2.1 Introduction	50
2.2 Who are poor Whites?	53
2.3 The Carnegie enquiry.....	58
2.4 Apartheid implementation	62
2.5 The colour of poverty	65
2.6 Conclusion	70

Chapter Three.....	71
Reversing the gaze: The challenges of cross-racial fieldwork	71
3.1 Introduction	71
3.2 Crossing the boundary line	72
3.3 Observations.....	81
3.4 The conversations.....	85
3.5 Ethical procedures	87
3.6 Language	88
3.7 Historical and archival information	89
3.8 Analysis of Data	90
3.9 Conclusion	90
Chapter Four	92
The changing fortunes of the White working-class.....	92
4.1 Introduction	92
4.2 Industrial nostalgia	93
4.3 ‘The factory gave us jobs’	96
4.4 Job turbulence	97
4.5 Failing to make ends meet	99
4.6 Coming to terms with industrialisation meltdown	104
4.7 Phase One: Growth and Expansion.....	105
4.7.1 Understanding racial-Fordism in South Africa.....	106
4.8 Phase Two: Consolidation	110
4.9 Phase Three: Collapse.....	112
4.10 Post-Fordist East London and neo-liberalism	117
4.11 Conclusion	120
Chapter Five	122
From White community to melting pot?	122
5.1 Introduction	122
5.2 A place called ‘home’	123
5.3 Places of limited opportunities	128
5.4 Spatial segregation	130

5.5 Reversal of White space	134
5.6 The 'intoxicated suburb'	138
5.7 Melting away of suburb dignity	141
5.8 Urban racial spatial integration: changing patterns?	143
5.9 Failure of urban residential integration?	147
5.10 Conclusion	148
Chapter Six	150
Surviving outside the formal economy	150
6.1 Introduction	150
6.2 The 'formal and informal'	154
6.2.1 Participation as exclusion	157
6.2.2 Informal participation as protest and exit	160
6.3 The formations of the informal economy in West Bank	162
6.3.1 State social welfare grants	162
6.3.2 Women and their struggles	163
6.3.3 'Down and out!'	164
6.4 Non-governmental organisations and religion	166
6.5 Conclusion	167
Chapter Seven	169
Entrapment and poor White stigma	169
7.1 Introduction	169
7.2 Spatial entrapment and exit in West Bank	171
7.3 Feelings of nostalgia and despondency	176
7.4 The concept of stigma	179
7.5 The trap of poverty	182
7.6 Poverty, shame and social alienation	186
7.7 Conclusion	198
Chapter Eight	200
Poor Whites and paradoxes of citizenship	200
8.1 Introduction	200
8.2 Post-apartheid citizenship in South Africa	201

8.3 Right to the city and insurgent citizenship	205
8.4 Wounded citizenship	208
References	215
Appendices	232
Appendix 1: Cocobana structures	232
Appendix 2: Population of the Municipal Area of East London 1875-1967.	235
Appendix 3: Race and employment in East London in 1960.....	236
Appendix 4: BCMM Population Distribution	237
Appendix 5: Some of the Industries that shut down/ retrenched in East London	238

List of Pictures

Picture 1: A backyard caravan in West Bank.....	136
Picture 2: 'Competing for space': home and garbage.....	190
Picture 3: A dilapidated house in Cocobana.....	232
Picture 4: A tin house in Cocobana.....	233
Picture 5: Derelict yard in Cocobana.....	234

List of Figures

TOC \h \z \c "Figure" HYPERLINK \l "_Toc345314266"Figure 1: Map of South Africa.....xiv

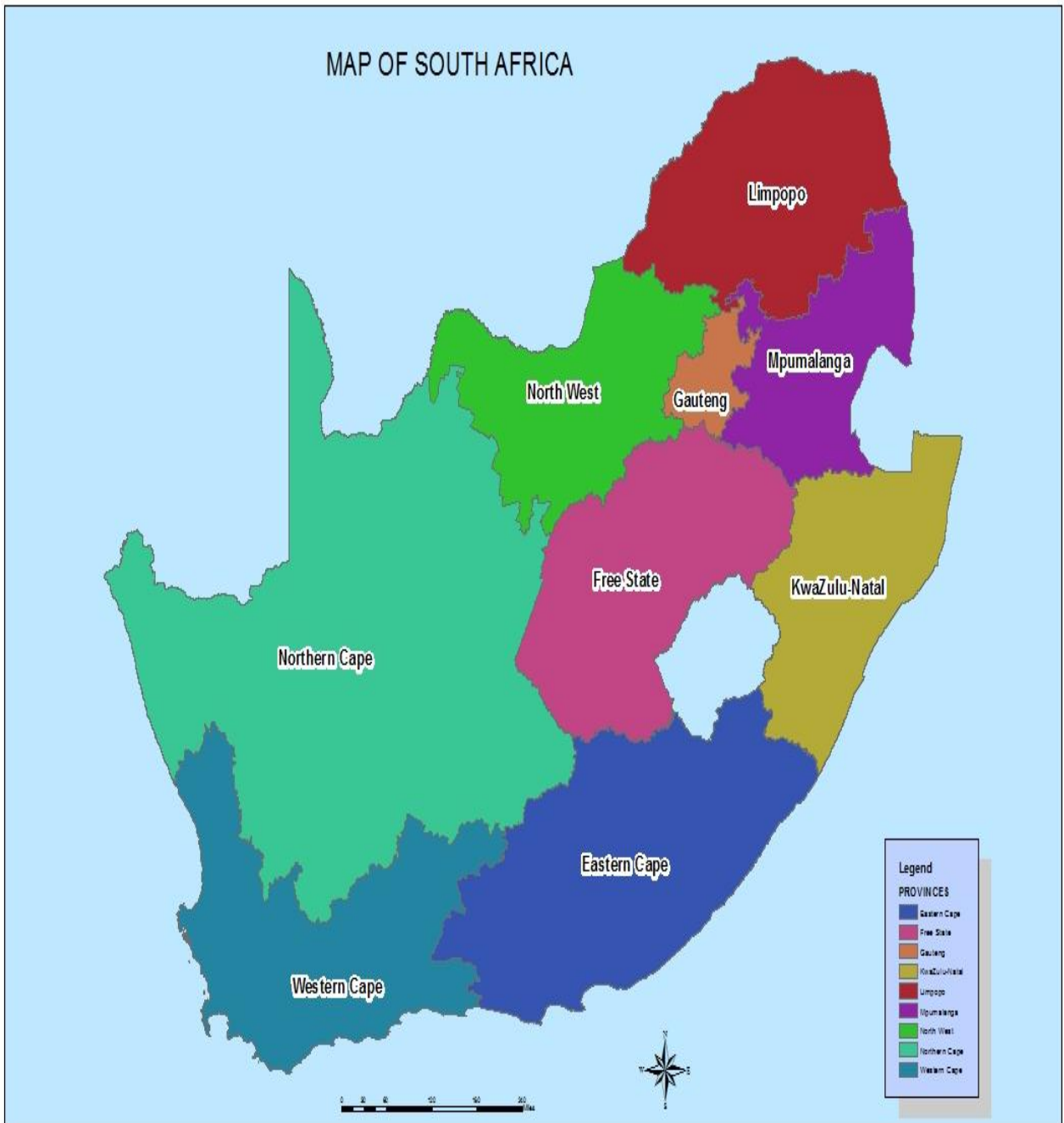
List of Tables

Table 1: Age distribution by population group in Ward 46.....	20
Table 2: Individual monthly income by population group in West Bank.....	21
Table 3: Monthly household income by population group in West Bank.....	22
Table 4: Average cost of rental properties in East London in 2012.....	137

List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth leader
ASNA	Anthropology Southern Africa
BCM	Buffalo City Municipality
BCMM	Buffalo City Metro Municipality
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
BNG	Breaking New Ground
CDC	Ciskei Development Corporation
EC	Eastern Cape
ECDC	Eastern Cape Development Corporation
EL	East London
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PEU	Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RIDP	Regional Industrial Development Programme
TDC	Transkei Development Corporation

Figure 1: Map of South Africa



Source: BCMM GIS Unit, (2013)

Figure 2: Map of the Eastern Cape



Source: BCMM GIS Unit, (2013)

Figure 3: Map of East London



Source: BCMM GIS Unit, (2013)

Chapter One

Whiteness, poverty and the city

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is an ethnographic exploration of poor White lives in post-apartheid South Africa. It is centred on the conceptualisation of poor Whites as both 'invisible' and the stigmatised 'Other' in this contemporary period. It is a narrative on the experiences, treatment, and struggles of poor Whites within a neo-liberal environment. The structural changes in the economy have not been fully linked with the condition of White poverty in post-apartheid South Africa. The general trend has been to homogenise white privilege and experiences, thereby alienating and stigmatising poor Whites. This study seeks to understand the dynamics that have led to the re-surfacing of White poverty in the post-apartheid period, which has also turned this subject into a contested issue.

White poverty has a long history in South Africa as it was a topical subject in the twentieth century leading to various policy interventions specifically to address this issue. In this study, I adopt the term 'White poverty', a concept which historically distinguished between the condition of poverty as experienced by Whites (who were at that time regarded as superior to other races) and Blacks, an African native population that was perceived as inferior. However, the condition of poverty as experienced by Blacks in South Africa has never been referred to as 'Black poverty' thereby highlighting the urgency illuminated by poverty when experienced by Whites. A White person experiencing poverty was historically referred to as a 'poor White', a term that has endured the test of time. The term also points to the alarm and anxiety triggered amongst other Whites by a White person experiencing poverty. This term has been and is still being used in an ironic way that drifts from sympathy to shame and disgust, for a White person was historically positioned as being above the condition of poverty through socio-economical and political domination. Such a perspective has contributed

to the complexities and contradictions in the contemporary discourse regarding race and poverty, especially in South Africa. Using the case study of West Bank in East London, this ethnographic exploration explores White people's lived understanding and experiences of poverty as felt by affected individuals and as viewed by others distant from the condition within the urban milieu.

White poverty has been described as a condition that characterises White people who have failed to meet certain standards seen as the benchmark for their racial category, mainly by failing to command lives deemed fit both economically and socially for a White person. This cap on what a White person ought to be has historical origins, having been an active discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It was during that period that White poverty, a condition which characterised Whites with a compromised socio-economic standing, was addressed. The term 'White poverty' - a condition, and 'poor Whites' - a person suffering from White poverty, were widely used historically in South Africa and their existence have stretched over to this contemporary period. It is, however, important to note that the usage of these terms was also common in America. In South Africa, though, they occupied a significant socio-economic and political role within a context where skin colour was used as a variable to demarcate between different racial groups. It was during this early period that White poverty became perceived as an external condition that distorted the ideal image of a White person, thereby necessitating urgent interventions to manage the condition.

The sprouting of White poverty and poor White discourse in post-apartheid South Africa has illuminated various forms of debate which have mainly centred on the invisibility of White poverty, the shame it carries, the comparative racial poverty 'talk' and the denial that such a condition even exists. This study, therefore, explores the concept of White poverty in post-apartheid South Africa in order to understand the evolving meanings attached to the condition, and how these have shaped various perceptions about the identity and citizenship of poor White South Africans.

1.2 The city of East London

The city of East London is located on the eastern seaboard of South Africa (Bank, 2011:20). According to Tankard (1990:23) East London was founded in April 1847 as a port to serve the troops in what was to become the British Kaffraria during the later stages of the 7th Frontier war, also known as the war of the Axe. It has been noted that East London expanded in 1870 and 1880 because of the boom in wool prices (Bank, 2011:20). It also blossomed into a trade centre, with an expansion of trading through agricultural exports of goods such as wool and hides (Bank, 2011; Minkley, 1994). West Bank became the first residential area for Whites; then in 1849 a separate location for Blacks was established (Tankard, 1990). These locations were established to provide cheap labour for industries. West Bank in this early period became a typical model location with labourers residing in municipal properties and working in factories and firms and fishing establishments. In 1848 East London was annexed to the Cape Colony which already had well developed trade mechanisms such as customs. This relationship lasted until 1857 when East London was annexed back to British Kaffraria.

The early settlement in West Bank originally accommodated English speaking merchants. West Bank became the first settlement that gave birth to East London which then expanded from there on. The constant outbreak of wars, however, shaped the town and impacted on its development. It has been observed that the Anglo-Boer war - which began on the 11th of October 1899 and ended in 1902 - had far reaching implications (Tankard, 1990; Klausen, 1997) for the burgeoning cities of the Eastern Cape. The effects of the war impacted on the agricultural production on farms and this pushed the rural based White population into the cities to seek a living. The cities could not absorb everyone into their economies, leading to the deterioration of the poor Whites that had migrated in search of greener pastures.

By 1874, there was a sizable Black population in East London but their history was characterised by continued relocation in order to meet the changing demands of White settlement (Tankard, 1990:350). Already at that time, racism was entrenched within the

social system and the treatment of different population groups followed that pattern. As such, Blacks were discriminated against and seen as different and inferior to Whites. Above all, Blacks were perceived as a threat to Whites in various ways; for instance in competing for jobs. It was during these early days that segregation became part and parcel of the East London society.

These early racist trends indicate that segregation and discrimination in East London began way before the Group Areas Act of 1950. Nel (1991) attributed this discrimination in East London to the military dictates and its location in the troubled area of the old Eastern Cape frontier. Even when the administration of the town was put under civilian administration, discrimination was prioritised and justified as a way of dealing with Asian commercial competition and Black settlement. By the year 1873, East London was given a municipal status, and in the White controlled council segregation was entrenched. The town developed as a trade centre and this saw the prioritisation of merchants (Nel, 1991). Segregation was now being justified on two bases: the concern for public health and Asian competition. Klausen (1997:28) contends that the 'English-speaking medical practitioners saw themselves as playing a vital role in nation-building: protecting and improving the health of the Whites of South Africa' through their obsession with health related issues. Their work actually changed social relations. In line with this, certain segments of the population, especially Indian shop keepers, were intended to be excluded from the urban areas through segregatory laws. The development paths for Whites and other races were, therefore, experienced at different levels. As such, the predominantly English White settlers exhibited a particular identity driven by a different ideological orientation and interest on the African soil. This was comparably different to other cities, especially Port Elizabeth, where the development of mixed areas such as South End and Kabah precipitated the enforcement of more dictatorial separate developments and forced removals later in the 1970s.

The settlement fashion which excluded the natives, the domination of the colonised and the ownership of both social and physical space secured White entitlements. Steyn (2001b) argues that some Whites left Europe, and settled permanently in Africa

however White South Africans, at a very literal level, made the southern tip of Africa their home. It has been observed that Whites in East London created an exclusionary environment that cut out other racial groups from access to wealth and the territory. Having first settled at the West Bank, an ambitious project in line with events happening in Britain was started. In order to survive in this new territory, new survival means were to be adopted. The first settlement was along the river within the West Bank area where many ships on the same route used to stop to refresh and replenish their supplies. Historically, the relationship with the local Xhosa people was one of domination, with Blacks mainly providing cheap labour for industries. The East London economy was initially based on trade until it was eventually radically transformed through industrialisation which was in line with the modernisation route of the Western developed world. After dominating the locals and pushing them from the coastal territories, industrialisation was to be the engine and the driver of the economy. There was initially a massive growth of automobile and textile manufacturing industries and, in these spaces, whiteness was manifest through the domination of the Whites in labour practices.

In East London, taming the landscape initially meant the creation of an industrial town to serve the needs of British settlers. Industries were developed and these were to provide employment and thus maintain high standards of life deemed to be fit for White people. The industrial revolution culminated in manufacturing factories which would generate White capital whilst at the same time absorbing White labour at higher levels than that of the natives. According to Bank (2011:21), in the 1930s there was a massive industrial drive around the harbour, and the city was marketed as a growing industrial hub. He further notes that 'by the end of the war, there were already over 100 manufacturing plants in East London , and these increased from 135 in 1946 to 323 in 1958'. Although both Whites and Blacks were employed in these industries, the focus was not on developing Blacks but on exploiting their labour. As such, Whites were employed as superiors since their engagement also meant fostering a particular identity for Whites. Even the poorer Whites could be absorbed by these factories in one capacity or another. Bank (2011) contends that by 1954 there were about 800 industries within the

eastern half of the Eastern Cape. Most of these industries were in East London. These industries provided the majority of Whites with secure employment, thereby insulating them from the effects of poverty, and on the other hand projecting an impression that Whites were beyond the condition of poverty. As such, White poverty was not so much of an issue in comparison with other parts of the country where both rural and urban based Whites had begun to endure poverty in the twentieth century (Bottomley, 2012; Teppo, 2004). As noted by Black and Davies (1986) the economy of East London became largely driven by industries thereby generating substantive job opportunities for Whites. Hence, in this way, Whites were able to maintain their difference through industrial revolution and also to exercise their whiteness through secure employment at managerial positions. The built environment was racially reproduced in that each race had a designated space from which to function.

When reading through the history of poor Whites in other parts of South Africa, including areas in the Eastern Cape such as Grahamstown, it is apparent that the formation of the city of East London sought to secure White privileges and White normalcy by racialising the economy and securing White immunity against poverty, a condition which eventually became typically associated with Blacks. Minkley (1994) observes that in the early history of East London, the industries absorbed excess White labour that was on the verge of sinking into poverty through the processes of racialised labour practices. East London seems to be comparably different to cities in the Eastern Cape like Port Elizabeth in the development of a White middle-class that was connected to a much stricter White enclave, through a coastal experience of whiteness, within a border city that served as a buffer against blackness in the old Transkei and Ciskei.

The majority of less skilled and less educated Whites in East London were converted into a White working-class with industries providing employment which was initially biased towards White people. The massive growth of textile industries in East London even necessitated the importation of White workers from Britain. The industries, therefore, became the perfect platform for whiteness as the factory 'floors' were White because of the domination of White labour. Gender also played an important role in the

factories. Although both White men and women were employed in the factories, the later were absorbed in bigger numbers. As observed by Mager (1989:46), in the 1920s when the economy of East London started industrialising, the production flows were mainly populated by White female workers. However, she notes that the domination of White women in factories came to a halt when their labour could not meet the production needs. For instance, at the outbreak of World War Two in the 1940s, the Frames Consolidated Textile Mills in East London received an order from the government for a million or more blankets for the army and this order was very urgent. The White women's labour could not cope and this led to the need to recruit African men who could do the job (Mager, 1989:47). Although initially there were big concerns about mixing White women's labour with that of Black men, a plan was finally made to separate them with a mobile fence (Mager, 1989). White women were to operate in front with Black men at the back. As White women kept vanishing from the factory floor, the fence got adjusted until there was no need to have the fence when the majority White women had left. However, it has been noted that due to changes in the demands of the capitalist economy, there was a necessity to gradually drop White labour in favour of cheaper Black labour (Mager, 1989; Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970; Bank and Mnyaka, 2013). The logic of profit margins justified this move in the sense that the capital always chases more profits thereby necessitating dropping off of expensive labour. It has been noted that, although factories had initially absorbed Black men, in the period post 1960 there was another crisis and Black men were eventually dumped in preference of Black women (Mager, 1989). The industrial crisis in the 1970s and the eventual relocation of industries from East London to the former Homelands led to further losses amongst the White working-class (see Chapter Four).

It is thus evident that the processes of poor White marginality started before the end of apartheid in 1994 although there were deliberate political efforts to hide this reality. The predominant way to hide this reality was to mask it through state supported employment and welfare for Whites. Unlike Black workers, the collapsing White working-class still had the state providing for it after industrial disintegration. A plethora of protective social

nets prevented working-class Whites from falling into deeper poverty. Due to state provisions, poor Whites could still lead decent lives.

However, due to the eventual failure of the apartheid system and its rescue measures, the former White working-class did not have much room to manoeuvre in post-apartheid South Africa. The fading state could no longer secure jobs for Whites or extend any other safety net and, furthermore, it could not guarantee protection from Black completion in the economy. Above all, the apartheid state could not permanently prevent deindustrialisation and the drastic effects of neo-liberalism, an economic model that was embraced by the post-apartheid state. These changes drastically altered the lives of many working-class people that relied on industrial employment. These experiences of the working-class are documented in Chapter Four and Six of this study. The effects of this rapid transformation has also been captured in Wacquant's work (2008) where the working-class is shown as transforming rapidly when formal employment ends due to de-industrialisation. East London, and in particular the West Bank section, has lost its former identity as an industrial hub. This collapse of the industrial city is detailed in Chapter Four. The city of East London has also rapidly urbanised, and there has been an influx of people from the rural hinterlands in search of jobs. However, it is evident that the job market has contracted leaving a lot of people without a stable source of living. The evaporated job opportunities have affected Whites and Blacks alike; however, this study focuses on the experiences of poor Whites sharing this background where they live on marginal boundaries of whiteness. The White middle-class in the city of East London has, however, continued to thrive and this has presented a complex picture to the existence of poor Whites. Judging from the empirical evidence of this research, the city of East London does not really embrace poor Whites as little pity is shown towards them. This is reflected by the sarcastic jokes from the middle-class section of Whites whom I interacted with in my research. This translated into both denial and rejection of poor Whites in the mainstream society.

1.3 Creation and consolidation of West Bank

The first settlement village of East London was situated on the West Bank of the Buffalo River which feeds into the Indian Ocean. Initially West Bank was a settlement for Whites but Africans soon started moving into the area. There was co-existence until a separate settlement for Africans was established in 1849. In 1857, two more settlement villages named Panmure and Cambridge were created to house the Anglo-German legion who settled in the British Kaffraria after the Crimean war (Tankard, 1990:23). West Bank expanded to house labour that was needed for industrial expansion. Before 1859, East London was under the Cape Colony whilst at the same time being administered by the British Kaffraria in King William's Town. The military influence continued to be visible in East London. There were frictions between Xhosas and the colonial administrators. The threat of war in 1857 and the Xhosa cattle killing (Peires, 1989) led to the adoption of decisions to further alienate Africans. Regulations to register and control the movement of Africans were put in place under the leadership of the Chief Commissioner of British Kaffraria. Nel (1991) observes a break in historical records in East London between 1857 and 1873 when the town acquired municipal status. By 1872, there was no ambiguity in terms of racial segregation. The military enforced separation of races whilst merchants sought to exploit cheap labour of Africans. In this way, class and race separation were entrenched.

The municipal council was controlled by Whites, who protected trading but grew increasingly obsessed with public health and Asian business competition. Swanson (1977) contends that the obsession with health and hygiene issues was widespread in many colonial cities such as the then Salisbury in Rhodesia and Johannesburg in South Africa, leading to the demolition of African settlements and their resettlement elsewhere. The sanitation scare had in most cases facilitated the urgent removal of Blacks from White settlements as a quarantine measure. Legislation was enacted to deal with health threats that had begun to manifest in the urban areas. Hence legislation such as the Public Health Act of 1919, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, and the Slums Act of 1934 was meant to manage and maintain public health standards (Ballard, 2004:50). These sanitation problems were generally read in the context of race and

class differences which consequently translated to urban race relations, which played a major role in the creation of urban apartheid (Swanson, 1977:387). The anxieties created by the sanitation debacle influenced the permanent segregation of South African cities.

Segregation of races, therefore, became one of the priorities in the 19th century in East London. This was expressed in planning and in the built environment of the urban space. The built environmental exclusionary patterns were reinforced by urban policies that were enacted. At this time, racial had become part and parcel of the social order (Emery, 2008). By 1873, the places of residence for Africans had expanded in the East Bank. In 1877 the Cape colonial government gave East London the go ahead to implement segregation policies against Africans (Nel 1991:62). New houses were built for Africans in the East Bank as well as West Bank. Although Africans resided in the city, they were not recognised as citizens of the Cape Colony. Africans were considered to be temporary town residents and could be relocated at will. Hence in 1878, Seaside location resided by Africans was abolished. All Africans were confined to the East Bank of the Buffalo River. In 1886, an African location was established in West Bank. The mingling of Whites and Blacks was restricted in residential areas although it is noted that in other cities mingling freely occurred (Bottomley, 2012; Nel, 1991). By 1895, the discrimination of Asians and Africans was at advanced stages supported by the law. In 1903, a separate settlement for Asians was established. In 1905 a new location in the area of Cambridge was provided for Africans. East London is described as having surpassed other South African towns by the extent of its pre-Union and pre-apartheid racial segregation which became a key feature. In 1913, all Asians had to be registered and subordinated to Whites. The South African war led to the influx of all racial groups into town. This exacerbated accommodation shortages in East London and led to further health threats.

In 1914, East London acquired city status. The segregation policy continued. In 1923, new housing initiatives were established in both the East Bank and West Bank. These locations became overcrowded and a source of decay due to neglect and under

funding. As the population of Africans began to swell, fewer services were provided although they were already subjected to taxes. The money collected from these taxes, according to Nel, was being used to develop White residential areas (Nel, 1991:64).

When the 1923 Native urban Act was introduced, East London was already a divided city with segregation in place. The African population doubled between 1921 and 1936 from 12 000 to over 24 000 people (Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970; Nel, 1991). This led to further deterioration of the living conditions in the East Bank as services could not cope with the massive population expansion. Due to overcrowding in West Bank, Duncan village housing initiatives were introduced in 1941. East Bank location became known as Duncan village. In 1948, the deterioration of West Bank led to recommendations for its demolition and re-planning as an industrial zone and a suburb for working-class Whites. This action was not, however, immediately implemented. It was in 1965 that West Bank was finally razed and Africans thrown into Mdantsane township whilst Coloureds went to the coloured area of North End. This removal of people from West Bank was done without their consent. It was a decision taken by the East London City Council in accordance with apartheid legislation.

In East London, the townships and the suburbs were clearly demarcated and the buffer zone never ambiguous. The townships were built very far away from the city, for example, the biggest township in East London, Mdantsane, is about 18km away from the city centre (van Ommen, 2005:512). Mdantsane had been created to solve the African problem in the city. It was one way of removing Blacks near the city and managing them in a homeland township that was far away from town (Nel, 1991:66). The growing Black population also seems to have influenced the establishment of Mdantsane. The establishment of this location was also premised on health concerns that were likely to be triggered by overcrowding (Oldfield, 2004; Tankard, 1990; Parnell & Mabin, 1995). As observed by Swanson (1977:409) 'Sanitation and public health provided the legal means to effect quick removals of African populations; they then sustained the rationale for permanent urban segregation'. Hence, by the time racial segregation was implemented across South Africa according to the apartheid

legislation, East London was already a divided city, practicing segregation, with each racial group having its own quota of land for settlement. The buffer zones between Blacks and Whites were residential areas for Coloureds.

The location of Black townships far away from the city was one way of controlling Black 'trouble' and keeping it as far away as possible from White order and peace. Although the townships were the necessary evil to house cheap Black labour that was necessary to sustain the city of East London, Black people still had to be kept away from White areas. The buffer zones between Mdantsane and the White suburbs of East London were suburbs for other racial groups such as Coloureds, followed by the industrial sites and stretches of empty land. van Ommen (2005:512) contends that apartheid planning strategically separated races using buffer zones of Coloured areas, such as Braelyn in East London, in order to keep Blacks and Whites far away from each other. According to Durlington (2006:149) 'South African apartheid was a geographical process' which translated into devastating effects. The geographical manipulation of the physical space created the atmosphere of separation amongst racial groups and each race was to pursue life and personal growth within the parameters laid down by the law. In each area, there were social and physical amenities meant for that racial group. Because of the nature of apartheid, Whites had the best of all facilities. Their residential areas were far much better equipped since these suburbs were built for permanent settlements. As a result they were equipped with the best schooling facilities and health care. The apartheid state was also able to monitor and manage people within their allocated spaces. As such, it would not have been easy for a White person residing in West Bank to know exactly what was going on in the townships. Negative perceptions about townships as places of violence and criminality have generally prevailed and, because of this identity, they are seen as no go areas for the White people. Due to unemployment and frustrations at failure to attain a better lifestyle during and also after apartheid, some townships have always been unsafe as violence erupts anytime.

During apartheid, laws that secured White accumulation were put in place and White contact with other racial groups was outlawed and strictly monitored through legislation

that promoted racial segregation. Some of these legislation included the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Bantu Education Act No.47 of 1953, the Bantu Homelands Citizen Act of 1970 and the Native (Black) Urban Areas Act 21 of 1923 (Christopher, 1994; Nel, 1991). Christopher (1992:561) observes that a multitude of segregation laws, including the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (1923) and the Group Areas Act (1950) have shaped South African cities for over a century. He further notes that:

In the 1950s the programme of transforming South African towns and cities into the apartheid model was set in motion. The first stage was the more rigorous enforcement of laws against the resident Black population. Blacks living in private or rented properties in or near the centers of cities were evicted and resettled in new Black townships on the margins of the cities. The destruction of Sophiatown in Johannesburg was one of the most widely known of these removals. In a parallel move several of the inner Black locations were also demolished and their inhabitants re-housed on the urban fringe (Christopher, 1992: 571).

These pieces of legislation were meant to protect White privilege and competition from Blacks. The economy of South Africa was centred on White accumulation. Whites had privileged access to wealth, courtesy of the apartheid state (Christopher, 1994). Similar sentiments are echoed by Muyeba and Seekings (2011:656) who contend that people were forcibly moved from their homes to places that were designated for their racial groups to pave way for White privileges. Elder (1990:262) propounds that the Group Areas Act was reinforced by the Population Registration Act and, together, they organised the population spatially and created a system of racially segregated political representation. There was no room for racial mixing through deliberate contact such as love relationships between people of different races. Residential segregation was reinforced by the Group Areas Act which dictated where people should reside based on their race. The Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Blacks had residential zones demarcated for them. In spite of this separation, people continued to privately engage in inter-racial relationships for which, if discovered, the consequences could be severe.

This process of segregation improved the socio-economic status of Whites, including the less educated and the economically vulnerable. This also secured White lifestyles that conformed to their identity as White, privileged and superior. In this way, the

demands of whiteness could then be satisfied. It was seen as a duty of each and every White person who cared about the protection of White identity to strive to lead lives that were comparatively higher than those of Blacks and other racial groups. In this way, Whites could then justify their superiority and hegemony above other racial groups. This hegemony was, in most cases, achieved through brutal ways and enforced by law.

As such, South Africa's history of racial segregation during the apartheid era was perhaps one of the harshest racial-based projects the world has ever witnessed. The separation of people according to their race was so intense that any loophole was closed through the system of petty apartheid. The whole ideology was to pursue separate development based on race. The urban residential segregation of people according to race was one of the most visible and strategic way of entrenching the apartheid ideology. Geography thus played a prominent role in segregating people according to their races. As observed by Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo (2009:351), the implementation of racist beliefs and policies shaped spaces at the national, regional, and city level, producing what could be described as typical geographies of (racial) classification and socio-spatial control. Not only were people labelled members of specific racial groups, but South African cities, too, were strictly structured along racial lines. Charles (2003) further contends that the separation of people of different races in residential places caused each to see the worst in each other. This in some cases transformed into fear of the 'other'.

Historically, the socialisation of people within their residential areas took a racial form, which actually engineered the ideology that racial groups were very different and that, by virtue of nature, Whites were superior. The racial superiority of the Whites was entrenched and put into practise through various pieces of legislation. Even the poorer Whites were socialised to believe that by the virtue of their skin they were better than Blacks. The schooling system was systematically laced with racial ideologies; hence it is not surprising that different racial groups had different perceptions about other races. The 'Other' was always viewed as very different and very alien. The hierarchical relationship made Whites believe that by virtue of natural order, Blacks were a different

and inferior race meant to serve the Whites. This racial pattern of thinking has been so intensely absorbed that several years after the demise of apartheid the foot prints of such ideologies are still visible although they are no longer formally backed up by the law. The apartheid institutions continue to be silently supported by unmarked pillars and institutions. Although apartheid is officially and formally over, some of its formations continue to endure and strive in different forms. Christopher (2001:454) rightly observes that the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act of 1991, while removing the segregation legislation, did not seek to actively reverse the effects of that legislation. The post-apartheid strategies to integrate the urban areas have, therefore, not sought to reverse or undo the apartheid city. Instead the consequences of an ambiguous approach have been the new forms of isolating the 'Other' that have since come up in urban areas.

1.4 Access to the study area

The suburb of West Bank stands on the western side of the Buffalo River which is popular for its internationally acclaimed harbour that hosts ships of all kinds and sizes. As one leaves the central business district of East London through the 'Settlers Way' main road leading to the East London airport, West Bank suburb can be viewed from across the Buffalo River, on the left hand side. The initial access point to the suburb used to be over a bridge across the river; however, this access point was closed some years ago for renovations which were still in progress during this study.

Another access point further down the Settlers Way connects the suburb. This access road takes one through the dense shrubs on the right side of the road if driving; those walking have tended to cut corners by going through this bushy area using what is popularly known as 'short cuts' (shorter route). However, this bushy area has been described as very unsafe with several killings having taken place in this vicinity, mainly targeting women daring to walk to and from town for various reasons. On the other side of this bushy area, there stand the West Bank industries.

After passing through this bushy area and crossing over the railroad, West Bank suburb is partially visible. At the entrance of the suburb, on the right side of the road, is the East London maximum prison. On the left side of the road, a variety of businesses are lined up: second-hand shops, panel beating shops, car workshops, a post office, and an old hotel. Across the road is a church, then a park where vagrants spend most of their time. The sight of children playing in this park is rare although there is commendable infrastructure for children. This park is, however, not well maintained. Across the road from the park is the biggest grocery shop in the area. This is where I normally alighted when going to do my study in central West Bank.

The residential houses line-up for several streets; the yards are of average size, and the houses are mainly built in 'town house' fashion. Most of these houses are old and need a face lift mainly by painting yet only a few renovated houses exist. The residential area is not expansive making it possible to walk through several streets in one day. This area is now a mixture of residential homes, taverns, spaza shops and shebeens¹. There is a school within the area which has remained intact and is multiracial.

Further down the main road, south-east of the major grocery store, is another railway line that has a goods train that has been parked there for a long time. The railway line is separated from the residential suburb by a fence. Beyond this parked goods train is the ocean. However the magnificent view of the ocean has been partially blocked by the stationary goods train wagons. Further down this 'ocean view' road is the golf course followed by water works and then the area known as 'Race Track' where an informal White settlement that is known as 'Cocobana' has sprouted. This settlement consists mainly of families of demographic variation residing in dilapidated houses (see picture 3, appendix 1) that were once used to house Race Track workers but was later shut down due to operational challenges.

There is a second access road off Settlers Way road to the right that leads to Cocobana. The distance is around three kilometres and only accessible by private

¹ Shebeens are unregulated and illegal beer drinking points in residential homes.

transport or on foot as there is no public transport available to this place. It is located on the southern part of the Race Track and its view is obstructed by trees and overgrown grass. Some of the structures are falling apart, paint has peeled off, litter has been thrown all over, wooden planks are piled up and children's toys are scattered around. The first house by the gate was once used as a warehouse, later a shop and eventually a home. It is the most dilapidated and unmaintained of all the houses in this area. This warehouse which was converted into a home houses two families and the partitioning is through old curtains and piled wooden planks. Further down from this warehouse, there is what used to be an entrance gate but only two side pillars that used to support a gate remain, with the actual gate missing.

On the right side of the access gravel road stands another house that has a garage extension turned into an additional room (see picture 4, appendix 1). The other houses on this site are semi-detached, with single or double rooms. The bathrooms are located outside the houses and shared by families occupying the two sides of the semi-detached house. The water source for these houses is also obtained from the bathroom tap, which combines a toilet and a shower. Most of the toilets do not work properly with several of them blocked. Little maintenance takes place. The homes are set in a compound-like fashion where they are fenced together and all have similar characteristics. The usage of spaces within these houses depends on the creativity of the occupant. Some have used various materials to divide their spaces into kitchen, lounge and bedroom. The majority of the occupants in this area are White and unemployed and a few are in low-paying contract employment that lasts for a few months.

The exterior of the houses at Cocobana is dominated by overgrown grass that resembles what used to be lawn. Residents complained of mosquitoes that tended to breed in the grass. To the north of the houses, within the same grounds, is a sprouting forest which residents have used as dumping ground for litter. There are no refuse services at this place. The houses are also not electrified with most residents using paraffin stoves and firewood as sources of energy. Old wooden planks obtained from

various sources were placed into a pile in front of some of the houses as reserves for energy (see picture 5, appendix 1). There is no street lighting nearby thus making the place very dark and unsafe to travel to at night. There are no services nearby and occupants of these houses have to travel on foot to central West Bank or Greenfields where there are shops, banks, schools and clinics. In a few of the houses, snacks such as dried chips and sweets are sold. Some of the occupants in these houses occasionally get part-time employment at the race course when racing events take place. Others work in shops whereas others are engaged in self-employment activities. Those without jobs spend most of their time at home. The majority of these are women. Employed or unemployed men usually do not spend the whole day at home but look around for 'piece jobs' (part-time work). The close proximity of the houses makes it possible for neighbours to know about each other's life. On occasions where I drove to Cocobana, a number of neighbours would come together to chat in the house of the person I had visited. We would either sit outside, or inside to chat about various issues. Cocobana is a quiet area as there is no electricity that could facilitate the making of noise either with radios or television sets. Even alternative sources of energy, such as solar panels and electric generators, are beyond the reach of the majority. There is little movement within the compound and the presence of people in this area can only be seen at close proximity.

Going back to central West Bank, I normally passed cars that were parked next to the ocean although there was no demarcated beach nearby; most of these were visitors from outside West Bank on various outings although residents warned that the area was unsafe. Further on, I would again pass behind the water works area and the golf course to board a taxi back to town. Throughout my research, I would alternate going to this place by private and public transport. However, when using public transport, I would alight very far and complete the trip by walking from the main road. Whenever I walked from Cocobana area to central West Bank, it was difficult to get transport although private cars passed; they never stopped to offer a lift. The taxis to town were only available in central West Bank and, further down, along Settlers Way.

1.5 Profile of West Bank community

The census data shows that there were 19 537 people in the ward in 2011, of which 4 286 were White (Stats SA, 2011). Table 1 below shows that almost 10% of White households had no income at all, compared with the 20% of Black African households in that situation. A further 15% of households earned less than R3200 a month and another 20% earned between R3200 and R6400 a month. This meant that almost half of the White population or 45% of the ward were in a situation of poverty (relative to household costs of formal housing, services and food).

The number of Black African families in the same predicament was 67%, suggesting that the race gap has closed significantly. It is estimated that the poverty rate in the area for Whites has probably increased by a third in the past decade. The statistics for the 2001 census (not comparable because the enumeration units were different) suggests that families in West Bank and Cocobana are getting poorer and are now less involved in the formal economy. The vast majority of these households would have located in the West Bank village and Cocobana sections, with the wealthier Whites living in Sunnyridge and Greenfields and other areas. The population distribution shows that across all ages, Blacks are in the majority. Amongst the White population, there is a reduction in the old age category (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Age distribution by population group in Ward 46²

AGE	Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Other	Total
00 – 04	1 279	70	11	219	1	1 580
05-09	1 063	83	11	230	1	1 389
10-14	943	107	17	249	2	1 319
15 – 19	1 128	110	21	299	4	1 562
20 – 24	1 583	97	14	311	11	2 017
25 – 29	1 779	101	19	325	15	2 240
30 – 34	1 490	62	24	274	11	1 861
35 – 39	1 338	95	20	293	6	1753
40 – 44	1038	113	13	348	4	1517
45 – 49	812	61	17	330	7	1226
50 – 54	595	57	9	355	2	1017
55 – 59	461	36	12	285	1	794
60 – 64	175	24	8	267	2	477
65 – 69	100	13	7	183	1	304
70 – 74	63	6	-	166	-	235
75 – 79	46	6	-	71	-	123
80 – 84	27	-	-	55	-	82
85+	14	1	-	25	1	41
Total	13 934	1042	203	4286	72	19 537

Poverty is a factor within ward 46 as can be seen from the number of people without any sources of income. This is reflected in Table 2 below drawn from census 2011 information. Amongst Whites, 1 192 people did not have any source of income. This captures the economic changes that have occurred to Whites.

² According to the Demarcation Board, West Bank falls under ward 46

Table 2: Individual monthly income by population group in West Bank³

	Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Other	Total
No income	4 802	351	67	1192	11	6 424
R1 - R400	978	30	2	58	2	1 071
R401 - R800	457	15	-	42	2	517
R801 - R1 600	1 050	48	3	338	3	1 443
R1 601 - R3 200	901	54	12	272	9	1 249
R3 201 - R6 400	524	84	19	539	2	1 168
R6 401 - R12 800	640	99	21	639	7	1 406
R12 801 - R25 600	537	84	18	357	7	1 002
R25 601 - R51 200	150	21	15	80	1	267
R51 201 - R102 400	22	4	1	16	1	45
R102 401 - R204 800	13	-	-	14	-	27
R204 801 or more	12	-	-	5	-	18
Unspecified	2 176	160	29	694	18	3 077
Not applicable	1 672	90	15	40	8	1 825
Total	13 934	1 042	203	4 286	72	19 537

Because there is no longer any guarantee that a White person can get a job, it is not surprising that there are growing numbers of non-employed Whites without any income making them very poor. There are many Whites who are earning below R6400 in a suburb where the average rental is around R3500. This makes such earners on the verge of being poor, since they still have to pay for other services from the remainder of money after paying their monthly rentals.

³ Buffalo City, Census 2011 (Household level)

Table 3: Monthly household income by population group in West Bank⁴

	Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Other	Total
No income	846	16	4	139	3	1 008
R 1 - R400	212	3	-	9	-	224
R401 - R800	289	7	-	13	-	310
R801 - R1 600	644	5	1	70	3	723
R1 601 - R3 200	604	21	1	86	4	715
R3 201 - R6 400	409	33	6	170	3	621
R6 401 - R12 800	369	43	9	286	1	708
R 12 801 - R 25 600	423	57	10	365	1	856
R 25 601 - R 51 200	239	43	13	208	5	508
R 51 201 - R 102 400	71	8	5	42	2	129
R 102 401 - R 204 800	10	3	-	8	-	21
R 204 801 or more	12	-	-	12	-	23
Unspecified	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4 128	238	51	1 407	23	5 846

Table 3 above shows that, there is substantial number of White households that have no source of income. The numbers are however more amongst Blacks who are in the majority of the population. During fieldwork, I used snowballing (discussed in Chapter Three) to locate the participants in this study.

⁴ Buffalo City, Census 2011 (Household level)

1.6 Initial encounters

My encounter with poor White families revealed different angles to the condition of poverty which I saw as very important to the contemporary discussions about race and poverty in contemporary South Africa. Although, demographically, poor Whites remain insignificant in comparison to the extent of poverty endured by Blacks, their complex interaction with poverty became important for this study. My ethnographic lenses drew me to an understanding of how the concept of poverty and race intersect and are manoeuvred on a daily basis as a way of exiting a condition of entrapment and shame; how they are played out to express a particular citizenship status and also as a way to distance people from the condition, thereby creating a division between 'us' and 'them'.

The purpose of this study was, therefore, to engage with the growing study of White poverty in South Africa with the slight departure of linking it with whiteness and structural economic changes that have taken place in East London. A once prosperous English industrial town where poverty amongst Whites was a marginal issue, it is a paradox that today poor Whites are part and parcel of the current structural setup. Poor Whites elsewhere in South Africa have attracted scholarly interest as evidenced by the work of scholars such as: Teppo (2004), Peens (2011), Bottomley (2012), Crapanzano (1985) and Du Plessis (2004). There has also been research on Whites from other disciplines such as geography and social history (Ballard, 2004; Steyn, 2001a; Schuermans and Visser, 2005; Visser, 2003). Moreover, there is a growing literature on Whiteness in South Africa, and scholars such Niehaus (2012) have audited this literature in response to attacks on anthropological studies on Whites by other Whites. However, studies on Whites in South Africa have not attracted much Black scholarship. My study, therefore, fills in the scholarship gaps within the field of anthropology. It does not come from a position of privilege into poverty but from a Black scholar into whiteness. This is unusual because the study challenges racial hierarchy, and actually reverses the predominant racial order. Even in the global arena, Blacks have tended to focus their studies on other Blacks and there has not been much significant focus on White lives by Black anthropologists. This is partly because the racial boundaries (Moss 2003:2) in terms of research focus still remain. White domination is still very fresh in the

minds of many researchers in South Africa and hence White studies have been perceived to carry little weight by Black academics. Who wants to study White people when Black cultures are challenged by many pressing issues? Hence the bias in anthropological enquiry in South Africa remains inclined towards Black issues.

As such, most Black scholars of substance have made advancements in their fields by studying in their own backyards and amongst their own people through the practice of auto-ethnography. The approach of using auto-ethnography is, thus, not only wide spread in South Africa but has been a general trend in southern Africa. Amongst the older generation of the 1950s and 1960s in South Africa, Mafeje did two studies before he left the country – one in his home village in Engcobo in the Transkei and the other in Langa, when he was at University of Cape Town (Wilson and Mafeje, 1963). Magubane worked in his home town of Durban on the ethnography of sports clubs before he left the country (Magubane, 1963). Mqotsi did research amongst healers in Middledrift – he was born in the Transkei (Mqotsi, 1957). Godfrey Pitje, who was the African National Congress Youth leader (ANCYL) in 1949 and an anthropologist, studied the Pedi, his home group (Pitje, 1950). Later, anthropologists, like Cecil Manona (1988) at Rhodes, came from Peddie but studied Keiskammahoek and in Peddie.

Unlike the Whites who studied the ‘Others’⁵ at home, Black people studied themselves at home. They all slotted into the tradition of working at home, which is also very popular elsewhere in Africa. I decided to study at home in South Africa because there was no possibility of getting funding to study suburbia in New York, Washington or London. I therefore settled on studying in South Africa which is a neighbour of my country of origin, Zimbabwe. Most Zimbabwean scholars, who are currently in South Africa in large numbers, have also tended to study other Zimbabweans in South Africa whilst others have opted to go back to Zimbabwe to conduct their fieldwork there. This is an easy option as data gathering is not as laborious. This insider status often makes it possible to gather information within a short space of time. I resisted the option of

⁵ ‘Others’ in this case refers to people who were of different racial groups from the Whites; these include Blacks, Indians, Asians and other races.

studying Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa or even issues of Zimbabwean land reform. I was interested in understanding the White people of South Africa through the study of the poor Whites in East London because of the little background knowledge I had about the White 'tribe' of South Africa. To me, these people were the 'Other' who had been historically fashioned to appear very different from Blacks.

I came to realise that Whites socialised with one another and definitely had a group identity, which was usually set against that of Blacks. The constitution of difference, the 'us' and 'them' contrast, was fundamental to White identity. Whites always set themselves against Blacks whom they regarded and depicted as inferior in various ways, as I was told by my respondents in this study, and I was certainly regarded as one of these 'inferior ones'. But to them this was the reality of the South African context, a fact that people could not easily run away from. However, it must not be assumed that because Whites have a common identity, they constitute a homogenous grouping. This is very far from the truth and it is something that was revealed to me very early in my study.

1.7 The invisibility of White poverty

In 2009 when I embarked on a study of poor Whites in post-apartheid South Africa, I had to deal with very important questions that were directed at me right from the beginning, and these questioned whether poor Whites really existed and where I would find them; and why I had decided to study poor Whites when there were millions of poor Blacks in all towns around the country. These questions were posed by my fellow Black colleagues and friends. On one hand, White people who heard about my study were quick to confirm the existence of poor Whites and to describe how they would generally look, often advising me to be careful around them. Some actually advised me to tread cautiously as it was difficult to reason with poor Whites. On the one hand, having read some newspapers with sensitive articles on and detailed picture images of how poor Whites in South Africa had become the 'new destitute', and with politicians, on the other hand, denying that Whites had become poor, the discourse on poor Whites became

even more complex and an interesting area of study. The expansive White middle-class and their wealth added to the complexity of the poor White dialogue. Not all Whites had become poorer; actually only a few of them could be described as poor. The statistics were clearly against poor Whites because, relative to their Black counterparts, their case became very insignificant in terms of numbers.

However, this study was not about number crunching or producing a statistical picture in order to justify the existence and an increasing number of poor Whites, but it was more concerned with the structural poverty endured by Whites which had resulted from a compressed job market that consequently weaned a number of working-class Whites resulting in their failure to find alternative employment within a neo-liberal climate. It was also about getting the first hand stories on how Whites had experienced both social and economic decline in their lives often triggered by job losses and the failure to climb back on the job market. Being unemployed and White has drawn various paradoxes, mainly because the existence of poor Whites has been interpreted within the context of whiteness, which previously accorded Whites privileges of various measures. Although there is now contestation on the extent to which privileges were enjoyed by Whites in previous eras, the dominant perspective has pointed to the past privileges that have remained unchanged for many people. This raises an important question as to why the opposing version about poor Whites in South Africa exists. This study provides insights into these opposing versions.

Another relevant question at this point is why poor Whites seem to be overshadowed by imagined privileges that they do not presently enjoy. Besides, most of the former White working-class who are presently unemployed, lead a life vastly incomparable with middle-class values and quality of life. The majority are in spaces that reflect glaring poverty that is normally camouflaged by high halls and gates, though the structures could be dilapidated, and can only be seen from a close range. For instance, it is very difficult to 'read' the lives led by people in a suburb; from afar everything reflects a 'normal' picture but a close range gaze reveals the untold story of poverty.

However, the actual story which unfolded throughout the fieldwork of this study revealed a different picture, with most of my informants in West Bank and Cocobana confirming the opposite of what many would normally expect of White people. Barely acknowledging that they were poor, the picture of poverty was silently interpreted and projected through their environment. The dusty verandas at rented properties, mainly in advanced stages of dilapidation, re-wrote what being White and underprivileged were. The condition of poverty was not openly embraced with most of my informants trying hard in words to be what they were not. Although a few acknowledged that they were undergoing difficult times financially, they did not explicitly refer to themselves as poor Whites, yet this term was widely used by others in various quarters. Understandably, the condition of White poverty has been seen as alienating, a shameful and dreadful category with negative connotations attached to it. In its current forms, it represents those who have failed to cling on to whiteness and exploit it to their advantage.

Moss (2003:2) in his study of poor Whites at Midwest City in the United States observed that poor Whites identified with forms of privilege because they preferred to see themselves in Whiteness and all of its promise, rather than to identify with forms of poverty. Interestingly, many of my informants were actually failing to graduate to the class of which they imagined themselves to be part. Their structural poverty was loud enough to keep them far from any forms of assimilation into middle-class Whites. Their racial affiliation remained the real umbilical cord that kept them connected to other Whites. However, it was clear that the condition of White poverty was an unwanted embarrassment as could be interpreted from quick interpretations offered by middle-class Whites that I interviewed. The unkind words linked the condition to self orchestrated destruction which could only be blamed on the victim. Seldom was the issue of structural axing from the main stream mentioned.

The story of Alicia, a 42 year old woman I met in 2009, details the pain, shame, and alienation of poor Whites, which consequently leads most of them to deny the reality of their lives. Many similar versions of such experiences by my informants are detailed in Chapter Seven of this study. Alicia, a seemingly modest woman, had lived in the

informal compound of Cocobana for more than five years with her partner and two children. The physical appearance of Alicia is alienated from the place she resides although she claimed to barely invest any money in herself due to the financial situation of the family. Alicia was very distinct from her neighbours due to her appearance; although she was quick to point out that she struggled to maintain her 'natural self' due to lack of money. However, when she went to the shops, no one ever imagined that she lived in a dusty dilapidated house where I found her. She was associated with middle-class whites residing at some modest suburb. Although she did not often frequent public spaces, whenever she did, she hardly declared openly who she was and where she was from in fear of obvious consequences. As Alicia put it, the images of normal Whites have endured a test of time in that:

You can't be White and be whatever you want to be, the whole world is always staring at you, judging you and always expecting you to do more, I can't just be fine with who I am, I have to be what the society expects me to be, and yes, I do pretend to be what I am not and its difficult to sustain that artificial self, I have nothing to show off, but that is not enough, it's just not acceptable, we have all been created, we are an image of what was there before (Alicia, 2009).

These words are not unique to the situation in which Alicia finds herself due to the trap of poverty. Many poorer Whites found it hard to acknowledge how the circumstances in their lives had recreated them. Many chose to be what they were not due to fear of condemnation and judgement. The idealistic images of what normal and good Whites are have historical origins. As Teppo (2004) detailed in her work on Epping Garden Village, a project to convert poorer Whites into 'good' Whites involved a holistic physical and spiritual overhaul. The undesirability of poor Whites is reflected in various policy interventions at various periods with the aim of reintegrating the straying Whites back on course of 'normal' whiteness. Some of my informants actually maintained that poor Whites did not go away at certain historical junctures in South Africa but were rather silenced, hidden or camouflaged. Others maintained that during the era of apartheid where Whites dominated it was improper to confess poverty, as it was considered to be out of the ordinary expectation. The situation had, however, not changed much, as the post-apartheid period had made it even harder for poor Whites to raise their heads as

this could annoy political powers and be taken to be a racial protest, something which the majority of people with whom I interacted wanted to avoid in South Africa.

Presently the discourse on poverty has tended to be more biased towards the Blacks who suffered an artificially induced poverty during apartheid. Hence poverty debates have tended to focus more on strategies to uproot Blacks from poverty and empower them. In comparison to poor Blacks, poor Whites are relatively weakened, at least statistically. This is, however, not the focus of the study as a statistical comparison between the majority of Blacks and the White minority would yield questionable results. The essence of this discussion hinges on the experiences of White poverty within the dimension of 'whiteness' which promises a particular path of life, one which stands in sharp contrast to poverty, but which has become a trap for many unemployed Whites. The imagining of a typical White through the lenses of whiteness has caused and sustained much social tension, creating opposing versions of what a White person ought to be. This is captured in this emotional reaction to my study of poor Whites by a Black colleague in 2010:

You see, my mother who raised me was a domestic worker all her life that is how we were raised, we knew that she would go out every day to work for Whites in order to support our family. And for sure, we were educated from that domestic salary, and above all most of my relatives worked for White people around East London, and now to turn around and say that Whites are also poor creates problems for many people. I for one, it is still fresh in my mind that it was White money that supported this family for many years, so what has happened to all that money which all Whites seem to have? (Yoli, 2010).

The sources of White wealth and money are viewed by many Black participants as still flowing and benefiting Whites like in the past. It is still expected that Whites are providers of jobs although the reality is that many of them are out of jobs. Such views, however, only served to reinforce images of a normal White life which, in other words, was interpreted as: smart, hard working, formally employed or owning a business and providing employment to Blacks. The general perceptions of Blacks about Whites are that Whites are wealthy due to the past social and economic arrangements. The fact that Whites at one point in the history of South Africa were exploiters of cheap Black labour informed the present perceptions about White people in general. On the one

hand, poor Whites also did not view their present circumstances as normal, and often compared their circumstances relatively to other Whites. The fact that they had actually reached the level of Black poverty and, in some instances, exceeded it did not matter; their benchmark was other Whites. On the other hand, wealthier Whites were not accommodating the existence of poor Whites, often preferring to alienate them. This alienation was very evident from their comments about poor Whites which often reinforced stereotypes that they were lazy and dishonest and, therefore, responsible for their predicaments. Interestingly, both poor Whites and the wealthier ones held certain images of what a White person ought to be, and that failure to attain such levels was problematic.

The enduring social discourse in South Africa that visualises the society in two broad ways, namely, wealthy White middle-class and Black poor masses, has further withered the visibility of poor Whites that are interpreted through generalised images of prosperous Whites. The structure of this social discourse, which is largely shaped through whiteness, has even conditioned poor Whites themselves to interpret their present situations in a somewhat awkward manner, which also seems to respond to the demands and expectations of whiteness. Yet the interaction of poor Whites within the demands of whiteness is one of severed interaction in that poor Whites operate within the margins of whiteness. Commenting on the marginality of poor Whites, Moss (2003:5) noted that:

Their experience within and on the margins of Whiteness presents a unique challenge to normalised notions of Whiteness existing as an “unmarked category against which difference is constructed.

As was seen from the case of Alicia above, even the poor are confined within the demands of whiteness which assigns social roles, yet at the same time offering a normalised version of a typically White life. What happens, then, to poor Whites such as Alicia? Some of these poor Whites are forced by the endurance of shame to pretend to be what they are not. Others that get trapped for longer by the condition of poverty present an interesting version that contradicts the ideals of whiteness. Other poor Whites are now scattered in all the busy street corners in the city, begging from

motorists, others beg along the Eastern Beach in town and these people have endured varied reactions from other people.

This study reveals various reasons that have led poor Whites into poverty. The main focus, however, will be on those that have been ejected from jobs from which they drew their main livelihoods. The structural economic changes that have been imported into the South African arena through the neo-liberal system have resulted in the axing of many Whites from the main stream economy. Yet it is difficult for society to imagine the physical existence of a class of White people who sleep on empty stomachs, struggle to survive, have poor hygiene and, in some cases, are homeless just like the rest of the other poor people in South Africa. This is unimaginable to many people because of the stereotyped images of 'normal' White people. Poor Whites, therefore, provoke feelings that most people do not want to think of, hence their alienation. Poor Whites have in many ways been silenced and overshadowed through dominant discourses on race and poverty which generally trivialise White poverty. Therefore, an understanding of whiteness in studying poor Whites is crucial as it sheds more light on the invisibility of poor Whites.

1.8 The Rise of Whiteness Studies

There has been an astonishing rise in interest in the study of whiteness over the past two decades. This has been expressed across a number of disciplines including psychology, education, sociology and even anthropology. This has been associated with a cultural turn in social sciences as well as the theoretical influence of the work of Michel Foucault (1972) and his understanding of knowledge and power in modern societies as well as the dominance of social constructionism as a perspective for the analysis of social and cultural change across disciplines.

The category of being White was long assumed to be natural and what this literature reveals is that the definition of whiteness has historically changed and has been articulated in different ways and associated with different meanings across societies

and historical periods. One particular area where this type of work has been strongly developed has been in America where assumptions about the disintegration of racial difference and the emergences of a melting pot have not unfolded in the manner in which many social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s predicted. So questions have been asked as to how white privilege has been maintained without the legal bulwark of the state and reproduced socially in society.

Whiteness studies examine the hierarchical relationships of power which are constructed around race. It looks at how Whites view themselves and others and how whiteness is constructed. These studies were initially conducted in America during the 1990s as a means of addressing the invisibility of whiteness that kept other racial groups in disadvantaged positions. The whiteness drive was motivated by continuous attempts to address inequalities in America. Whiteness studies have, however, spread across the world to address problems emanating from both the visible and the invisible patterns of whiteness which have created two opposite poles: the privileged and the underprivileged. Scholars such as Frankenberg (1997) noted that whiteness had spread to alarming proportions and often pretended to be a universal phenomenon thereby naturalising it. Roedigger (1991) identified whiteness as a central race problem. Roedigger's book (1991) entitled *The Wages of Whiteness* looked at the construction of whiteness by America's working-class that protected their benefits through race. Roedigger viewed race problems as intimately linked with the problems of whiteness. As Bottomley (2012:40) puts it, 'race relations can be a 'cultural currency' that we exchange in order to advance ourselves', since race embodies advantages and disadvantages often deciding on who gets what and who does not. Roedigger's work provides interesting parallels with the South African context where race has always been visibly linked with whiteness.

In America Whites did not readily acknowledge the privileges that whiteness accorded to them (Morrison, 1992; Frankenberg, 1997). In the South African context, however, whiteness was visible unlike in America (Frankenberg, 1993). Although in both cases whiteness was critical in the construction of White identity, in the South African case

whiteness had a legal status and it was formalised. Steyn (2001b:87) argues that within South Africa whiteness was championed by successive regimes, culminating in state-enforced whiteness through the policy of apartheid. As a result of this, state structures manipulated the economy, labour, the media and the education system to produce a society that protected and at the same time advanced the superiority of Whites. The interesting argument by Steyn (2001b) is that Whites were protected from deeper self-analysis through state control of reality in various ways including manipulating the media.

Steyn (2004), in an article entitled *Rehybridising the Creole: New South African Afrikaners* looked at how the Afrikaner whiteness should be understood in the context of English-speaking White South Africans where she indicates that, in their difference was also their similarity. There was unity in the construction of White superiority which did not emphasise the ethnic differences amongst Whites. Steyn (2001b) looked at different meanings that new South Africa was generating into White South Africans by exploring how the changes that came with the demise of apartheid were changing the White population's identity. The end of apartheid is described as having introduced drastic changes to the lives of many White people and so igniting a crisis. This is noted by Anderson in that:

The collapse of a belief system can be like the end of the world. It can bring down not only the powerful, but whole systems of social roles and the concepts of personal identity that go with them. Even those who are most oppressed by a system often fear the loss of it. People can literally cease to know who they are....There are many people who have been thus dispossessed. (Anderson, 1990:27)

Steyn's work, therefore, speaks of the dilemmas that have been brought about by changes to the world of Whites. Some view it as a loss while for others this period is comparable to that of mourning a death of someone dear. This can also be linked with Hughes' work on Whites in Zimbabwe. Hughes (2010) looked at how Whites had a contested belonging in Zimbabwe and how that was reflected in their relationship with the natural environment, which they transformed in many ways. However, the changes in governance approaches in Zimbabwe problematised the belonging of Whites as most

of them were disposed of their land. Hughes, however, mainly focused on the privileged class of White farmers in Zimbabwe, making them appear to be a homogenous group that does not share in the challenges of indigenous people.

Ballard's (2004) looked at how White South Africans have sought to find new meanings of home in a rapidly integrating South Africa. Ballard particularly notes that some Whites see a home as an extension of them and have resorted, therefore, to emigration and semigration. Teppo (2004:74), however, cautions those intending to study White South Africans by advising that 'there is need to stay alert and be aware of the pitfalls in the discourse of Whiteness, and of the complexity of the whole concept of being White'. Some of these pitfalls are the denialism that White poverty exists; the blanket view of all Whites as privileged; and the racial marking of poverty.

1.9 Whites and anthropological studies in South Africa

South Africa has been a platform for the anthropological gaze for a decade, and studies of various natures have emanated from various ethnographic encounters. Although the bulk of the studies in South Africa have focused on the conditions of Blacks, a position which could be justified on the grounds of a plethora of challenges facing Blacks, there has been a gradual growth in the production of studies focusing specifically on Whites (Bottomely, 2012; Crapanzano, 1985; Du Plessis, 2004; Peens, 2011; Schuermans and Visser, 2005; Teppo, 2004). However, Nyamnjoh (2012) recently commented that Whites have been understudied relative to Blacks in South Africa by other Whites. However, evidence by Niehaus (2012) has argued that White studies present a significant tradition that can be traced through various studies on Whites by other White anthropologists. Unlike the whiteness perspective, anthropologists have studied whites as communities and have broadly applied a holistic perspective – focusing on social relations, religious affiliations, social identity and political anxieties.

One of the several White studies conducted in South Africa was by Crapanzano (1985) in which he expressed White people's insecurities over the impending power take-over

by Blacks from the conservative Afrikaner nationalist party. The Whites that had been the main beneficiaries of the apartheid regime were now facing an uncertain future as the White minority government was losing control of the country and ceding the power to the Black majority. Crapanzano argued that there were signs of anxiety, helplessness, vulnerability, and rage that were not very far from the surface (Crapanzano, 1985:44). Above all, Crapanzano noted that Whites were 'waiting' for something to happen. Blacks, Asians and Coloureds represented symbols of danger and violence, an impending disruption to the quiet life of Whites. Yet their presence, on the other hand, represented nothing of value. Crapanzano's study focused on Whites in the Western Cape that were cited as all united by this strong fear of the danger that this 'Other' represented. Crapanzano summarised his work with the following words:

The book was not about the sources of economic, political and military power or their display; rather it was about the discourses of people who are privileged by that power and paradoxically in their privilege, victims of it.

Crapanzano (1985:1) heavily criticized White South Africans, condemning them for being 'heavy hearted, lacking consciousness, people who self indulge, cowards and acting in bad faith'. This study, however, concentrated on the privileged White discourses of the apartheid period but did not touch issues of poor Whites who were a minority within White racial group. It gave the impression that Whites were all racist and had enjoyed without guilt the apartheid privileges. Teppo (2004:72), however, noted that this controversial view presented by Crapanzano was much criticised by South African anthropologists for presenting a biased view.

The re-introduction of the poor White phenomenon has illuminated renewed interest by scholars studying Whites in South Africa. Most of these studies have revealed the changing dynamics in the lives of poor Whites (Bottomley, 2012; Peens, 2011, Schuermans and Visser, 2005; Teppo 2004). The studies on poor Whites in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Bloemfontein and KwaZulu Natal have been undertaken by Bottomley (2012), Teppo (2004), Schuermans and Visser (2005), and Peens (2011) respectively. However, no anthropological studies on poor Whites have been undertaken on smaller cities like East London.

Schuermans and Visser (2005) did a study in two suburbs called Ehrlich Park and Oranjesig in Bloemfontein, looking at how White poverty had re-emerged and how it was being experienced by their informants. They traced the life histories of their informants through interviews and observation. They identified the causes of poverty amongst the poor White informants as lack of regular employment. Most of their informants relied on informal and low paying jobs as car washers, car guards and pancakes sellers. They also observed that most employed people were now forming an army of the 'working poor' whose salaries could not cope with the escalating standard of living. Most Whites in the study were quoted citing discrimination as denying them opportunities to get employed. Those without accommodation could not even get houses through Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as these had been mainly reserved for poor Blacks who had been discriminated against by the apartheid government. These scholars sought to amplify the challenges of poor Whites within an environment where their existence had been overshadowed by ideological images of middle-class Whites and the magnitude of Black poverty.

In his book entitled 'Poor White', Edward-John Bottomley (2012) demonstrated how the poor White problem was created in the 20th century in order to consolidate White power. It was at this time that a clear definition of how a White person ought to live was outlined. This also created a myth that because of one's Whiteness, one could not, therefore, do certain kinds of jobs. Prior to this period of White re-examination, Bottomley vividly demonstrates how poor Whites lived under the most appalling conditions, especially in Johannesburg in the 19th century before the consolidation of White power by Afrikaner elites and the middle-class. Some Whites in Johannesburg at this time were very poor, to such an extent that they also lived in slums alongside Blacks and Coloureds and competed for survival space. The conditions in the slums were terrible. For instance, there was an outbreak of plague in Brickfields in the early 1900s and an outbreak of influenza in 1918 (Bottomley, 2012:105). Life was tough for all the inhabitants of the slums where there was lack of service delivery and the effects of this were drastic. In the absence of jobs to absorb every city dweller, some poor

White girls turned to prostitution where some of their customers were Blacks and this lowered the 'expected levels' of the White race. The Whites were gradually losing respect amongst Blacks because of the behaviour displayed by poor Whites. The ruling elite are cited as having been particularly disturbed by this behaviour of poor Whites and their close proximity to Blacks. During this period, poor Whites were also associated with laziness and drunken behaviour. They sold and drank beer with Blacks and sometimes fights would break out after the booze. This was seen by the ruling elite as seriously harming and denting the image of the civilized White person. As summarized by Bottomley, 'weakening the White race endangered the overextended colonizers by bringing them on a level with those they had colonized' (Bottomley, 2012: 41). The poor Whites had, therefore, lost their respect through the condition of poverty and were on the verge of falling on the wrong side of the fence. This ambiguous position of poor Whites created a lot of uneasiness that needed to be addressed. The solution to this dilemma was the appraisal of separate residential areas for poor Whites so that they could regain their Whiteness which they were gradually losing. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 made it possible for the state to clear slums occupied by interracial groups and create suburbs for poor Whites (Bottomley, 2012:105). In this way, hidden in the suburbs, away from the public gaze, poor Whites could then be fixed and closely monitored to arrest their straying habits.

In her classical work on poor Whites in Cape Town, Teppo (2004) did a historical ethnography on poor Whites in Epping Garden Village, a former poor White suburb. Teppo's work was interested in how the category of white normalcy was constructed and reproduced under apartheid. Using the analogy of the body, Teppo highlighted that the body was not just producing norms of how to behave but also shaping things as intimate as the way people carry their bodies. Hence the category of poor White was put under surveillance in suburbs that were created to house them in order correct and turn them into acceptable Whites who would ultimately become 'good whites'. In these spaces of separation, poor Whites were to be re-engineered to regain their lost whiteness through a rehabilitation of value sets in order to turn poor Whites into productive members of the White society. The poor Whites had already been

categorized as abnormal deviants who could still be rehabilitated. This categorisation is linked to the miscegenation philosophy that was prevailing in Europe and America in the 19th century which played a big role in providing a roadmap for the treatment of the poor White condition.

Other studies on White people in South Africa have not looked specifically at the plight of the White poor. Frankenthal (1999) did a study on Israeli Jewish encounters in Cape Town by focusing on how Jews integrated in their communities within the South African context. Her extensive fieldwork amongst local South African Jews and their Israeli counterparts in the country gave insights on how Jewish life was organized and integrated. She was able to explore the relationships that are built within existing networks of the Jewish community through the ritual of prayer and rites of passage. The social networks among the White Jews also existed in the form of library facilities and Jewish food. The integration of Jews was also attributed to their shared common past of persecution, exile and their minority status.

1.10 Urban anthropology and other studies of East London

My entry into this work, besides being motivated by the quest to boost my little knowledge of the White community, was also influenced by a number of Border studies on White people that were undertaken in East London in 1964 (Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970) and the broader Border area of King William's Town (Watts, 1966) and Maclean Town (Irving, 1959). The Border enquiries became a package of studies, one set of studies was that of Philip Mayer (1974) and the trilogy that Bank (2002; 2011) revisited. The sociological studies that were undertaken on Whites within the Border in the 1960s by Watts and Agar-Hamilton (1970) and others have not been very popular in anthropology and elsewhere. Neither have they attained any international recognition and status in comparison to Philip Mayer's work.

The focus of White studies in the Eastern Cape was initially on the small towns of Maclean and King William's Town. Because the Eastern Cape is made up of small

towns, the interest initially was on small town phenomena within the small White population. As the research matured, there was a need for comparison with a larger town like East London which was undertaken in 1964 by Watts and Agar-Hamilton. The aim was to compare King William's Town and East London's White population on the aspects of history and sociological demographic description. It was also particularly interested in issues of migration and general attitude towards the towns in which they resided. These studies of Border towns were mainly quantitative in nature and, therefore, interested in the statistics and numbers.

The Border Port study (Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970) found that East London was rapidly urbanising with the population doubling in 20 years between the 1920s and 1950s due to industrial economic growth. However, it was also noted that there was some tension between the industrial and commercial components of the city's growth, reflected in the attitudes that were captured in the studies. On the question of migration there was a clear contrast between results from King William's Town and East London. King William's Town seemed to bleed the White population to larger cities whilst East London seemed to retain them, with the younger age groups opting to migrate for better opportunities in other cities (Watt and Agar-Hamilton, 1970: 176). So, there seemed to be some distinction between small town White population and a resident population of (relatively) permanent White people in larger East London.

The population figures that were presented in the Border survey (Watts-Agar-Hamilton, 1970) revealed that Whites were the biggest group in the studied towns. There was an initial population growth from 1891 to the 1950s. The census studies in 1951, for instance, reflected that East London had a White population of 43, 411, whilst Blacks were 39,801. The population of Blacks surpassed that of Whites by 1960. By 1967, there were 51,130 Whites in East London and 70,906 Blacks (Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970:55). Notably the White population remained stagnant while the Black population multiplied almost tenfold. However, the economy was dominated by Whites in all sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and commercial ventures. It is noticeable that more significant changes have taken place from 1970, with the White population

failing to grow at the same massive rate as that of Blacks. One explanation for the lack of growth amongst the White population is the migration of young adult Whites, as well as the lifting of influx control for residents of the old Transkei and Ciskei.

Through reading urban anthropology and recognising the limits of ethnographic studies, I was motivated to do ethnography amongst poor Whites in East London, focusing on how the 'urban' had impacted on their lives, often shifting normal patterns of life and bringing into the fore new dimensions and complexities. The above sociological quantitative enquiries provided key information on the population growth of East London, but still did not engage with historical and contextual matters, nor produce a lived understanding of people's worlds. These kinds of surveys, however, have been very popular in South Africa with government bureaucracies that have deep faith in numbers that say little or nothing about people's feelings. It is difficult to draw the texture of urbanism from a study that uses a numbers approach. This study explores anthropology of urbanism as opposed to urban anthropology. It looks specifically at the urban experience in which the notion of stigma is relevant. This study is not a survey; it is not about the numbers of the poor but about the processes of urbanism that they encounter in their very position of marginality. While I appreciate the need for that reflection which is more cultural and intimate and captures people's urban experience, I do realise the larger story of industrialisation that has related to Whites in various ways. This thesis is an attempt to blend concerns with broader political and economic forces.

My interest in this kind of study was particularly motivated by more qualitative anthropological works, and particularly through a reading of early urban anthropology, Monica Hunter on East London (1936) and Grahamstown, and Hellman (1948) on Rooiyard. Hunter integrated her study into a consideration of social change amongst the Mpondo. Most of her book, *Reaction to Conquest*, was based on her Pondoland rural research. She added East London material because she felt that it was necessary to explore social change. Her reporting on East Bank was like a community study. Hellman (1948) was not concerned with rural life and the theme of urbanisation was in her work at a time when others studied tribes. She was concerned with the 'yards' and

particularly the role of women in the yards and their struggle for survival in the city (Hellman, 1948). The dominant theme in her work was that of urbanisation and cultural change. Although this is not the theme of my work, I use it to highlight the studies that were conducted by other scholars on the urban and in the Eastern Cape, a province within which my work is situated.

In the 1960s several new texts appeared in the discipline which profiled urbanisation, culture and identity – Philip and Iona Mayer (1974) produced their *Xhosa in Town Trilogy* on East London, which was framed around questions of the cultural meaning of urbanisation. They argued that it was possible for African men and women to move to the city without urbanising in a cultural sense. In other words, they could live and work in the city without investing in urban settlement in the sense of setting down roots or permanence. The fact that men and women remained loyal and committed to building the *umzi*⁶ was exotic and intriguing to the Mayers and their colleagues (1974). The fact that those who moved to the city did not desire the city and modernity seemed counter-intuitive and well worth documenting. The Mayers focused their ethnography on describing and analysing what they saw as the rural in the urban – the persistence of tradition in town. Key terms used in this analysis were ideas like “network” – loose-knit and tight-knit networks.

This representation of African life in the city generated considerable debate. Magubane (1973) wrote in an article entitled the *Xhosa in Town Revisited* that the Mayers were deliberately representing Blacks as backward and ignoring their modernity. He claimed that the Mayers’ representations and the work of anthropology generally, with its obsession with tradition, re-enforced apartheid. It left the impression that Blacks did not want to change and that apartheid policies were appropriate given the aspirations of Blacks.

⁶ Umzi is a Xhosa word for a home.

Bank (2011) also revisits the *Xhosa in Town Trilogy* after extensive new research in the townships which the Mayers visited in the 1950s. He argues that the Mayers were correct to note the existence of a strong and distinctive set of migrant sub-cultures that revolved around loyalty to rural areas and an ideology of building the *umzi* (home). What Bank objects to is the under-reporting in the *Trilogy* of the extent of urban engagement with modernity, social and cultural forms. He suggests that one of the main reasons that the Mayers missed the vibrant modern social scene was because they did their fieldwork during the week and seldom visited the community halls and sports venues at the weekend. Bank argues that this led to a very one-sided view of township life.

In his ethnography, Bank seeks to correct this view and extend the analysis of urban social and cultural change from the 1960s through to the post-apartheid period. Bank's work provides a corrective to the work of the Mayers, but, nevertheless, it offers only a partial perspective on the city because of its focus on the urban poor of East London's townships. In more recent work, Bank (2002, 2011) has tried to correct this by analysing Whites in the city and their modes of self-representation. One recent paper, written with Phindi Mnyaka, argues that the White lenses on the city were reluctant to recognise the change. Bank and Mnyaka (2013) argue that the nostalgia for the 'Victorian settler city' seemed to dominate in some quarters in the 1960s, even in a context of rapid social change. This created the scenario where the main view of the city was dominated by 'salvage anthropology', which in the one case presented Blacks as tribal and Whites as Victorians. Neither image was fully in tune with the rapidly changing industrialising, modern city.

These sources indicate that the dominant and prevailing ideology of progress in the 1950s and 1960s was treated with some suspicion by some Whites and Blacks in the city. Some Blacks were weary of what would happen if they gave up their independence in the countryside for an uncertain future in industry, while many urban Whites, who were British settlers, feared what would happen to them if they joined the project of Afrikaner nationalism and racial modernism. They wondered what would happen to their

language and their rights if they threw in their lot with Afrikaner nationalism. This uncertainty translated into a feeling of a 'city of yesteryear', especially amongst the older generation.

Bank and Mnyaka (2013) also argue that the searchlight of apartheid, "racial modernism", shifted to the countryside in the years after 1960. The development of the city became a secondary objective to the development of the surrounding homelands from about 1965. The Afrikaner nationalists encouraged industry to resettle in the new towns and places like Mdanstane, Dimbaza, Ezibeleni, Butterworth and Idutywa in the homelands. The then government did not want a large Black working-class permanently settling in towns like East London. It preferred, rather, a situation of commuter and migrant labour where workers were settled separately outside the city and entered the city to supply labour and do some shopping before returning to their real homes. This kind of policy undermined the modernisation of East London because it made urban outsiders the core component of the urban work force.

These features somehow arrested the modernisation of East London in the late 1960s and sent the city into an extended period of economic decay and recession. They led to stagnation in the industrial sector and laid the foundation for on-going labour conflict as workers had to bear the brunt of the cost and time consumed by long commutes. Racial and political conflict on the shop floor, together with low wages and a low level of productivity defined the cities' industrial sector during these years (Mager, 1989). One of the features of this period was the isolation of the White working-class.

There are no studies of poor Whites in the city of East London, outside of the nostalgic sketches and photographic images of the Victorian city of the past (Bank, 2011; Bank and Mnyaka, 2013). Black life in the city is relatively well documented, though (Hunter, 1936), but there is an enormous gap to fill through historical and anthropological research on Whites. This study will fill that gap and contribute to a growing literature on poor Whites in South Africa. Central to my thesis is trying to come to terms with White identity in the city. The concept of identity can be generally understood within the

concept of culture, which is achieved when individuals conform to general social values and expectations (Rew and Campbell, 1999:19). I suggest that there is a distinction to be made between different versions of White identity that emerged in the interior and those created on the Eastern Cape coast. In the case of East London, I argue that the dominance of a British settler community shaped the ethos of the town, but that there was also a sense here that the land in the interior was highly contested, and not always accessible.

My work on poor Whites is located within the context of urban social anthropology. It is influenced by the work of other urban anthropologists such as Scheper-Hughes (1992); Wacquant, (2007, 2008); Perlman (1976) and Bourgois (1995). However, due to limited anthropological inquiry on marginal White lives in the city, I find my work being located within an interdisciplinary space. My literature base, therefore, does not only draw from the anthropological pot. A lot of anthropology literature on urban issues tends to put more emphasis on cultural change that occurs with urbanisation and the changes that result from modernisation (Bank, 2002; Ferguson, 1999).

My work is focused on the marginal lives of poor Whites within the context of urban areas, and I show how this marginality consequently shapes and maintains a particular citizenship of the marginalised. My interests rest on the invisible narratives of White failures as opposed to White successes. I also go further to explore the construction of the 'Other' intra-racially amongst Whites. The interest being on the fact that the racialised 'Other' is not another person of colour or different race, but the 'Other' in this instance is another White person who, due to poverty, is perceived as quite different. This study seeks to understand how the urban space creates the poor class and also how the poor experience their marginality, and different dimensions of such marginality. In essence the study is 'anthropology of urbanism' which explores the creation and maintenance of people's identities in the city.

1.11 Anthropology of urbanism

The urban space has been the focus of anthropological research for a considerable period of time. As stated above, East London was the gaze of anthropology in the twentieth century with most anthropologists conducting studies amongst Blacks that had moved from the rural areas in search of work in the city. These studies were particularly interested in the cultural transformations that were triggered by the urban space. The missing piece in anthropology at this particular time was the study of Whites in the urban space. Bank (2002:13) contends that 'the first and most critical concepts in the anthropology of urbanism are those of 'space and place'. Space represents a multiplicity of socio-material concerns and it is both the geographical site of action and the social possibility of engaging in action (Gottdiener, 1985:123). Place can be understood as the way in which people attach meaning to their immediate social and natural environment. Place can be seen as the way in which people declare their presence within a landscape (Hirsch, 1995), and includes all that pertains to the attachment to and also an expression of identity, home and any feelings of belonging. The concept of space, on the other hand, refers to that which surrounds or lies beyond a home, the context of the urban space, or landscape (Connor, 2007: 27).

In line with Henry Lefebvre's (1991) thinking, urban space is produced and re-produced. Lefebvre contends that:

... 'production' has a cardinal role: first the (absolute) idea produces the world; next, nature produces the human being; and the human being in turn, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness-and hence that Mind which reproduces the initial and ultimate idea (Lefebvre 1991:69).

A set of particular actions and processes shape and re-shape urban space often producing and reproducing a set of inclusionary and exclusionary variables (Massey, 2005). It is within this dialectical relationship that the urban space assigns who the citizens and the non citizens are within a given space. It is a contested space - as Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) point out, the true dynamics of space and place are contained in the way in which people manage and attach meaning to experiences of

change, dislocation and loss (Connor, 2007: 28). The continuous reproduction of space, therefore, serves the purpose of maintaining the continuous process of negotiated space. Although the physical urban space was colonised by Whites in the South African context, there has not been significant inquiry on how the urban in turn impacted on Whites, often creating a set of unequal relations.

The urban space in this instance is not static. It is able to create and re-create. Space is a practiced space, in that it is socially produced (Bank, 2002:14). Urban dwellers are also not immune to the space reproduction in the urban areas. In other words, the urban space influences people; it is responsible for their life experiences and reality of the city. Bank (2002:15) contends that:

In recognising the relationship between the social and spatial, the urban neighbourhoods within which we work cannot be taken as predetermined sites through which people with pre-established identities pass unthinkably. They need to be considered as spaces that are themselves constituted and constitutive of social identities and cultural processes.

Space is socially constructed and reproduced. This results in certain reactions which, in turn, create a new set of practices. This theoretical orientation acknowledges that space goes beyond the physical architectural nature of the environment to encompass all social variables that shape it into various forms. It is space that produces and reproduces both the spatial and social boundaries. For example, urban space in industrialising urban centres has been able to create an unequal access to the economy and this has created inequalities and class differentiation. The working-class and the poor have been redefined in these spaces. In the context of the South African history, urban space was used to 'produce and reproduce racial categories' (Teppo, 2004:21). The intra-racial inequalities and categories were also historically reproduced. This led to the distinction between the middle-class, the working-class and the poor within the White racial group.

Baud, et al. (2011) refers to space as both representational and representative. Representative space is thus defined as the space of planners, engineers and cartographers. It is a constructed, abstract space and often presents an absolute space

that represents and produces a conceived reality. Representational space, on the other hand, is understood as the material or lived space of the community (Baud, 2011: 5). It is within this represented space that different versions of reality often collide. Within the urban space of East London, certain narratives – such as those of poor Whites – are often hidden away, making way for the predominant reality of wealthy Whites and working-class Blacks. This gap is what this study intends to address.

1.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have positioned my work within urban social anthropology whilst at the same time showing how it is methodologically relevant in contemporary debates. It was noted in the discussions above that the gaze on South African Whites has increased through the studies of whiteness. However, whiteness studies have not really focused on the experiences of poor Whites within the context of assumed White privilege. This study sought to interpret the experiences of poor Whites within the general assumptions of whiteness. It was also noted that amongst Blacks in South Africa and, indeed, in Africa and elsewhere globally, there has been little interest to study White people with the majority of Blacks preferring to study at home amongst their own people. This has also created racial research boundaries and hierarchies. Why are Blacks not interested in studying Whites? The racial colonial boundaries still seem to be very active and influence the direction and engagement in research in South Africa. This study goes beyond the racial boundaries to focus on the often neglected research area by Black scholars, that of studying Whites and specifically poor Whites.

1.13 Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter One introduces the background and overview of the study. In this chapter, I map my field site and detail my approach and initial encounters with targeted informants. I also explore how poor Whites have remained invisible against the generalised notions of White privilege from which they have not benefited. I then locate my study within urban anthropology which

explores how the 'urban' has shaped people's experiences and identities within a neo-liberal environment.

Chapter Two provides a historical context of White poverty in South Africa and East London. It looks at how White poverty was historically a socially constructed category, which was meant to foster an ideology of White superiority over other racial groups. The poor Whites are defined and also located within the history of South Africa. The racialisation of poverty in South Africa is discussed under the subtitle 'The colour of poverty'.

Chapter Three is a narrative of my fieldwork engagement, detailing the processes that I went through during data collection for this study. This chapter justifies the methodological approach that was used in this dissertation. Hence it explains why ethnography was an appropriate approach for this study. The data collection methods are discussed in detail, showing how they aided this work to achieve its objectives. I also discuss methodological challenges and how these were overcome.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the foundation of accumulation based on race and how this eventually became a failed project with the demise of racial-Fordism. I show how different dynamics in a post-Fordist city have produced a different set of social relations. The neo-liberal factor that comes at a time when economies such as that of East London have de-industrialised is discussed and linked with the experiences of my informants.

In Chapter Five, I discuss issues of spatial and social integration in post-apartheid South Africa; to do this, I explore issues of residential integration at length whilst at the same time highlighting the complexities in de-racialising the geographical space. Whilst in contemporary South Africa people are free to reside in any part of the country and in any suburb depending on what they can afford, there are new exclusion patterns that are emerging without being supported by any formal policy.

In Chapter Six, I look at various ways which have been explored by poor Whites operating outside the formal economy. I challenge the notion of a dual economy in South Africa which was defined from a racial perspective. All Whites in South Africa were described as belonging to the formal economy that was privileged, whereas Blacks belonged to the informal and underprivileged economy. This over simplification of the economic processes overlooks the former working-class Whites who were dumped by the capitalist economy. Using ethnographic empirical data, I highlight the involvement of Whites in the informal economy in East London.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss issues around entrapment of poor Whites in spaces of marginalisation and how they exit such spaces. The chapter goes further to discuss the shame felt by poor Whites whose condition is deemed illegitimate and shameful. I show that because of the severe stigmatisation of White poverty, poor Whites have to endure being viewed as outcasts and humiliated at their failure to command certain lifestyles due to unemployment and lack of income. The stigmatisation of the poor transcends material deprivation and goes further to encompass issues of identity. To be poor is not only about lack of money but also about failing to affiliate and uphold the White identity.

Chapter Eight concludes the study by exploring the paradoxes of citizenship as they apply to poor Whites. In South Africa, not so long ago, White people were accorded first class citizenship with full benefits guaranteed by the state. However, this status has changed with Whites falling out of employment into a bracket of poverty. The neo-liberal processes are presented as having axed poor Whites from the economic system, thereby leading to anxieties and shame. The changes in post apartheid cities are interpreted using the notion of 'differentiated citizenship', 'insurgent citizenship' and 'wounded citizenship' in order to capture how Whites have experienced change in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Two

Historicising White poverty

2.1 Introduction

The issue of White poverty in South Africa derives from a specific period within the history of White settlement in the country. The historical context of White poverty helps to highlight how it was constructed as an alien condition amongst Whites, an external condition that was unacceptable. This condition was seen as distorting the ideal construction of White normalcy. Through the use of historical lenses on White poverty and the illuminated debate on whiteness (Bottomley, 2012; Frankenberg, 1997; Roedigger, 1991; Steyn, 2001a; Teppo, 2004), I provide insights into understanding how the issue of White poverty has been positioned within the South African contemporary discourses. I indicated in the first chapter that there has been a fierce debate around the 'problem' of White poverty, with various schools of thoughts offering divergent views. The highlight of contemporary deliberations on the subject has been the contradictory insights on the invisibility as opposed to visibility of White poverty. These contradictions seem to have historical foundations which portrayed Whites as above the condition of poverty and hence the heightened panic on the issue leading to the Carnegie inquiry.

Whilst there are divergent views on the role of various historical periods that had an influence on Whites, and more specifically on addressing poverty amongst Whites, in this chapter I argue for the understanding of these various periods as junctures that had a huge influence on the creation and consolidation of White identity. Furthermore, this led to the formalisation of whiteness through legal enforcement in the South African context. This formalised notion of entitlement zoomed on aspects such as White space, White ownership, White privilege and White superiority. These aspects have had an enduring effect that has made it difficult to divorce them from contemporary debates on White poverty. It has, however, been noted that the pillars that historically defined and sustained that which was demarcated as 'White standard' was severely dented by the

demise of apartheid and the end of racial-Fordism. This scenario presents complexities in the post-apartheid conceptualisation of White poverty as shall be seen in the unfolding discussion.

It is also important to highlight at this point the general views on White poverty in contemporary South Africa where poverty has been colour coded. As such, poverty is viewed as afflicting certain segments of the population, thereby partially dismissing the view that Whites can be poor. The colour of poverty debate is explored further in this chapter. Under this debate, I zoom into the East London experience of White poverty, arguing mainly around issues of industrialisation and de-industrialisation which eroded the White working-class, turning most of them into joblessness and misery. I technically refer to these periods as the racial-Fordist and the post racial-Fordist period respectively. The consequences of a restructuring industrial economy such as that of East London have not been fully explored within the context of White poverty, thereby leaving a gap in the understanding of the city's history and its relationship with poor Whites.

I also use Wacquant's (2008) theory on marginalisation that results from a restructuring economy in order to understand the East London experience of White poverty as the working-class base declined. Wacquant's book entitled *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*, deliberated on how industrialised cities were turning against the working-class through retrenchments and unemployment, thereby creating 'modernisation of misery' (Wacquant 2008:260). These consequences of the de-industrialising economy as captured by Wacquant (2008) share similarities with Ferguson's (1999) observations on the Zambian Copperbelt where the working-class was badly affected by the de-industrialising Copperbelt economy since retrenchment became a reality and job opportunities in the copper sector melted away. Ferguson's ethnographic engagement with mine workers revealed the complexities of accounting for the turn of events in Zambia through the myth of modernisation. In his account, the lives of mine workers were badly affected by the fall of copper prices that led to the partial collapse of the copper-based Zambian economy. This was in deep contrast with

the earlier prosperity the mine workers had experienced at the height of copper prices. The collapse of the economy, and the misery that was experienced by workers thereafter could not be easily explained.

The Whites in South Africa, however, did not prosper merely because of the successful economy that integrated them; poorer Whites were rescued from the threat of poverty in various ways in different periods through socio-political interventions that subsequently manoeuvred the economy to absorb those classified as weak and vulnerable. The racial-Fordist economy in South Africa eventually collapsed leaving some Whites out of employment and not being able to be re-integrated into the formal economy.

The collapse of Fordist economies is, however, not unique to South Africa as it has been experienced elsewhere. Wacquant (2008) contends that the easy poverty solutions that were applied during the Fordist age in Western metropolises through expanding commodities were permanently disconnected from macroeconomic fluctuations. The lack of permanent and sustainable strategies to deal with poverty in the city within the destabilised economies severed the weak and vulnerable urban dwellers from experiencing the normal city life, leading to various forms of marginality. Wacquant further notes that the processes of urban marginality take different forms in various parts of the world although the working-class has been the biggest casualty in an increasingly unpredictable capitalist modality. The end product to this casualty orchestrated by capitalist processes has been:

Homelessness, joblessness, street money begging, people carrying cardboard signs broadcasting 'I am hungry'; soup kitchens teeming not only with drifters and assorted human wreckage but also with wage-earners in situations of chronic underemployment ... the mingling despondency and rage of youths shut out from gainful employment who cannot move out of their parents' house and get their own life and family started; and the bitterness of older workers made absolute by de-industrialisation (Wacquant, 2008:262).

Wacquant's marginality theory also highlights widening inequality that takes place within spaces of marginality. This is also the case in East London where the gap between the rich and the poor is very wide. This gap is not only between the Whites and the Blacks,

but it is also intra-racial, meaning that the gaps are also between the wealthier Whites and poor Whites. Whereas, historically, East London was developed as an exclusionary area for Whites that did not equalise all Whites in terms of access to wealth, although it made them to be relatively better off than other races.

2.2 Who are poor Whites?

The term 'poor White' is a historically and socially constructed term used to describe White people that are poor. It has been observed that after World War 1, Afrikaners moved into urban areas in search of jobs which were not readily available, resulting in extensive poverty of the urbanised Whites which led to 'increasing concerns about the so-called 'poor White problem', which was seen as 'the social, economic and moral impoverishment or 'degeneration' of Whites (Klausen, 1997:28). This was a period where Whites also resided in multicultural slums (Klausen, 2004: 154) alongside with Blacks, thereby undermining the racial divisions and hierarchy. The main concern was the high probability of intermingling and interracial sexual relationships that poor Whites were likely to engage in with Blacks due to their close proximity. These suspicions of poor Whites were mounted because they were regarded as of inferior quality and blind to the racial categories, thereby exposing the White race to dangers of 'degeneration' and potential extinction.

The term poor White however was also commonly used in America. According to Bottomley (2012:44), the origins of the term 'poor White' could probably be traced to America where in 1870 'the desperately poor conditions of millions of Whites were nearly equal to those of recently emancipated slaves'. In South Africa, the term 'poor White' was used in the late 19th century to the early 20th century to denote a poor person of European descent. Wilcocks (1932:1) provided a detailed definition of a poor White and used the descent history of such a person as the starting point. A poor White was explicitly defined so that a person of mixed blood could not actually fit in the categories of a typically poor White whose blood was to be pure. Wilcocks (1932:2) stated that in their compilation of the Carnegie report, 'those that were of mixed blood could easily be picked up by mere observation and hence would not be considered'.

Hence a poor White was identified as a White person of European descent who lacked basic needs for survival, thus excluding people with mixed blood of Whites and Coloureds or Blacks in this category (Wilcocks, 1932).

Besides race as a differentiating factor, the dividing line between the poor and the non poor was also based on their livelihood. The typical poor eked their living as *bywoners* and farm hands, as owners of small shares of a farm, as poor settlers on poor White settlements, or as unskilled or poorly skilled labourers in the town and cities or elsewhere (for example on the railway or on road works) (Wilcocks, 1932:11-4). The fact that other White people were now being referred to as poor Whites meant that there was a 'problem' amongst Whites that needed to be weeded out. Hence, White poverty was magnified to highlight its urgency. Magubane (2008:697) contends that the term 'poor White' indicates that poverty among Whites is felt as something more or less exceptional. The poor Whites were not only considered an unfortunate case amongst Whites but it also became an embarrassment that carried with it shame as it weakened the social standing of Whites. By being poor, Whites were being portrayed as vulnerable to life hazards of poverty, which made them similar to other races that Whites dominated and sought to portray as inferior and less advanced. The typical progress of Whites could, therefore, only be fully secured through defeating the unpopular condition of poverty amongst Whites. The title 'poor Whites' is also indicative of the weight carried by this condition, for the term gives an impression of an anomaly within Whites. It also gave an impression that a White person was not expected to become poor. The emphasis on the fact that this poverty is being experienced by Whites indicates that poverty was feared amongst Whites and was also something of an exception. Although poverty is a condition experienced by other racial groups, it is not referred to in relation to their racial classification. For example, poverty experienced by Blacks, Coloureds and Indians is not referred to as 'Black poverty', 'Indian poverty' and 'Coloured poverty' respectively. However, a person classified as White by race has to carry the title of 'poor White', which in most cases is used in a derogatory manner.

In the period before the second Anglo-Boer war, an increasing number of Whites were in deep poverty comparable with that of Africans and Coloureds, although there was silence on the conditions of other racial groups. The extent of White poverty was big to such an extent that some White 'Afrikaners were even domestic or farm workers for Africans or Coloureds' (Teppo, 2004:14). This scenario created a lot of anxiety on the basis that if Whites were to endure the condition of poverty in the same way as Blacks, then that would eventually erode the social racial hierarchies. Above all, the lower classes were suspected to be vulnerable and more likely to form alliances with other races experiencing the same challenges and threaten the stability of the ruling minority White government.

There was a lot of anxiety in the 20th century around White poverty as it dented the superiority status of the White man, as the suffering endured by poor Whites equated them to Blacks, who were by all standards seen as inferior. The condition of poor Whites also presented another threat, that of having people of low status across racial lines mingling, thereby undermining racial boundaries. As noted by Bottomley (2012:41):

The colonisers were obsessed with miscegenation, White prestige and the protection of White women from the natives, and these obsessions were part and parcel of an ongoing project of self-classification, of keeping wayward colonials, such as poor Whites and prostitutes, from straying too much from their racial categories, from 'going native'.

The problem of poor Whites, therefore, became an identity crisis. Klausen (1997) contends that poor Whites were seen to 'threaten the quality' of the White race. Their poverty status compromised the justification of White superiority and domination of Blacks. Freund (1992: xiii) argues that the term 'poor White' is not a natural one but one that has been socially constructed and is elusive'. It has been noted that 'the poor White problem was instrumental in the creation of an entire people and was crucial to their identity (Bottomley 2012:13). In other words, poor Whites were crucial in the formation of White identity in South Africa. Bottomley identifies these people as the Afrikaners, who were Dutch descendents. White poverty began to be viewed as a

tragedy, not only of a single person, but of the entire White race. It has been noted that the experiences of poverty amongst Whites in the 19th century was severe to the extent that poor Whites occupied slums in places like Johannesburg and in Port Elizabeth. This prompted the colonial government in 1906-1908 to set up a commission to investigate the rise in the numbers of poor Whites in Transvaal. The Transvaal Indigency Commission was set up for this task (Bottomley, 2012:44). This commission recommended racial-based intervention to re-integrate poor Whites into the mainstream White society. It has been observed that, in English dominated parts of South Africa, English Whites were quick to establish racial boundaries between themselves and Blacks and introduced intense racism to protect Whites from any form of competition. White prestige was to be maintained through certain standards of living that safeguarded them from poverty. However, poorer Afrikaners were different to English Whites, as they often lived with and worked with their Black counterparts. Of course, this was problematic in the creation of apartheid and separate development.

The definition of White poverty is therefore, derived from two things: the relativity of their condition in comparison with non poor Whites and the middle-class; and their situation in relation to Blacks. It is noted that the ethnic diversity amongst Whites in South Africa was silenced in the common goal of solving the poor White problem. The strategies that were implemented to contain the spread of White poverty camouflaged it for a certain period until it made a re-entry into post-apartheid South Africa. However, the condition of White poverty is still stigmatised and poor Whites stereotyped. Bottomley (2012:17) observes that in post-apartheid South Africa:

The world has moved on and the 'poor Whites' have become 'White trash'-beggars, thieves and confidence men. Low-class, inbred, violent and drunk. Unworthy of charity and wasting any goodwill to come their way.

Hence in post-apartheid South Africa, the term 'poor White' continues to be used in a derogatory manner to refer to Whites who are unemployed and residing in certain areas and, therefore, not able to take care of themselves. Most of them have no source of stable income mainly due to unemployment. It is very noticeable that laughter, sarcasm and ridicule often accompany any discussion of poor Whites in contemporary South

Africa. A lot of questions are thrown around the issue of poor Whites, with most people often asking themselves how it is possible that a White person could also be trapped in poverty, a condition that has for a long time been seen as synonymous with Blacks. What is striking, however, is that these questions and perceptions are accompanied by a negative attitude, in that poor Whites are viewed as failures and losers for failing to use the historical advantages packaged for Whites by the colonial and apartheid governments. Because of their failure to maintain a certain standard of life, poor Whites are viewed as something outside of normal White borders.

Poor Whites in post-apartheid South Africa continue to be viewed as the 'Other' that is different from that which has been socially constructed as ideal. As observed by Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010:695):

Othering is a process of differentiation and demarcation, in which difference is translated to inferiority by applying differential moral codes to differing social categories...The others are perceived as objects who lack complexity, motivation, rationality and capabilities, as carriers of what is undesirable in ourselves or repressed and buried in our unconscious.

Due to this 'othering', poor Whites are despised thereby transferring a sense of shame on those failing to keep themselves free of poverty. These expectations thrive within the society and have become a 'system' or culture which is not necessarily canonised. However, the poor simply became treated as the 'Other'. Those with power define who the 'Other' is, and this 'Othering' becomes the rationale of and justification for inequalities (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin, 2010:696). The 'us' and 'them' dichotomy triggers feelings of worthlessness to the marginalised, prompting them either to go to great lengths to hide their identity or to internalise this alienation. As can be read from the past efforts to address White poverty, this condition historically triggered anxiety leading to concerted effort to diagnose and correct it through the Carnegie on poor Whites.

2.3 The Carnegie enquiry

It is particularly through the Carnegie enquiry of 1932 that White poverty was investigated through a national survey that focused on the poor White 'problem'. This phenomenon had troubled a number of prominent classes that encompassed the political elite, the church, the White middle-class and the state, and this prompted a combined quest to address a problem which was seen as a threat to White moral fabric. Not only were poor Whites viewed as deteriorating to levels outside acceptable White standards, but they were also feared to be on the verge of establishing undesired unions with Blacks. Blacks and poor Whites were both competing for jobs in town and this was feared as a breeding ground for Black-White union (Freund, 1992).

The Carnegie study established that more than 300 000 Whites could be regarded as poor since they lacked basic necessities in order to lead a normal acceptable life style (Grosskopf, 1932). A number of factors have been alluded to as the cause of this poverty. Most of these poor Whites were identified as farm migrants who had moved to towns in search of employment after the decline of agriculture. Grosskopf (1932:vi) identified the following types of Whites as poor:

The rural White dwellers, mainly the poor 'trek' farmers, the 'bywoners', farm labourers and shepherds, the 'bushveld type, the poor woodcutters, the former farmers hit by natural and economic disasters such as droughts, plagues, floods, livestock-diseases, wars and a sudden drop on their prices for their products, the unskilled Whites that had moved into towns and were not able to get employment and some general railway workers.

The construction of the category of a poor White is an indication that it strived side by side with its opposite, namely, the middle-class Whites. A poor White class has always been viewed as a category that undermines White values. At worst, the labelling of poor Whites as 'White trash' is common in countries such as America⁷. This denotes a failed and wasted life that has failed to live 'White' and be White. This category has connotations of waste and detritus. It further invokes stereotypes that poor Whites are incestuous and sexually promiscuous, violent, alcoholic and lazy (Bouson, 2001). White

⁷ In the music world, local groups such as 'Die Antwoord' mock and make fun of 'White trash'-and this group is very popular in South Africa and America. See: www.dieantwoord.com

trash is considered to be uncultured, a social deviant and generally a shame to the White folk. Even in visual and literary work, poor Whites are portrayed as people with limited thinking abilities. Poor Whites are stereotyped as failing to live in a rational manner. Such stereotypes are illuminated in literary works such as van Niekerk's *Triomf* which was converted into a very popular movie where poor Whites are portrayed as incestuous and having little control over their bodies. A father, son and uncle are all captured as fulfilling their sexual appetite on one woman in the house who has no voice at all. The perpetrators see nothing wrong with their actions and the poor woman passively gives into the lust of the whole household (Van Niekerk, 1994). The wounds of stigma, stereotype, shame and alienation have been borne by poor Whites for a long time. In the American context, such categories of Whites were mocked as they were sharply contrasted with hard work, success and achievement. Bouson's (2001:101) article entitled "*You are nothing but trash*": *White Trash Shame in Dorothy Allison's Bastard out of Carolina*' opens by remarking how "Americans love to hate the poor". The attitude towards poor Whites in South Africa draws close similarities.

In South Africa, it was out of fear of social degradation of a section of Whites whose plight could impact negatively on the status of others that White poverty became a reference point needing urgent interventions in the 20th century. The interventions to solve White poverty were not only to be understood simply as a measure intended to uplift poor Whites out their condition of deprivation but also an attempt to rescue the 'White race out of shame'. As observed by Freund (1992: xiii), 'poor White constitutes a particular ideological construction that cannot be taken for granted or assumed'. The fact that it was surprising to other Whites that a section of their racial group could be visibly poor was an indication that certain perceptions of Whites as being naturally able to adapt to continuously changing social environments were held. It has been argued that racial capitalism equated Whiteness with property (Garner, 2007) and, therefore, the 'property-less' Whites were a threat to this order. It was thus viewed as both strategic and important to rehabilitate poor Whites in order to rescue them from poverty.

White poverty, therefore, became both a threat and a disgrace to the ideals of White racial superiority, since becoming a poor White not only meant becoming poor, but also involved a change in class position and world view. This transition was viewed by contemporary observers as people losing their self-respect and their characters (Morrell, 1992:15). The visit by the President and the secretary of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1927 illuminated the First Carnegie Commission into the study of the poor White problem in South Africa .After submitting a convincing motivation to the American Carnegie Corporation, a philanthropic organisation which was established by Andrew Carnegie to undertake various studies, funds were made available to undertake this study. Senior social scientists from both South Africa and America were engaged to look into all the aspects that constituted this problem.

The Carnegie sponsored investigation into the conditions of poor Whites identified five categories under which the conditions of poor Whites could be classified. The resultant five volumes of the study discussed the following themes: the economic aspect of their poverty, the psychological well being of a poor White, the educational aspects, the health aspects and the sociological interpretation of their condition (Grosskopf, 1932). These five evaluative categories gave explanations of the factors that were responsible for this rapid deterioration of Whites at that time. The five volumes of the report were as follows: an Economic report (Grosskopf, 1932), a Psychological report (Wilcocks, 1932), an Educational report (Malherbe, 1932), a Health report (Murray, 1932) and a Sociological report (Albertyn, 1932). The people that were identified as poor Whites were thus evaluated on these five categories and recommendations for addressing these key areas were appraised.

It has been noted that the psychological aspect of the report was influenced by the eugenics movement which was popular in America and Europe in the 18th century (Teppo, 2004). Eugenic tests scrutinized human intelligence explaining the results from a genetic perspective. Although the White race was regarded as superior, some ethnic groups amongst Whites were found to be less developed than the others. This theory held that 'Blacks were biologically proven to be inferior to Whites' (Bottomley, 2012:52).

Poor people and social deviants had their conditions explained in the context of their biological make-up. The South African study of poor Whites seems to have been influenced by this American philosophy. As noted by Magubane (2008:691) comparisons between South Africa and America were premised on similar racial encounters:

What justifies these comparisons is not a primordial and predetermined aptitude for “racism” common to American and South African Whites, but rather the emergence of long-term, historically conditioned tendencies leading to more self-conscious and rigorously enforced forms of racial domination-trends that were similar in general direction but surprisingly variable in rate of development, ideological expression, and institutional embodiment.

It is through comparisons between the American philosophy and that of South Africa that similarities in their social orders begin to emerge. Magubane (2008: 692) further claims that comparisons between these two countries ‘became pertinent because both were capitalist societies whose White oligarchy kept Blacks in ‘economic servitude’. The Americans played pivotal roles in the study of poor Whites in South Africa through the provision of funds.

Magubane (2008:692) propounds that the Carnegie Corporation ‘carved out spaces for the production and exchange of intellectuals, research paradigms, and theory’. Magubane further describes the identical approach to poor ‘Whiteism’ which was identified as a social problem and the proposed solutions as ‘activist transnational intellectuals’. The findings of the Carnegie study went even as far as to blame the predicament of poor Whites on cheap native labour and competition (Grosskopf, 1932). It has been argued by some scholars that the Carnegie Commission became a rubber stamp to severe racial discrimination that was adopted through apartheid (Du Plessis, 2004). It is also endorsed as having laid the racial foundation for scientific discrimination and segregation that lasted for a lengthy period of over 40 years (Magubane, 2008), particularly with the National Party victory in 1948.⁸ With the victory of the Nationalist Party, the cause of poor Whites became a state project and also assumed an ethnic

⁸ The Nationalist Party was founder of the intensely racial state in South Africa. It used state apparatus to crush any threat from the African indigenous population.

character. The upliftment of the poor Whites became one of the central upper middle-class projects that were meant to consolidate the White racial group and insulate it from any possible threat that could result from racial confusion if all the Blacks were put on par with Whites.

Hence the Carnegie enquiry was not only about addressing the material needs of poor Whites but it was also about addressing White culture: the identity and the shame that poverty symbolised. It was interested in how poor Whites could be converted back into being proper Whites. After the Carnegie enquiry, the apartheid government worked tirelessly to rehabilitate poor Whites and although it did not make poor Whites wealthier, it managed, however, to place them in a position of superiority to other racial groups – based on race, status, and income. This was one way of consolidating an unambiguous White identity, one that spelt out the expectations of being a White person. In contrast, the stigma of poor Whites currently has much to do with the stereotypes created by the stigmatisation of White poverty and the notion that all Whites could ‘not be poor’.

2.4 Apartheid implementation

After 1948 the nationalist state incorporated the lower strata into a nexus of social institutions and regulations aimed at ‘bettering’ the situation and ‘reforming’ poor Whites so that they properly integrated into the society. According to Du Plessis (2004:883) this relationship reflected a dual beneficiary union in that:

Different levels of government incorporated the lower strata comprising so called ‘poor Whites’ into a nexus of social institutions and regulations aimed at ‘bettering’ their situation and ‘reforming’ them into productive members of society in the context of the modern city. In Foucauldian sense ‘poor Whites’ became entangled in a particular set of power relations between the state and its citizens, exercised through disciplinary power and bio-power which rendered them both beneficiaries and debtors.

This kind of interaction created a dialectical relationship where the state was to be the provider in return of political support from the poor Whites (Du Plessis, 2004). This relationship was ‘a two way political beneficiary project’ since all parties involved in this

engagement had something to gain. The politicians were to gain an assured vote, a critical aspect for political survival while the poor Whites were to enjoy privileges of the state pie through a range of social nets. These ranged from free, cheap and affordable shelter, education and job reservation. Above all, the improvement of these poor Whites was meant to seal White pride and superiority. Du Plessis (2004: 883) argues that because the majority of these poor Whites were of Afrikaner origins, the cause of poor Whites was also assuming an ethnic character as being a poor White became equated to being an Afrikaner. Coloured people (who also spoke Afrikaans) were excluded from the categories of White Afrikaners and poor Whites.

The actions of the apartheid state, therefore, served to confer first class citizenship on all Whites whilst locking out of the socio-economic and political order those who it deemed to be outsiders (Christopher, 1994). Mamdani (1996:6) contends that the domination of other racial groups was artistically crafted in the form of territorial segregation with a complex political system of ethnic pluralism (institutional segregation), so that everyone could appear as minorities.

The privileges that Whites received regardless of their ethnic orientation improved their standard of living and insulated them from the experiences of poverty that other non White racial groups were experiencing. Whites had become more prosperous, in part because the state subsidized their living standards, insulated them from market competition, denied Blacks access to free markets, and organized the exploitation of Blacks (MacDonald, 2006). Decent housing for poor Whites was also one of the project activities to improve the lives of poor Whites. As early as 1936, poor White suburbs were already being established. The first such suburb was Jan Hofmeyr (Teppo, 2004) in Johannesburg; another was Triomf (famously built on the ruins of Sophiatown). In Port Elizabeth, the destruction of Kabah in Uitenhage and Valley Road laid the basis for the separate development of Whites, Coloureds and Blacks. It then became a common spatial design of most White towns to build poor White suburbs. The establishment of these poor residential suburbs made it more convenient for the middle-class to enforce their ideologies within a closely monitored space (Teppo, 2004). It was these ideologies

that were directed at lifting the poor Whites to minimally acceptable standards within a culturally controlled social, political and physical space. Legislations were also enacted to enforce White supremacy. As noted by Beinart and Dubow (1995), segregation came in various forms such as:

The 1911 Mines and Works Act (segregation in employment), the 1913 Natives Land Act (segregation in the countryside and the prohibitions on African land purchase, the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act (Urban residential segregation), the 1936 Representation of Natives Act (abolition of the remnant African franchise) and the 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act (an elaboration of the 1913 Land Act (Beinart and Dubow, 1995: 3-4).

During apartheid, there were programmes that were developed to nurture poor Whites to be 'good Whites' (Teppo, 2004) and avoid the risk of relapsing into their previous condition. In her work on Epping Garden Village, Teppo (2004) contends that poor White areas became a focus of social workers who monitored them and rehabilitated them so that they could fit perfectly into the formation of White South African identity. Through rehabilitation interventions, some of these poor Whites could even end up climbing up the ladder into the middle-class. Hence in order to nurture a 'proper White', regular surveillance became a necessity. The state was concerned with consolidating a White state whilst at the same time forming a proper White identity hence its personal involvement in establishing an acceptable social order. The deviants who displayed undesirable characteristics that were contrary to the envisaged social order were corrected through a plethora of corrective measures in order to properly align them to becoming good citizens.

The church also played a crucial and pivotal role in the process of creating a good citizen, particularly with Afrikaners, who had often sunk low down in terms of class and income. The Dutch Reformed church played a significant role in mobilising funds to sponsor research that was to investigate the situation of poor Whites (Magubane, 2008). This church became an ally of the state which thrived on racial capitalism. Whereas the state used the machinery and instruments of oppression, such as the police, security forces and the army, amongst others, to create and maintain desired social order, the church used biblical extracts for that purpose. It was partially through

the church doctrine that the White race was championed as superior and having been put in that position by God. Thus by exercising superiority, the Whites were simply claiming what had been ascribed to them by God; the other races, on the other hand, were seen as inferior and created to serve the needs of Whites. The state and the church, therefore, worked together for a common purpose to secure and maintain White privilege with a clear heart and soul having been given such authority by divine powers.

The official end of the apartheid government not only heralded the end of a separatist regime but also ushered a change in the economic engagements. Race could no longer guarantee privileges for Whites. Whereas race continues to be used in other ways to define the socio-economic sphere in South Africa, new words and language have replaced the previous era of segregation. The striking feature, however, is the same fashion in which the post-apartheid government has continued to draw lesson from the past to use in the present period. In correcting the injustices of the past, the present government has used the variable of race to redress the inequalities that were created by the colonial and apartheid regime. The simple equation has been that Whites historically benefited enough, and, therefore, it is now time for Blacks and other minority races to access the economy through programmes such as the 'Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)' policies. This affirmative approach to the economy has not been without challenges, as it has created another differentiated class popularly known as the 'Black Diamonds' referring to the rich and famous Blacks who have accumulated their wealth through the BEE policies, where government tenders are awarded through a preferential treatment that prioritises the previously disadvantaged.

2.5 The colour of poverty

In the light of the new economic access arrangements, poverty remains a complex issue in post-apartheid South Africa, with various methods and approaches still being applied to diagnose and cure it. But poverty remains too broad a concept. As such, poverty means different things to people in different contexts and hence the complexity in attempting to come up with one acceptable universal definition. A plethora of

definitions have been advocated by different schools of thought, yet none of these unifies the diversity of this concept. Most definitions of poverty have been associated with poverty measurements based on income. Whilst there is validity in such an approach, it leaves out some of the non-monetary indicators of poverty. For instance, the World Bank uses the one dollar per day to separate the poor from non poor. Absolute poverty is thus characterized by the inability of individual households or an entire community to command sufficient resources to satisfy their basic needs (May, 2000:28). In this study I depart from merely conceptualising poverty in these monetary terms although I still acknowledge the useful insights it gives about poverty. I prefer, rather, to adopt a broader definition which is context specific and encompasses various variables.

Other definitions of poverty have been generated through comparisons of persons belonging to the same community. In this way, the meaning of poverty is dependent on one's own values, norms and beliefs, and this varies from one community to another. Other scholars argue that poverty is cultural specific and thus it depends on certain perceptions (Townsend, 1993). Townsend (1993:36), further notes that people could be described as relatively poor if they cannot obtain the living conditions - diets, facilities, norms and services - to fulfil their roles, participate in relationships and follow the customary behaviour which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society. Townsend also observes that relative poverty can manifest itself in any or all spheres of life: at work, at home, in the neighbourhood and family and in a range of social and individual activities outside work, home and the neighbourhood; and in performing a variety of roles in fulfilment of social obligations. Townsend (1993; 1979; 1970), therefore, asserts that poverty must be conceived in the present in relation to conditions, obligations, expectations and customs of today, and not some absolute standard of the past. Niemand (1993) further notes that relative poverty is based on differences in life style and it also describes the uneven distribution of resources and the denial of opportunities for advancement. In this instance the poor are to be understood in the context of their own communities and culture. Poverty, therefore, cannot be

universalised since different communities have a different understanding of what poverty is.

Other scholars have advocated a definition of poverty that looks at the environment in which one functions, looking specifically at how it allows a person to maximise their potential. The environment could either be enabling or not enabling, and this can then facilitate different outcomes. Sen (1999) thus proposed a 'capabilities' theory to measure how poor one is. This theory propounds that one is poor if they are denied space to exercise their capabilities. In this instance, poverty is not measured on the basis of what one has, but rather on what can be done with it. Hence poverty could be defined as:

Failure to achieve certain minimal or basic capabilities, where basic capabilities refer to the ability to satisfy some 'functioning' up to a certain minimally adequate level (Misturelli, 2008:667).

Although there can be many factors that prevent one from fully functioning within a particular environment, it is not very clear how the proper environment has to be created and whose custodian it becomes and what happens to those people who choose not to be productive. Although I partially use Sen's capabilities insights, I further problematise this issue by utilising the element of custodianship and also aspects of exercising capabilities in a self initiated endeavour. What happens to those individuals who remain where there are because of self created ideologies about the world around them? What if people are failing to move beyond history? How about different interpretations of reality? These are some of the questions one has to keep in mind when dealing with complex concepts such as poverty.

Another useful insight on poverty is from the multi-dimensional approach to poverty. In this approach, poverty is regarded as involving a wide range of political, social and economic facets:

Poverty is also made to become synonymous with ill-being, i.e a state of mind and physicality where the individual experiences the deprivation of material, physical and social needs' (Misturelli, 2008:667).

Poverty, therefore, becomes entangled in complex relationships with social conditions that sometimes emanate from cultural and political interactions. Some people can be excluded from certain processes due to a number of factors such as health, sex and ethnicity, gender, race and nationality amongst others. This understanding of poverty is more open as it embraces various dimensions of poverty. It thus plays an important part in this study.

The understanding of poverty in this study is mostly drawn from the reflections of participants of this research. In this context, poverty was viewed as interwoven in a web of complex social and political issues. Poverty was not just about unemployment, but it was also about the social construction of what it means to be poverty as a White person. Poverty also had more to do with a sense of belonging to group membership. This is precisely because poverty experienced by Whites was not merely measured against Blacks who, in most cases, are in worse off positions. Poverty was constantly referred to in comparison with other Whites, especially the middle-class. It emerged that to be poor as a White person triggers feelings of shame, because of the stereotypes associated with being poor. Above all, White poverty is stigmatised as shall be seen in Chapter Seven. The transformation that occurred in the lives of many of my informants was seen as responsible for the condition that they were currently experiencing. Change had occurred; albeit, in a negative way. However, although most people were able to recount on what they had lost, explanations to arrival at that loss varied. Issues of social exclusion were emphasised.

In contemporary South Africa, however, poverty is seen as a condition that affects Blacks more than any other race and hence the interventions of poverty in South Africa, at least from a basic services perspective, have been informed by the racial dimension of South African citizens. Similar notions in the past informed the Carnegie enquiry on White poverty, which, in a sense, became an identity formation project. The colour of skin gained an important role in the social ordering of the society. In this sense, the Carnegie enquiry shaped the 'colour of poverty' long before the end of apartheid in 1994 where the welfare of the Whites was prioritised. Race, therefore, became an important

social lense. Klausen (1997:27) actually described South Africa as a 'racially disfigured society'. To advance the cause of race the apartheid era further emphasised the importance of Whites through racism, thereby uplifting Whites to a better social and economic position. Poverty at that time adopted a 'Black face' although that did not matter that much to the state. Whites who had been improved from being poor did not lose their status of being 'poor Whites' unless their lives improved significantly thereby facilitating a shift in class position.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the condition of poverty is amongst Whites is not taken seriously. Above all, it remains controversial because Whites and poverty have always been treated as unrelated. Amongst most Blacks for example, it is not fully acceptable that a White person can be poor. The affirmative action policies still utilise this perspective as well. There is a general belief that all Whites have money and are not poor. Demographically, poor Whites remain few thereby weakening their claim to enduring poverty within the context where millions of Blacks are enduring high levels of poverty in urban areas where they reside in informal settlements. Although White South Africans remain relatively wealthy in comparison with other racial groups, a small percentage of poor Whites are deemed insignificant and not worthy of any serious attention (Schuermans and Visser, 2005). In 2004, a study by the University of South Africa's Bureau for Market Research is cited as having estimated that at least 400 000 Whites lived below the poverty line as compared to none in 1990 (Schuermans and Visser, 2005: 259). Although there is still some resistance and mixed feelings on the issue of White poverty, it is recognised in this study that the extent of stigma associated the condition has contributed to its complexity thereby necessitating the need to demystify White poverty.

As such, poverty interventions in South Africa have mainly been directed at finding solutions to Black poverty. In East London, income poverty studies have previously been conducted and these have ruled out the existence of White poverty. A regional study in 2005 concluded that 73.8% of Blacks and 48.7% of Coloureds were poor whilst

Whites and Asians were not poor⁹ . The Buffalo City Municipality under which East London falls has a White population of 53 311, 616 833 Blacks, 52 212 Coloureds and 1950 Asians¹⁰. The reduction of White poverty into an insignificant occurrence has therefore accelerated the invisibility and the stigmatization of those who find themselves locked in this condition. The impression thus far is that poor Whites have not reached a level that can be genuinely regarded as a condition of poverty. The current scenario is more prepared to entertain issues on Black poverty. The general justification for this has been that White poverty was swallowed by history. Hence the quantitative approach to poverty by the state has tended to be biased towards Black poverty thereby overlooking poverty experiences endured by other races in South Africa. As this study unfolds, the myth of White poverty is dispelled.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the conceptualisation of poverty as it relates to Whites in South Africa is riddled with complexities and also entangled in controversy. The history of White poverty in South Africa was detailed and the term 'poor White' was contextualised. It was demonstrated how the issue of poor Whites was handled in the past especially through the Carnegie inquiry and apartheid implementation. The focus on poor Whites in these phases was meant to consolidate a particular White identity. Hence, through the adoption of racial-Fordism, poor Whites were economically uplifted. However, the collapse of racial-Fordism (see Chapter Four) and the end of apartheid which collided with the adoption of a neo-liberal framework in managing the economy vastly altered the lives of the working-class Whites, many of whom became unemployed, making it difficult for them to survive in transforming urban environment.

The following chapter looks at the methodological approach that was adopted in this study; it shows why ethnography was adopted as the approach to gather information. Data collection procedures are also detailed.

⁹ This information was obtained from; www.elsenburg.com/.../BP2005_1_2%20Demographics%20EC.pdf

¹⁰ Information obtained from; <http://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/demographics.stm>.

Chapter Three

Reversing the gaze: The challenges of cross-racial fieldwork

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details my ethnographic journey of gathering empirical data for this study. As an ethnographer, I manoeuvred through various experiences, some challenging but some exciting. My research on the White communities was quite revealing at the same time. I gained a lot of insight, and learnt new things whilst at the same time going through a different cultural experience. The experiences of researchers conducting fieldwork are always varied in terms of their encounters during the research trip(s). The approaches and strategies utilized by the researcher to gain entry into the communities are therefore very important since these have the potential to shape the direction of the research. Furthermore, the identity of the researcher also plays an important role as it influences how the researched receive the researcher.

Drawing from the experience during my fieldwork endeavours, researching the marginalised and the poor does not result in a swift collection of empirical data. My undertaking of an ethnographic study was not a smooth route as it involved intensive negotiation due to initial difficulties experienced. My identity as a Black, foreign and female researcher played both negative and positive roles during my fieldwork engagement. During the initial fieldwork stages, there was some resistance to the research by my informants who were not very keen to provide information about themselves to a stranger like me. The initial experience of resistance by my informants was worrying to me, often making me rethink going forward with research. However, patience, persistence and networking eventually yielded positive results. To my consolation, I later got to understand the defensive attitudes and resistance from my informants, as I explain below. Because of the initial challenges that I faced in this research, I had to find new, innovative ways to gain entry into the field. I continued nonetheless on a lone journey to understand the everyday dynamics of poor Whites. I

detail my ethnographic endeavours in sections that follow, showing both the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches that I used.

3.2 Crossing the boundary line

My engagement in the field was that of an outsider and involved a lot of negotiation and referrals. I felt like an outsider, having internalized the South African race dynamics. I was aware that I had a different identity from the communities I sought to study; I did not expect the fieldwork process to be an easy task within the context of a racially polarized South Africa. The initial reactions of my informants also affirmed my outsider identity. My informants were initially uncomfortable to have their lives scrutinized, and the racial tone and reaction to my request for an interview affirmed that. Many researchers have faced various challenges during fieldwork. In most cases, access difficulties often come 'as a rude surprise' to researchers who have not anticipated the difficulties that could be involved in trying to gain entry into communities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:41). These challenges are wide-spread in the initial phase of the research, but also persist to one degree or another, throughout the data collection process. As was experienced by Teppo (2004) and Browne (who is quoted in Teppo's thesis), it is not always automatic that the ethnographer will make it in the field. Participants might be suspicious of the researcher and not be too happy to have their 'privacy' invaded and so resist research. Sensitive topics are especially very difficult to break through and therefore, it might take longer to become part of the community being studied and be able to gather key information.

Teppo (2004: 68) quotes Browne who described how communities that he was studying clearly resented scrutiny of their lives and the invasion of their privacy, but still did not feel they were in a position to refuse to participate. Teppo, whose field of study was located in Epping Garden Village, a formerly poor White suburb in Cape Town, had a difficult time whilst doing fieldwork. She says that, being a researcher affiliated with the local university, fieldwork was a tough experience in the poor White area that she sought to study. People could not easily open up and the rapport developed slowly if at

all it did (Teppo, 2004: 68). I went through similar experiences in trying to gather empirical data. There was an initial resistance to welcome me as a researcher into the homes of my research participant. When faced with a situation where there is resistance, the researchers are advised to participate in the research for an extended period of time in order to gain entry into the participant's world (Patton, 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). The ethnographic method has been particularly key and strategic in such situations (David and Sutton, 2004; Gobo, 2008; Kottak, 2008; Nkwi, 1998; Spradley 1980).

The power dynamics were at play in a context where a Black person went out to seek to understand the world of Whites although in this case not the typical White person but the marginal one. As was also noted in 'Reversed gaze' by Mwenda Ntarangwi (2010), a then Kenyan student studying in America and studying Americans in an endeavour by a group of anthropology students which was not very successful, being a foreigner actually allowed him the liberty to strike a conversation with local Americans easier than the American students, especially Whites. In their group assignments to study a poor community in the north, local White students actually failed to come up with any information and were constantly frustrated. They already held some prejudices as well about the area where the ethnography was supposed to take place; they considered this northern suburb to be infested with criminals and, therefore, dangerous. As a foreigner, Mwenda did not have this pre-information and was not part of the race dynamics prevailing in America and so was able to collect more information from African-Americans about race than his White group-mates who failed to do so. Mwenda further raises a question as to whether being a foreigner could offer some advantages in the field, prompting most Western anthropologists to prefer to conduct their fieldwork elsewhere, especially in African Black contexts. This notion of foreign advantage in the field is debatable. However, what was prominent in my own experience is that an anthropologist has to explore a variety of strategies in order to make it in the field. Mwenda contends that White anthropologists studying in Africa have an advantage stemming out of colonial domination by Whites and the subjugation of other racial

groups. This enables them to operate from the advantage of dominant race relations with Black subjects who, in most cases, hope to benefit from the research relationship.

Through my experience, being a Black foreigner trying to understand the lives of marginal Whites was both challenging and revealing. I carried an identity which was very obvious into the field; being Black, foreign and female played various roles. Although I attempted to cross the boundary line through ethnography into White people's experiences of poverty, that did not erase the racial boundaries. I still experienced racially induced pain and difficulties. In the initial stages of this study, I experienced rejection. Although I was self-conscious of my identity, the field site also acted as a constant reminder of that identity. In the initial stages of this research, my position as a Black researcher kept coming up as an issue, with my informants finding it difficult to connect with me. I went to their homes, shops and church, and always tried to strike a conversation with people but the conversations were not always spontaneous. At their homes, I would sometimes be told that I had come at the wrong time and must make an appointment only to find the person not there the next day. This was very discouraging and affirmed the warnings I had received that I might be rejected. This made me to be conscious of the differences between me and my study population and necessitated that I tread with caution. Actually, one family openly told me that they were scared of Blacks and did not trust them.

The numerous challenges that I initially faced in this fieldwork necessitated me to go back to the drawing board and re-strategise. I had discussed my intentions to do research on poor Whites with a number of people. One of my acquaintances, after hearing that I wanted to focus mainly on the West Bank area of East London, advised me to contact a local journalist for the Daily Dispatch newspaper who had done some work in the area with students from Rhodes University¹¹. I got some of the contacts of people who could be of great assistance from this journalist. I was therefore able to get locate some of my informants through this facilitation. This made the fieldwork process

¹¹ Andrew, a journalist by profession, was also interested in the stories of poor Whites within the West Bank area and had done some work there.

lighter and watered down suspicion on some of my informants. I therefore relied heavily on snowballing and purposive sampling to locate more informants. Gobo (2008:102) states that purposive sampling consists of identifying sites with an extreme status of particular attributes, or sites which comprise a range of the status available such that all of the possible statuses are present. I used this approach to sample areas such as the West Bank area which technically provided a clearer picture of living in poverty in a former working-class area. Snow balling also proved to be very useful in locating relevant informants. This kind of sampling involves the picking of only individuals who display the necessary attributes, and then, through their recommendations, finding other individuals with the same characteristics. This type of sample is usually the one best suited to researching highly sensitive topics: socially stigmatised behaviour, for example, or behaviour of which the subjects are ashamed or which is illegal.

When I embarked on this research, I was not very new to the South African context, although the study of Whites was a new experience for me. I had lived in South Africa for a lengthy period of time undertaking my post graduate studies. I first came to South Africa in 2001 to pursue a Masters degree. I was based in the rural Fort Hare campus of Alice which is about 120km inland from the East London campus. Although I was not studying White poverty back then, I was sensitized to the racial dynamics that characterized the South African society. South Africa at that time was still in its earlier stages on the route to transformation. It did not take me long to understand the racial nature of the South Africa during its early stages of transformation.

I developed an interest to study White poverty during my stay in East London in 2009 when I registered for a Doctoral degree. Through interaction with colleagues on issues of social change, transformation and poverty in post-apartheid South Africa, I cultivated an interest to focus on White poverty as an area which has been sidelined in contemporary scholarly enquiries especially by Blacks. However, this decision surprised many people. The sensitive nature of the topic drew diverse reactions. I was also conscious of the long and winding journey I was about to embark on. Blacks had 'naturally' stayed away from studying Whites especially in the South African context.

Most people commented saying that I had dived into the deep end of the pool. Their reaction was not surprising. The relations between Blacks and Whites were polarised due to the history of segregation. At the time of my research, although Blacks and Whites tolerated each other, trust had not fully developed. Although South Africa has travelled many years into democracy, the traits of apartheid have not been entirely erased. The racial divisions are still clear with each racial group largely keeping to their own. Others thought that it would be unsafe for me to delve into such a study yet others thought I could add more value by studying other Blacks languishing in urban poverty. One of my colleagues actually asked me if I had not taken time to look around and observe how wide spread poverty was amongst Blacks in surrounding informal settlements and questioned why I had decided to probe something which was not too obvious. Questions of this nature kept coming up throughout my research.

Instead of reacting in the most obvious way to all the advice and warnings, I decided to proceed with the research and take the risks. In that way, I entangled myself into controversy and became even more curious to probe this area. Although I experienced rejection, I also felt empathy for my informants. This could sound paradoxical in that to some extent I suffered discrimination and experienced racism in the field, but I still sympathised with my informants. Their experiences are complicated in that they possess a dented White identity and have been continuously inflicted with new wounds, which have altered their sense of belonging in many ways (see Chapter Eight on wounded citizenship).

Although I was not born in East London and do not have a deep natural bond with the area, I had a fair knowledge of the city through literature and travelling with friends to many areas of the city. It is not very difficult to see how divided East London is geographically. The divides in social classes are also clearly represented in this spatial layout. Patterns responding to the question of class are visible. The spatial layout of the city affirms the social and physical status accorded to various areas as there are glaring differences in terms of physical space memberships. The poor and the middle-class are located in different physical geographical spaces. This division has gone beyond the

dictates of race. Marginal Whites out of employment and having no reliable financial backup are thrown into the deep end, where they find themselves having to live in Black dominated suburbs. I observed, though, that most Whites are still hanging onto the idea of the suburb, which has over time lost its original meaning and intentions. This assertion is grounded in the idea of separate suburbs for different racial groups which largely faded away with the end of apartheid. The formally White suburbs that were located close to town were flooded with Black occupants after the abolition of the Group Areas Act 1991 (Kotze and Donaldson, 1998) which was the official policy of separation.

In East London the social space represents the identities of the occupants of that space, a clear criteria being the economic wealth accumulation. Social classes have been reproduced in various spaces. Race as a social force of dividing space has been overshadowed by the production of new spaces. There is a clear division between the middle-class and the poor. Geographical space has been occupied in that pattern. Those with the economic power have been able to occupy their own social spaces in different suburbs that are fairly expensive. The amount of rent that is required for occupancy in upper class areas as reflected in the local newspaper adverts on a daily basis confirms money as the catalyst in the production of new social space. Rentals are high and the social demands in such spaces separate those who can and those who cannot occupy those spaces. The poor have been demarcated their own social spaces in areas that are degenerating.

I also resided in Southernwood and Quigney suburbs that had similar characteristics to West Bank and were rapidly deteriorating. These suburbs are close to town and to the University although I still needed some form of transport to get there. In central West Bank, taxis are available; these are small private cars that have been converted for the taxi business. From 2009 to 2011 it costs R5 to get there on a taxi shared by four passengers. On the upper end of West Bank within Race Track access was difficult because there was no public transport going there. As a result, one needed a car or, alternatively, enough money to hire a private taxi which charged around R60 for a return trip. The other option was to board a taxi going to East London airport and drop off

along Settlers highway and then walk to Cocobana. The trip on foot had its own challenges as one could be mugged or be confused for a prostitute as the area was flooded by such activities even in broad daylight.

On my first trip to West Bank, a friend of mine who resides in the area gave me a lift. We patrolled around the central West Bank and also went to the Race Track area which is popularly known as the 'Cocobana'. This was the most interesting area for my study. This area is visibly a neglected space. The community in that area informally resides within the Race Track, in a neighbourhood without electricity. There are about 20 homes in that area, and on my first visit in 2009, about 98% of the residents were Whites who were unemployed, on short term contracts, and on government grants. This place only charged a nominal fee for rent. To be precise, rent was about R250¹² (which residents could hardly afford). On the other side of central West Bank, rentals were above R1000 for a single room; even a backyard shack could fetch as much as R700. Accommodation is generally a major problem in East London and this keeps rentals at inflated levels. This high demand for accommodation could also be attributed to the fact that the city is home to two universities; the University of Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu University that also compete for accommodation space for students. In addition to that, the city is also a tourist destination. The ocean and wild coastal areas are the major attractions.

On my second trip to do my fieldwork, I boarded a public taxi which left me along Settlers Way. I walked for about 45 minutes to the Cocobana area, an informal settlement in West Bank. When I initially asked at the taxi rank in town if it was possible for me to get a taxi to this area, the taxi operators burst into laughter and said:

Why would you want to go to such an area? Don't you know that there is no transport to that place? If you want to go there you can hire me, or I can drop you along Settlers Way and you can proceed on foot. You will have to return the same way (Taxi driver, 2009)

I then opted to drop off along Settlers highway. It was an eye opening experience to actually opt to be dropped on the way and complete the trip on foot. What might look

¹² The average exchange rate between the Rand and US Dollar was \$1=R8.5 from mid 2012

very normal from inside the car is actually very scary on foot. I walked whilst waving to the cars that were possibly heading to the beach nearby, but they passed me at speed. I hardly met anyone on the road and I walked as fast as I could; at times I would even run. Of course, I was scared that maybe something bad might befall me or that I might be attacked by criminals. Luckily that did not happen. When I got close to Race Track, I could see scantily dressed girls loitering around looking for clients. These girls, I was informed, were sex workers who operated during the day. I was informed that some of them actually operate with male body guards as the place is not safe and hence they need these body guards to defend them against territorial feuds with competitors within the same industry.

The Cocobana area is only visible from close range as the place is surrounded by trees and thick vegetation. The name of that place sounds exotic but the reality of that place presents a different picture. When I first went to the Cocobana area, I had already done my homework on it. I had no fear of what might happen to me inside the compound as I had sought advice from a Daily Dispatch¹³ journalist who had done some research on the area for his newspaper articles. The residents of the area were not amused at the scrutiny of their lives. They told me that they had received many visitors who had promised to help them but nothing had materialized. It was evident to me that when they saw a visitor, they anticipated some form of assistance and would all generally want to know what the visitor was up to. A few of the houses had 'mini' fences around the properties; otherwise, it is easy to just knock on the door. At any given time, there would be people in the houses as the majority of the people were unemployed and spent most of their time at home. On my first visit, I went straight to the person I had been referred to by the Daily Dispatch journalist and introduced myself. That was the beginning of numerous meetings and interviews that we held together. I was also introduced to other residents in Cocobana who became an integral part of this research.

The situation at central West Bank was, however, different from that of Cocobana. I got to know which homes I should visit through a friend of mine who resided there. She had

¹³ The Daily Dispatch is a local newspaper which also did a brief research on the Cocobana area. The newspaper can be viewed on : www.dispatch.co.za

briefed me about some of the experiences of her White neighbours. I then decided to go house by house asking for appointments. I soon discovered that the timing of my research was not the best. It was an emotional period in the country after the murder of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) leader Eugene Terre'Blanche at his farm in Ventersdorp in the North West province¹⁴. That prompted tensions in the country to the extent that president Zuma had to appeal on national television for calm in the country in face of the isolated incident that had occurred¹⁵. This period was an emotional one for many Afrikaners in that to some extent it symbolized White persecution and dispossession by Blacks. His death on the farm could also have symbolized the violent seizure of White farms by Blacks as had transpired in the northern neighbouring country of Zimbabwe where scores of White farmers were butchered by Blacks during forced farm invasions from the year 2000 onwards.

Although the print media has carried pockets of stories about the state of poor Whites in post-apartheid South Africa, the stories have tended to lack depth, so, using ethnography, here was an opportunity to verify for myself the experiences of poor Whites. By so doing, I actually encountered life experiences of people who are on the edge¹⁶. Most of these experiences of poverty are locked away from the public gaze. They are locked within the secret walls of the home. It is only through close observation that one can get to appreciate the challenges faced by poor Whites. One of my informant, Daizy, a 42 years old mother of three summarised the challenges they faced by saying that; 'It's reality as you can see for yourself, we are poor, we live in poverty, we are struggling as well (Daizy, 2010). It was through ethnographic engagement that it became apparent to me that poverty is enclosed within the context of the private home

¹⁴ Terre'Blanche was a White farmer who held very conservative ideologies and campaigned for a separate state for Afrikaners when it became clear post the 1980s that apartheid was facing its demise and the Nationalist party was also willing to reform. He formed the 'Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging' (AWB) an Afrikaner resistance movement to advance his ideologies of White supremacy. He advocated a separate state/homeland (Boerevolkstaat) for the Afrikaners. He was murdered on the 3rd of April 2010 at his farm in the North West province by two of his farm workers.

¹⁵ Times online, 3 April 2010, www.timesonline.co.za

¹⁶ One of my not so poor White friends commented that poor Whites on the margins are down and out and that there is little that is left for them to salvage. I remember also coming across a poor White standing right in the middle of the road on my way to Nahoon shopping centre carrying a cardboard poster inscribed 'down and out please assist'.

for the majority of poor White South Africans as public display of the condition is not encouraged. Some of my informants actually referred to themselves as belonging to the 'forgotten past' of South Africa since the contemporary period offers little prospects for their life advancements. Observations also became very important during data collection phases.

3.3 Observations

I utilized observations in order to understand the cultural dynamics of the subject under study. This helped capture what could not be articulated in words. Scholars have also recommended the adoption of observation in order to capture the essence of the subject under study (Babbie, 1998; Clifford & Marcus,1986; Hastrup, 1990; Nader, 2011; Marcus,1998) . Observations act as useful tools to gather information that cannot be necessarily gathered through other tools. These can also be used for verification purposes. To ensure validity of research, ethnographers have tended to rely on participant observation and interviewing in order to get to grips with the contexts and content of different people's everyday social, cultural, political and economic lives (Crang & Cook, 2007:60). I engaged in both participant and non-participant observation to solicit information. Observations are naturally a big part of an ethnographic study (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2003). As such, participant observations were used to gather information. Babbie (1998:282) describes participant observation as 'a specific form of research in which the researcher participates as an actor in the events under study'. In an ethnographic research, things are not taken for granted. Observations are crucial to make meaning of lived experiences. Social phenomena are complex and it takes a combination of techniques to make sense of them. As observed by Babbie and Mouton (2001), the importance of observations cannot be over exaggerated. Everything becomes important, be it the exterior physical signs, architecture, behaviour, attitudes, language and perceptions, amongst others. The context in which certain actions occur also becomes significant. Everything needs to be watched carefully and meanings generated out of such contexts. Gobo (2008) contends that 'we now live in the

observation society', making observations an important approach in gaining understanding about social relations.

On the other hand, in non-participant observations, the researcher observes the subjects 'from a distance' without interacting with them (Gobo, 2008:5). This strategy is engaged by researchers who are not interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the subject's social world and the symbolic sphere; hence they do not interfere in their natural setting. Participant and non-participant observations are, therefore, sides of the same coin. It has been noted that, although observations play a pivotal role in an ethnographic study, there are other secondary sources of information that serve a complementary role. Gobo (2008:5) observes that the following sources of information are used in an ancillary manner by the ethnographer and these are:

Informal conversations, individual or group interviews and documentary material (diaries, letters, class essays, organisational documents, newspapers, photographs and audiovisual aids).

The main strategy for ethnographic research remains reliant on observation as the key. It is important for actions to be observed as they take place in their settings. Observations are able to capture that which we are not always ready to articulate. Actions do not always correlate with what we say. That is why there is even a common phrase that says "do as I say not as I do". This confirms the disparity that exists between words and actions. To further emphasise my point, I draw from Gobo (2008:5) who quoted an American sociologist, Edward C Lindeman, who made an important observation on this issue by asserting that:

If, say the behaviourists, you wish to know what a person is doing, by all means refrain from asking him. His answer is sure to be wrong, not merely because he does not know what he is doing but precisely because he is answering a question and he will make the reply in terms of you and not in terms of the objective thing he is doing.

As such, ethnography utilizes observations in order to capture that which will not be willingly articulated (Punch, 1994; Wills, 2007; Wolcott, 1999). What people say and do

is sometimes very contradictory in many ways. People will normally respond in a way that will satisfy the question asked thus avoiding saying what is truly in their hearts.

Ethnographers have gone to great lengths to try and obtain information but there have been warnings that one must guard against going 'native' whilst doing an ethnographic study. Practical experiences are powerful conversion catalysts. One can end up being submerged in the culture being investigated and find it difficult to pull out of the situation. For example, one could be converted to a certain religion whilst trying to understand it from the inside and find it highly difficult to pull out of the situation at the completion of the inquiry. Sometimes an ethnographer might actually feel guilty to be moving out of a certain context. Ethnographers can choose to introduce themselves to the communities being studied for ethical considerations; however, in some cases the researcher might actually act like a detective or an investigative journalist and conceal their identities. This is technically known as covert observation. In such a situation, the actors are unaware of the researcher's identity and of the purposes of his or her research (Gobo, 2008:107). This technique is used when the researcher believes that if his subjects were aware of his presence that might heavily alter their usual behaviour. Although this kind of approach has an advantage in that the researcher does not have to negotiate his entry into the field, it also possesses a number of disadvantages. These are stated by Gobo (2008:108) as:

The risk of being discovered, and taken to be a spy with embarrassing - or sometimes dangerous - consequences and also the difficulty to conduct formal interviews or to be excessively insistent in his or her questioning, because people will not put up with interviews and observations for which no purpose is explained.

Engaging in covert observation also tests the ethical considerations in social science research. When discovered that research was going on without the subjects' approval, people might feel that their privacy was invaded and dishonesty used to gather information. This might then lead to unpleasant consequences. Concealing one's identity might actually back fire and one may be sued in some cases. As propounded by Gobo (2008:108), 'actors are entitled to their privacy and they have the right to know who they are dealing with so that they can decide whether or not to take part in the

research'. Gobo states that there are exceptions, however, to the question of ethics in research in certain situations. For example, when the researchers are conducting their research without interacting with actors, maintaining a distance from them, such a research might take place in settings such as stadiums, beaches, political rallies, buses, dance halls and queues in public places. The other example given is that of actors under observation perform a public function or provide a customer service (shopkeepers, police officers, front-office staff, shop assistants, bank tellers) and whose work performed is impersonal. This approach, therefore, needs to be exercised with a lot of caution to limit negative consequences. On the other hand, being an overt observer, which means introducing oneself, can also trigger protectionism and only limited information may then be obtained.

Social scientists have to continuously negotiate in the research space as they manoeuvre to understand that which is not openly visible. There is no doubt that participant observation is key to unlocking the inside world, but the question, perhaps, is how one actually negotiates the space in which to participate. Being an outsider in a research site takes longer for one to be able to be part and parcel of the social space being investigated. Writing on an event that has been witnessed and participated in gives more volume to the area under study. Babbie and Mouton (2001) assert that participant observation should be a lived experience. One has to abandon one's comfort zones and get into action in the study context. One has to experience what the participants are actually going through, how they negotiate their space, and what meanings they attach to their experiences. It is clear that most knowledge that people possess about social relations is generated from either participant or non-participant observations. It is important to note, though, that two different people can observe the same thing at the same time but arrive at different conclusions about that particular phenomenon. Participant observation has its own challenges as the group that is being observed might actually decide to 'act up' if they are aware of the intentions of the researcher. They might engage in this behaviour in order to conceal certain information. In this context, there is need for the researcher to utilize a variety of skills to obtain different information. In some situations, the researcher might conceal himself and

participate in activities of the group if that does not trigger serious ethical considerations. In summary, Gobo (2008:13) makes an important observation that the participant observation methodology has the following features:

The researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors, staying in their natural environment with the purpose of observing and describing their behaviour by interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals, and, learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions.

In my research observations became key and complimentary to interviews. I was able to reconstruct narratives of pain and loss by mere observations. The life styles of my informants were partly reflected through observations. Some of what I observed is not too obvious from the outside and can only be seen at a close range. The reconstruction of my observation points to people in despair. Through observing the difficulties that my informants were going through, I shared in their pain and suffering. Whereas, people watch with little sympathy and doubt at the suffering experienced by some Whites, it is only through embarking on a closely observed endeavour that the reality and extent of challenges faced by poor Whites start to make sense. The loss of employment and failing secure a livelihood is an experience that drains energy on many often making some to lose hope of ever regaining a normal life. The extent of property dilapidation occupied by some of my informants also told an untold story of suffering. Steyn (2001b:156) contends that the changes that have taken place in South Africa have made the White people feel out of place.

Apart from observations, I also relied heavily on interviews during the course of my research. By the end of this study I had interviewed more than 80 informants. Most interviews were done in homes at central West Bank and Cocobana, restaurants, parks and at the University.

3.4 The conversations

The conversations with my informants were generated through in-depth interviews, unstructured and semi-structured interviews that were used in conjunction with

participant observations. Not everything in the field can be understood and deconstructed through participatory observations. Participation has some limitation hence the need for the researcher to rely also on other data collection techniques and employ them in a complementary way. As noted by Babbie (1998:282), in-depth interviewing is the mainstay of participant observation. Interviews can be used as a tool to discover further clues and directions. As noted by May (2001:120), 'interviews yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings'. I therefore opted for the unstructured interview and semi-structured, as I wanted to avoid a situation whereby the responses of my informants are controlled in that they will have to answer in a particular way that tally with an interview schedule. Opening up the interview in an unstructured manner makes it possible to gather more information. Even other dimensions of the subject that are not necessarily evident could be revealed. Robson (2002) also emphasises the value of semi-structured interviews as opposed to the rigid structured interviews that are likely to constrain the interview process and lead to key information being missed. Semi-structured interviews facilitate greater interaction, and also allow modification of questions during the interview.

Most of the interviews granted by my informants were normally done on the veranda of their homes, outside within the yard and at other places preferred by my informants. I also tended to engage in informal discussions about the issue with Whites that I met in various places. However, the key informants interviewed were poor Whites, middle-class Whites, social workers, politicians, academics, religious leaders and non-governmental organisations and ordinary citizens. Through interviews, I was able to cross check some of the information that I had gathered through observations. During the interviews, I wrote down the conversations in my fieldwork diary. I notified my informants that I would note down our conversation in my diary in order to be able to reflect on what we had discussed. It was easy to take notes during the interviews as most of the conversations took place in private residences and other places where we would sit and discuss. I also recorded some of the conversation with the full knowledge

of the person being interviewed. Some preferred not to be recorded on an audio tape and that was respected.

3.5 Ethical procedures

Social researchers have obligations towards their research; and therefore it is their responsibility to follow ethical guidelines. Since social researchers work within a variety of economic, cultural, legal and political settings, each influences the emphasis and focus of research. However, if social research is to be of benefit to society and the groups and individuals within it, then social researchers must conduct their work responsibly and in the light of the moral and legal order of the society in which they practice¹⁷.

A wide range of ethical considerations were adhered to in this research. Churton (2000) advises that social scientists must ensure that the goal of their research does not impinge on the rights of others, and they must safeguard the well-being of research participants and obtain their informed consent. Hence, participation in this research was on a voluntary basis and consent was sought. The researcher explained the research objectives to the subjects in a manner and language they could understand. They were told about the context, purpose, nature, methods, procedures and sponsors of the research¹⁸. This was done to allow them the choice to either participate or not participate. I did not conceal my identity as a researcher. They were fully aware that I was doing this fieldwork for my Doctoral studies at the University of Fort Hare. I asked for permission to take notes and also to record during the interview process. The research was conducted in a competent manner that guarded against any form of harm to the subjects. Trust between the informants and the researcher was developed in the process of this research. The research was carried out in compliance with and awareness of local customs. Therefore, the researcher put considerable effort into trying to familiarize herself with the host culture, and respected and maintained the dignity of all individuals involved in this research.

¹⁷ See <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf>.

¹⁸ www.aappolicy.aapublications.org

The informants were informed about what the research findings will be used for and also how it will contribute valuable information to policy formulation and social cohesion in the country. As confidentiality on identity was assured, pseudo names were used in this research. The respondents were also assured that they were free to withdraw from participating in this research at any point since participation was on a voluntary basis and that they would not be victimized for that. The researcher, however, tried to maintain good relations with all the informants as their participation in this research was invaluable.

3.6 Language

The proficiency in the language of the group under study is undoubtedly one of the most important skills a researcher should possess. Language embodies culture and hence to understand the group being studied one must be able to understand what they articulate. An ethnographer has to be part of what is being studied and, as such, language skills are essential. As observed by McNeill (1990), the purpose of such research is to describe the culture and life style of the group of people being studied in a way that is as faithful as possible to the way they see it themselves. This method, therefore, allows the researcher to write about the case the way it presents itself. Ley (1988:121) also asserts that such a method is concerned with making sense of the actions and intentions of people as knowledgeable agents; indeed, more properly, it attempts to make sense of their perceptions of the events and opportunities confronting them in everyday life. This contention was further strengthened by Fielding (1993:156) who advocated that every social group is distinct in its own setting. He further quoted Goffman who advocated for understanding the target in its own setting:

The researcher has to be in that setting since, any group of persons - prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients - develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and ... a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject.

The language spoken by my target group was English and therefore I had no problem conducting interviews since I am proficient in the language. As an ethnographer, the knowledge of the language was essential and very useful. Ethnographers cannot be in a position to understand the world they seek to study if they lack language skills. In my case, the languages that I encountered were mainly English and IsiXhosa. I was well versed in the two languages and therefore I did not have to struggle trying to learn the languages. Although they were also Afrikaners in my study population, they preferred to converse in English most of the time. I hardly heard them speak in Afrikaans during my presence. The language issue was one important observation that I made. Although I got to know that some of my informants were Afrikaners, they tended to shy away from their language and preferred English.

3.7 Historical and archival information

In order to complement the empirical data gathered from my fieldwork, I also used archival information and historical documents. These proved to be very useful sources of information. At the beginning of this study, I spent a considerable amount of time at the University of Fort Hare, Alice campus, where the Howard Pim Library is located. The Alice campus is about 120 kilometres from East London where I was based. The Howard Pim Library houses important archival materials and invaluable historical documents. At the Howard Pim Library, I managed to access the five volumes of the 1932 Carnegie study on White poverty. These documents could not be taken out of a certain section of the library but I was allowed to read them and make some copies. These documents proved to be very useful for background information to White people in South Africa. I also spent time at the Daily Dispatch archives in East London reading and trying to understand the dynamics of the city in order to reconstruct the history of East London. At the Daily Dispatch archives, I went through newspapers that dated back to the 1950s and 1960s. I also searched for more information at the East London Museum in order to understand the early history of this town.

3.8 Analysis of Data

The collection of data for this study was through interviews, observations and conversations with people. This information was logged in the field diary. The observations that I made in the field and captured in my memory became important in the analysis period (Okely, 1994). These generated insights on critical themes. Content analysis then began. The data was grouped according to themes that emerged from empirical data and theory. Babbie and Mouton (2001:108) advise that data analysis must involve breaking up the data into themes, patterns, trends and relationships that are manageable. This is done in order establish relationships between 'concepts, constructs or variables and also to gauge whether some patterns or trends can be identified or isolated' (Babbie and Mouton 2001:108). This study adopted the conceptual and relational analysis procedures. The conceptual analysis basically draws from themes whereas the relational analysis establishes relationships between data elements. My notes were initially taken down in the field either by writing down during the interview process or recording using an audio recorder with the permission of the informants. The observations were normally stored in my memory and quickly written down when I returned to my base. At times I wrote down what I had observed on my way back. In order to make meaning of the notes that I had taken down, I grouped the material according to emerging themes. These were then processed through interpretation. I also established relationships between the emerging themes and these were also compared with theory.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, ethnography was the approach used in order to gain a deeper understanding of the community under study. As such, I used observations, semi-structured and unstructured interviews as tools to gain knowledge from my informants. I also relied on historical and archival documents. I highlighted the difficulties that are often experienced by researchers in undertaking research in communities that are unfamiliar and of different cultural orientation. During the fieldwork period, there is a

high possibility of isolation and the research sometimes becomes a lone journey with numerous challenges. The immediate difficulty associated with embarking on a study of other cultural groups is the deliberate refusal to allow entry. Race becomes the first gate keeper. Being a Black person, foreign and female, produces its own dilemmas for the researcher. The participation in the field, therefore, spanned a number of years. There was always that 'need to go back' and verify information. Also attachment to the area being studied cannot be overruled. However, ethnographers always have to find a way to withdraw from communities under study.

Chapter Four

The changing fortunes of the White working-class

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter explores the changing nature of the fortunes of the White working-class in West Bank. These changes emanate from various economic phases within the East London industrial economy. This Chapter reflects on the lives of my informants, whose experiences were transformed through various economic phases. The opening narrative mirrors the ideal economic climate encountered during a period of gainful employment within an expanding industrial economy, which I refer to as the 'racial-Fordist' period in South Africa. The narrative of Melissa, Simon and Martha speak to that period when the industrial sector was able to secure decent livelihoods for the majority of the White working-class. However subsequent economic changes that affected the industrial sector in East London altered the lives of the working-class. The various fluctuations in the economy and their impact on the lives of my informants are captured through the experiences of George, who moved back and forth from one job to another during the global economic recession experienced in the 1970s. This economic instability was locally managed through heavy government investment in the economy and also by incentivising industrial relocations to the homelands. It was noted that much of the effects of the economic destabilisations were felt on a higher scale towards the end of apartheid in South Africa, where the attainment of freedom coincided with the rise of neo-liberal forces in the economy, thereby severing many from secure employment. The effects of neo-liberal forces on the working-class are reflected in the lives of James and Sarah who are jobless and very uncertain about their future after they were both retrenched from their jobs.

4.2 Industrial nostalgia

As stated earlier on, this study focuses on the lives of people who once occupied working-class economic positions and were eventually pushed out of their jobs due to economic decline and subsequent de-industrialisation. In 2009, I met an old couple, Melissa and Simon, who were above the age of 65 and resided in West Bank. In a series of interviews that I held with them, a nostalgic picture of East London of yesteryear was reconstructed. This couple provided an insight into the nature of their lives and those of many other working-class Whites in the past. They emphasised the vast job opportunities that were available in the past in the industrial sector in East London. Their reconstruction of the past showed a great contrast between today's East London and that of the past. Of course, Simon and Melissa had witnessed various transitions of the economy in East London.

Simon, who had been born and bred in a working-class family in West Bank, remembered fondly how as a young man he had looked forward to a future full of possibilities. Having attended the local schools, he described himself as having been a hard working student, although he had never reached the top ten level of his class. He was fond of the sciences, an area he pursued as a career, until he became an electrician. At the age of twenty, he already had a stable job within the industrial sector, dealing mainly with electrical issues. He had been happy in this job. Although it did not make him wealthy, he nevertheless led a decent life. Even when he got married to Melissa who had a passion for 'numbers', they enjoyed the peace of financial security. Melissa worked as a clerk in local firms.

After Simon and Melissa 'tied the knot', they were blessed with four children. They raised their children in a secure home. They were not awash with cash, yet they provided a decent home to their children and also assisted them to acquire decent education. They indicated that, by sending their children to school, they knew that there was a future for them somewhere in the country. They did not even imagine a period when jobs would dry out. Education and work were intimately related. People with some form of education could never struggle to get work. The economic outlook of South

Africa at that stage was promising to everyone and, as such, there was little to worry about.

Although Simon and Melissa did not want to deliberate on the racial factor of employment prospects in the South Africa of yesteryear, they emphasised that they never imagined South Africa in its current form where everyone seemed to struggle to get employed. Although they were now at a pensionable stage, for them the present outlook sharply contrasted with what was normal in many South African towns some years back. Simon remembered fondly that when he had finished his course in electrical engineering, he sent his job applications to three firms. Two responded swiftly and, before long, he was gainfully employed. Although he did not disclose how much his firm was paying him, the money was nonetheless enough to cater for his family and all his other needs.

Within the first year of working, Simon was already driving a decent car. 'It cost close to nothing to drive, money by then could buy a lot', he said. He also alluded to the fact that most of his friends actually had cars, and that it was normal to be in that position without accumulating the burden of debt. He mentioned that he used to hang around with his friends for fishing outings or socialisation, and they could meet anyway around the city because they all drove.

Simon had worked for more than thirty years at various firms until he retired in the early 1990s. His children were all grown up by that time and three of them had voluntarily decided to leave East London to work in bigger cities. Their last child had remained behind and eventually joined the education sector in East London. He then decided to lead his own life alone, and later with his spouse when he married. As a result, Simon and Melissa were left alone in the house that they had bought through their combined salaries. The house had five rooms built on an average-sized yard. At first, upon going on pension, they indicated that they would engage in part-time work. However, such opportunities eventually dried out. When part-time positions were available, Simon would carry out electrical repairs on a part-time basis upon request, but eventually such

chances became very slim. Melissa was also in agreement that work opportunities for the retired were now close to nil in the new South Africa. When I probed what they thought were the causes of such changes, they could not offer me clear explanations and just maintained that things were now different in terms of employment prospects, and that various businesses that offered them part-time work opportunities had since closed down.

Although opportunities in East London kept narrowing, Simon and Melissa had preferred to remain in the city. At the present moment, their only source of income was the government old-age pension grant which was pegged at R1200¹⁹. Although they were appreciative of the fact that the new government had catered for all old people in the country, the amount paid out was far too little to cater for their living and medical expenses. They indicated that the money ran out before the month ended making it difficult for them to pull through. 'Something had gone wrong with the rand!' They said this in reference to the eroded purchasing power of the rand. The rand had continued to weaken against major currencies whilst at the same time prices of basic commodities gradually escalated making it difficult for many people to cope in a situation where salaries remained stagnant. To make matters worse, it was almost impossible to save money for the future because the money to save was simply not available. These sentiments were also shared by many of my informants who could not see how people could stash away some money when they actually could not make ends meet for their day-to-day needs. When I inquired from Simon and Melissa whether in the past they had actually saved money from their earnings, they indicated that each month they saved for various items such as education of their children and cars, and they faithfully paid the mortgage for their house. However, their savings had been eroded over the years and also it had become impossible to replenish their financial coffers.

Although Simon and Melissa clearly noted that the economic outlook of South Africa was not only affecting the pensioners, the general recession of the economy had touched the lives of many people albeit in a negative way. However, the most notable

¹⁹ At the average exchange rate of 8.5 against the US dollar, this amount translated to USD \$141 per month.

changes to the economy had taken place post 1994. As for what remained as a way forward to the drastic changes that were being experienced by South Africans, Simon emphasised the uncertainty that had become everyone's dilemma without clear solutions ahead. The fears of an uncertain future are shared by many South Africans today as the country continues to experience financial pressure and a dwindling job market. For job seekers, the situation has worsened since job opportunities continue to fade within a complex neo-liberal environment. However, most of my informants could not point out at what had really driven economic changes in the country. Many pointed at the economic changes that coincided with political changes, without putting much emphasis on the neo-liberal economic dilemmas embraced by the democratic dispensation in South Africa. Most informants lingered on the positive aspects of the past, a period in which they had racial advantages.

4.3 'The factory gave us jobs'

The economic changes that affected the industrial sector had detrimental effects on the working-class. Most of my informants were very pessimistic about the future, often indicating that they did not imagine any better future for themselves. One of my informants summarised the former roles of factories by saying that 'the factory gave us jobs and a decent livelihood' (Martha, 2009). Martha was a textile factory worker for a long time. She indicated that the factory was the only work space she knew. Although she was White, she was not highly skilled but had a job that enabled her to survive decently. She had the basic skills for factory work. She indicated that, in the past, it was easy to get a job since every White person who wanted to work could get a job in different sectors. She earned a reasonable salary that kept her out of poverty. She and her husband managed to raise their children and send them to school using the money earned from the factory. Her husband had also worked for different factories around East London. They had a home in West Bank that was regularly maintained.

Martha was a hard worker in the factory and took pride in her work. However, she says things began to change sometime in the 1980s. She indicated that it just became too

difficult to work at the factory as it kept retrenching employees as business began to decline. This was the time when many factories were closing down and heading for the Ciskei and Transkei where everything seemed to be cheaper and attractive to business. Finally, the factory that she worked for also folded its operations and headed for the Transkei where business prospects were better. However, she could not relocate with the factory due to personal reasons. As the factory exited East London, she was left unemployed. She has not been fortunate to get another job and has been sitting at home from the early 1990s. She tried to get other jobs but they were just not forthcoming. At the time of this study, she was in a desperate situation with little options for improvement. She commented that she woke up everyday looking forward to 'nothing' as she has lost hope of ever getting a job. The alternative livelihood for her and many others in her situation remains a big challenge and a puzzle without a clear solution. These sentiments were shared by many of my informants whose struggle to survive joblessness are described in Chapter Seven. Not only are these informants suffering from lack of cash and unemployment, but the pain of an uncertain future coupled with their stigmatised social standing is a shame from which many have failed to escape.

4.4 Job turbulence

Through the stormy period of global recession in the twentieth century, East London hung on to its identity as an industrial hub, but the uncertainty of industrial prospects began to gradually set in and to be experienced by many working-class people in East London. A different perspective to that of Simon and Melissa on the East London's once smart industrial economy was given by George, whose narrative actually gave a contrasting version of the industrial sector. In 2010, when I first met George, he had been unemployed for a reasonable period of time. Although he preferred to refer to his situation as not 'formally employed', he offered a narrative of troubled engagement in the industrial sector. He had actually worked for a blanket factory for seven years before moving to a giant clothing factory. He described his roles at different firms as 'various', meaning that he was engaged in different capacities. Later on, he joined a plastic-

making company, which marked the end of his career when he got retrenched in the mid 1990s.

George considered himself as 'very experienced' as he had moved from one firm to another and had served in different capacities. Referring to himself as a fast learner, George mentioned that the industrial economy of East London had changed several times although he was not very clear as to why that had happened. He remembered that the first company that he worked for had relocated its branch out of East London. 'I just heard that our company was considering relocating out of East London to Transkei in order to expand production to the surprise of everyone, and that was sometime during the 1980s'. George explained that most employees could not understand why the homeland of Transkei could be the final destination of their blanket factory which, according to his own assessment, was operating reasonably well. A few White employees as far as he could remember actually opted to relocate with the company. Small packages were offered to workers who preferred to remain in East London and look for work in other firms. As he pointed out, at that time things were not as bad as they were in more recent times in East London.

He did not last long in his second job as he was unhappy with the package they had offered him. He mentioned that he felt that he deserved more based on his work experience and commitment. However, his firm would not budge to increase the incentives. His firm cited operational challenges and small profit margins hence their inability to increase the wages. This made him very unhappy for some time until he decided to quit in 1989 to join a plastic manufacturing firm. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen operating challenges, this company eventually shut down in the mid-1990s leaving many of its work force stranded.

Although George described himself as very skilled, at least in terms of work experience and not in terms of academic achievement, he had struggled to find another stable job. Periodically, he got short contract employment, but that had not done much to improve his life. As a result, he was having problems with securing his livelihood. Money

shortages began to affect his life in various ways. The most notable change was in his social life. Affordability of life became a challenge as money opportunities melted away. He stated that he once had a partner but their relationship had gone sour when he could not provide for his partner of many years and his daughter. They fought regularly over money issues since he was the sole provider. His partner thought that he was doing little to acquire a job and provide for her and his daughter. This became an unhappy period for everyone until they eventually agreed to separate, marking the end of their relationship. After this unhappy episode, George moved into one room in the West Bank where he struggled to make ends meet. However, more than ten years after his industrial disintegration, life opportunities had not improved for him, as he continued to struggle for integration into the job market. The re-integration into the competitive job market had become a struggle for many people. Jobs that required low-skills had dwindled, and also competition for such jobs had increased, with all South Africans struggling to fit somewhere into the economy. The formal sector employment had become particularly difficult to penetrate as shall be seen in Chapter Six thereby forcing many to seek alternatives in the parallel informal economy.

4.5 Failing to make ends meet

I first met James and Sarah, both in their late fifties, in their rented house in central West Bank in 2010. This had been their home for a decade. They had both been born and raised in West Bank where they also worked in various industries around the suburb for a long time. They later got married in their thirties and raised three children in different parts of the suburb, since they often moved from one house to another in West Bank. They said that they were just used to this suburb, and did not imagine moving elsewhere. Understandably their finances were limited at the time when I met them and they were not at liberty to move to any place where rentals could be higher. Both had lost their jobs in the 1990s through retrenchment and had been struggling to find alternative jobs.

This couple had children who were grown up and were now leading their own lives elsewhere except for their last born child who preferred to stay with them. He was unemployed and had been searching for a job for a while. He said he could do a lot of things if offered a job but his skills were unspecific since he possessed no formal qualification for a list of services he was able to render if offered a job. His life centred on being in the house, moving around the suburb with some of his friends, and looking for a job 'now and then'. He also mentioned that he had tried to get a social life by getting married. However, his relationships had not worked out for him as they ended up in separation. He had attempted to marry several times but the end was always sad. He indicated to me that for now he was single and wanted to 'chill' alone, whilst hoping for a job opportunity to be available for him.

James and Sarah rented an old house whose owner lived in another suburb. We sat in the veranda of this house on dusty and broken chairs. They preferred to be interviewed both at the same time, arguing that they would remind each other in case they forgot some of the information. That did not worry me. As we sat outside, a number of things around the house drew my attention. The untidiness of the place was alarming although the occupants of the house seemed unbothered by that. The floors of the house were (at least up to the point that was visible to me) dusty and cracked. The yard was untidy and showed little signs of maintenance. I uncomfortably sat on the chair that I was provided with, silently concerned that the chair could break and I would fall down and be embarrassed. The house had three bedrooms which were shared with other White families who were also tenants. Each room cost around R1000, which was barely affordable to most tenants. James and Sarah, however, told me that they always paid the rental for their two rooms, albeit at times late. They made an effort not to skip a month without paying. Raising such an amount was, however, a big challenge to them due to unemployment.

James and Sarah had worked in a number of firms within West Bank and the broader East London area. James was an electrician but his company had closed down some years back and he had not managed to get another job although he relied on short

contracts which were hard to come by. 'You see with age, no one wants to employ you,' he said. Hence he had sought employment from many companies without success and at one point had even attempted to open his own business which did not take off because of financial constraints. He could not find or get enough capital for his business to take off. When I asked him if he had not kept any savings from his salary or wage, he indicated that the money was never enough to keep any savings. Explaining what had drained all his cash, he said:

I used all the money to raise my children, they went to school, college and all and there was nothing to save, and even now what I make goes to rent and the little food that we buy, medication and all that (James, 2010).

For James, his life was now the opposite of what it used to be. At first he could not understand why but now his eyes were wide open to the new realities. In the past, jobs were easy to find but that guarantee was now an elusive dream. There was no more certainty of getting a job. The industries were no longer what they used to be, people had to compete for jobs and Whites were not the priority anymore. As I interviewed James, their unemployed son hung around, regularly coming to stand by the front door, which was wide open, and to throw in a few words before disappearing into one of their rooms. This front door led to the veranda on which we sat and offered us a view of everything that took place across the road.

Sarah, on the other hand, said that she possessed various skills such as sewing, cooking and typing. She said that she had worked for many companies and had reasonable experience. She had stopped working full time to concentrate on raising her children but had worked in-between. However, it became very difficult for her to get a stable and permanent job. Only part-time contracts that did not pay much were available. For some time now she had also supplemented the income of her husband through part-time employment. She indicated that it was more and more difficult now to get employed as firms had closed down and there was a lot of competition for jobs and affirmative action did not prioritise employment of White people. Even part-time jobs were now difficult to find. She summarised this by saying that:

Now they don't even call me for interviews but I keep applying for jobs that I occasionally see on newspapers, I don't buy it every day but sometimes I do when there is extra money (Sarah, 2010).

Life opportunities had certainly changed, compromising their livelihoods. Their unemployed son, who was their dependent, although he was old enough to lead his own life, pained them. They had struggled to take care of him and seeing how life had actually turned out for him had disappointed them. This scenario also troubled them as they did not know for how long he would be their dependent. Referring to him as an 'adult child' Sarah said:

He is old enough to lead his own life alone somewhere, but he can't afford to do that without a job, he once tried it but within a month he was back, unemployed again. What can we do? He is our son we can't throw him away. He is just here but we can't get a job for him, there are no jobs anymore, not for everyone at least (Sarah, 2010).

Their son had gone through Matric but could not get a job. When I inquired whether he had actually passed his Matric, the response that I got was that 'he had tried his best'. Sarah actually said that her son was always looking for something (work) but that it was hard to get anything. 'You see sometimes they call him for two weeks only and its difficult to make a living out of that, the money just goes', she said. She also indicated that there was generally high unemployment in the area and that most youths milled around drinking and doing drugs.

As we were chatting, a group of White boys with one Coloured person passed and stood in front of a near-by house with a tuck shop. A small car with ladies was also parked there. After a short while, these boys seemed to be arguing. One of the ladies in the car, whom I was informed was the mother of one of the boys, came out seemingly trying to calm the boys. An argument ensued between her and her son and insults were exchanged. Sarah informed me that it was most probable that the boys had taken drugs which were in abundance in the suburb although she declined to tell me where exactly these drugs were being sold. When I asked her about that, she was very uncomfortable and even asked me to inquire from other people as she did not want to get into trouble. Sarah attributed this kind of behaviour from the youth as emanating from poverty

because the youths were unemployed and frustrated. As a result, they kept themselves in gangster-like groups where they sought solace in alcohol and drugs. In the past, it was not common for the youths to loiter around because they were kept occupied; those that wanted work could find it somewhere, but the situation had changed and there was no guarantee that one would get employed.

Towards the end of my interview with Sarah, another man in a total drunken state emerged from the house, looked at me and said nothing and murmured something to Sarah. I could only guess that she was wanted for something and was being asked to stop the interview. 'That's my uncle, I need to go we can chat some other time,' she said. I thanked both Sarah and James, then went off to look for another lady whom I was told knew everything the suburb as she provided soup and bread to the poor.

All the discussions with my informants pointed to rapid unemployment and decay of the suburb. It was clear that it was now very difficult for people to get employed and some ended up drowning their sorrows in drugs and alcohol. 'People were now very poor and hungry but sometimes their pride makes them want to hide away their poverty although sometimes it's too obvious,' said the lady at a house famously known as number 55. She went further to say the fact that people queued for soup and bread showed the extent of their poverty. It was also indicated to me that it was not only Whites that came for soup and bread but that their number was substantial and that all the people that came to be fed were out of employment. The lady also indicated that it was not always easy for people to open up about their lives but she affirmed that the suburb of West Bank had changed its face as more and more people were scrambling for jobs and barely making ends meet. Poverty had taken its toll on many people and there was no clear solution for this predicament. The soup kitchens that provided food to the poor and hungry served as a temporary measure to the problem which appeared to be growing. The large numbers of Whites queuing to be fed also proved that poverty and suffering had changed its face and was becoming more visible amongst Whites. Although the acknowledgement that poverty in its various forms has no respect for colour is yet to be fully embraced, more and more White people along with other racial groups continue to

plunge into the deep ends of poverty, clearly contrasting with what is accepted as 'official truth'.

4.6 Coming to terms with industrialisation meltdown

Although the condition of poverty in post-apartheid South Africa has been seen as a Black experience stemming out of the apartheid experience, the present situation of the unemployed and former working-class Whites challenges such a notion. Although the magnitude of poverty is tilted towards Blacks that does not erase the presence of poor Whites who are becoming a reality that can no longer be ignored in post-apartheid South Africa. However, the story of the former working-class Whites in cities such as East London has not been fully explored. As a result, there are mixed versions that seek to interpret White experiences of poverty in de-industrialised economies such as that of East London. Similar experiences within the displaced working-class have been experienced elsewhere. In the United States of America, Moss (2003) captured similar observations at Northtown in Midway city where the collapse of packing houses that served as economic lifelines brought rapid changes in the lives of residents that depended on this economy. Most White people that had enjoyed a working-class life were thrown into the deep end of poverty where their dignity was stripped away. The melting down of famous industrial-based towns has also been experienced in other southern African countries. The industrial base in the city of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe provides such an example where the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank partially collapsed the industrial sector (Gibbon, 1995), leaving thousands out of jobs with uncertainties looming ahead. Most households that entirely depended on the industrial sector for a source of living have struggled to climb back onto the economic ladder.

This section offers insights into processes that led to the de-industrialisation of the city of East London which, in turn, negatively affected the White working-class. The understanding of these processes is highlighted better through the three economic phases that I explained, whose final stage resulted in the collapse of the industrial

sector. In this chapter, although deep poverty among the Black community is acknowledged, I do not seek to compare the experiences of deprivation among Blacks with those of the poor Whites in South Africa. I will concentrate more on a reconstruction of White experiences of poverty within the general notions of privilege. I explore the development of racial capitalism in South Africa, highlighting how it created the false hope of White security that later proved to be unsustainable and collapsed. I also show how the present predicament of poor Whites originates with the class formations within the capitalist system that have evolved at various stages of the capitalist processes, consequently fuelling both racial inequality and intra-racial inequalities. I trace the period from the twentieth century up to the post-apartheid period, showing how there have been continuities in the production of inequality. I interrogate the nature of intra-racial inequality in order to show how it continues to reproduce and sustain class formations in the South African context. I conclude the chapter by contextualising the experiences of poor Whites within the post-Fordist spatial urban environment in East London. In this case I discuss the changing spatial geography and new meanings and perceptions generated in this rapidly changing context. I relate the changing context to new meanings ascribed to 'space' and 'place' as representing both privilege and under privilege and often reproducing the 'Other' and ascribing certain identities. The new representations of space and place generate continuities in the trajectories of the past and present in South Africa. I will pay particular attention to the different phases in the growth of East London and the Eastern Cape, highlighting how these influenced both the formation and, subsequently, the demolition of the White working-class. These conform to three phases:

1. Phase One: Growth and Expansion
2. Phase Two: Consolidation
3. Phase Three: Collapse

4.7 Phase One: Growth and Expansion

The contextualising narratives offered above can be best illustrated through tracing the convolutions of industrial expansion in East London. Industrial success in East London

was experienced during the twentieth century with a massive industrial drive that resulted in an expansive manufacturing sector being located in this city. The magnitude of this experience could actually compare with the American economic success story during what is famously known as the 'Fordist' period, a period that was baptised as 'racial-Fordism' in South Africa. The initial industrial success story of East London had its roots in the diversified economy that had begun to show positive signs as early as the nineteenth century. As a result, by the early twentieth century, industrialisation was already picking up at an accelerated rate, pitching East London at a high level of industrial success. The footprints of this industrial success translated into jobs that could even absorb the poorly skilled Whites. These people were transformed into the working-class and their quality of life was kept flouting above that of Blacks. This success is reflected in the narrative of Simon and Melissa whose nostalgic reconstruction of the past speaks to this initial phase in the economic history of South Africa where racial-Fordism, discussed below in section 4.7.1 facilitated the employment of many Whites around the country.

4.7.1 Understanding racial-Fordism in South Africa

Racial-Fordism was a process that characterised the post Second World War period when the global economy was recovering from war depression. The South African economy went through similar recovery stages often adopting the western economic strategies to boost and resuscitate the ailing economy. In the beginning - the period after the Second World War - different parts of the world seemed to experience economic revival in various forms. The most notable was the success stories that followed the implementation of certain economic strategies, mainly influenced by the Marshall economic plan of America, which later spread to different parts of the world through modernisation theory (Hopper, 2012; So, 1990). America, in particular, had found an economic path that seemed to promise prosperity and a better future. This was via the route that became known as 'Fordism'. This period became the 'golden age' of mass production and mass consumption. As observed by Beauregard (2006:102) 'never in the long annals of mankind had so many people in any nation enjoyed so high

a level of prosperity' as that enjoyed by Americans during the Fordist period. During this period, the United States became the biggest economy in the world and continued to expand. South Africa followed the same pattern into economic strength. The difference between the American experience and that of South Africa was the modification of the latter in the sense that it also adopted a racial angle. A number of scholars have drawn comparisons of the post World War economic boom between America and South Africa (Maller and Dwolatsky, 1993; Bank and Makubalo, 2005; Crankshaw, 2008). Other scholars have referred to this period as the 'Americanisation Dream', which was adopted in South Africa as a 'racial project' for consolidating 'whiteness'.

Although South Africa drew a lot from this 'American dream', scholars have been quick to point out the different nature of experience between the American Fordism and the South African 'racial-Fordism' (Bank and Makubalo 2005; Crankshaw 2008); often pointing to the extremeness of the latter. The South African period is referred to as 'racial-Fordism' because of the racial nature in production and consumption patterns. The racial variable became central to accessing the economy and other social benefits. The subsequent demise of the racial-Fordist project had as its major casualty poorer Whites who formed the bulk of the working-class and relied on the jobs created by the racial-Fordist project. Although more harm was transferred to poorer Whites at the demise of racial-Fordism, the industrial sector also suffered as it was either forced to shut down or to scale down its operations.

According to Thursfield (2000:26) the term 'Fordism' was conceived by Gramsci (1971) to describe the trends in American capitalism during the 1920s. Clarke (1992:13) contends that the term refers to the methods of mass production and social organisation of the labour process introduced by Henry Ford and developed by the Ford Motor Company. This period of massive accumulation was defined as such because of Henry Ford's pioneering role in developing a system of mass produced standardized goods by highly repetitive mechanical methods (Maller and Dwolatsky, 1993:70). Hirsch (1991) elaborates more on the Fordist system by stating that:

The system was based on the strategy of 'intensive' capital accumulation which rests essentially on the Taylorist reorganisation of the labour process. The establishment of Taylorism signified a decisive intensification of exploitation, based on far reaching deskilling processes, the destruction of traditional craft forms of workers' power and the introduction of efficient techniques of managerial control and supervision.

Consequently, labour processes were highly productive and pushed the quest to mass consume. Clarke (1992) further says that in the 1920s, particularly in Europe, Fordism came to be seen as a central component of Americanisation, which was hailed as the cornerstone of modernisation. This became a period of intensive accumulation.

From the 1930s, Fordism was associated with industrial development, collective bargaining and generally high wages for the working-class (Bank and Makubalo 2005:26). In the South African context, racial-Fordism took a form that was not separate from the issues of racial categorisation and 'Othering'. The production patterns and accumulation were in favour of Whites and created 'real' opportunities for the White working-class and underclass to escape conditions of material deprivation. The state during that period supported the consumption pattern that prioritised Whites by introducing discriminatory legislation intended to shelter White accumulation from any form of competition. Discrimination became a state policy and was, therefore, applicable to all areas and regions under the jurisdiction of the South African government.

As such, the term 'racial-Fordism' has been suggested to stylize this peculiarly South African growth model in which racial domination was the pre-eminent factor shaping economic institutions²⁰. In the South African context, the term 'racial-Fordism' was generally applied from the post Second World War up to the period of the oil crisis of the mid-1970s (Bank and Makubalo, 2005; Maller and Dwolatsky, 1993; Webster and Omar, 2003). This period was complemented by the complex nature of apartheid whose

²⁰ The information was accessed from; Tijdschrift voor economische, pp 385, en Sociale geografie, vol. 82, Issue 5, pages 355-366, November 1991. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9663.1991.tb00799.X/abstract>.

main intention was to advance separate development mainly for the benefit of Whites. This would then ensure the 'mastership' role of Whites above Blacks who were supposed to occupy inferior social positions. At the height of racial-Fordism, there was mass production of different car models in East London; however, this production of Ford motor cars was also accompanied by the racial pattern of accumulation in terms of employment quotas. Whites were employed in large numbers whereas Black labour was minimal and also highly regulated.

This period, therefore, presented the White working-class South Africans with a good opportunity to be established economically and to actively participate in and benefit from the economy. The state played an important role as a surety that safeguarded the economy from foreign competition by implementing protectionist laws that made it very difficult for foreign capital to compete with local capital. During that period, America and South Africa became allies and developed strong ties in various ways. The adaptation of the American social patterns in South Africa went beyond economic replication and also included intellectual advisory capacity, research paradigms and theoretical models. The American intellectuals were very active players in the South Africa social arena and played a visible part in the Carnegie Study of Poor Whites in South Africa (Magubane, 2008). The difference at that time, perhaps, was how the issue of racism was handled from both sides.

During the 1950s to the 1960s, the industrial sector in East London experienced significant growth. The industries within the vicinity of West Bank also expanded remarkably. This period consolidated the industrial status and identity of East London as an industrialised city. This massive growth of East London was captured in the study that was conducted by Watts and Agar-Hamilton (1970). In their industrial growth analysis, they indicated that the private industries increased from 146 establishments in 1928-9 (3 525 employees) to 284 establishments in 1953-4 with 11 299 employees. The majority of those employed were Whites²¹.

²¹ Refer to Appendix 3 on the racial distribution of employment

4.8 Phase Two: Consolidation

When the economy of America and other Western countries began to decline as the Fordist ethos faded away in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the apartheid government in South Africa was quick to step in to protect its industries from going down. Various interventions aimed at stimulating the ailing economy were put in place to avoid the impending collapse. However, the pressure began to build up on the racial-Fordist economy of South Africa which began to experience real threat and decline during the 1970s at the inception of the oil crisis. According to Bank and Makubalo (2005), during this oil crisis, the service sector began to grow, the unions weakened, a shift to contract work and the informalisation of the economy became a reality. As a result, the economy also began to decline, sending shock waves in the manufacturing sector. This period was also intertwined with the real threat of de-industrialisation. As a consequence, profit margins began to decline, and also employment in the mining and manufacturing sectors declined. This decline left a trail of pain amongst those who had for a long period of time depended on the provisions of these sectors. Now that the crisis was advancing and becoming part and parcel of social reality, new ways of escaping the drastic end were sought. The apartheid government had to invent mechanisms to deal with the situation. The government was well aware of what this meant to a number of its citizens who relied on the collapsing sectors. Hence the government found ways to stimulate the economy.

Although by the late 1960s the manufacturing industries were already under enormous pressure due to the oil crisis, in South Africa the apartheid state kept most industries afloat through the promotion of decentralisation. Hart (2002:127) describes this industrial decentralisation as yet another grand project of apartheid spatial engineering. As it turned out, industrial decentralisation was the politically driven invention of apartheid spatial engineers seeking to turn back the tides of economic logic by 'artificially' locating heavily subsidised factories in the middle of nowhere (Hart, 2002: 131). The economic performance of East London generally declined during this period, but the active involvement of the state avoided total collapse. According to Watts and

Agar-Hamilton (1970), the performance of the industrial economy in this period was slightly below the national average, growing at 6.2% as opposed to the 6.7% nationally.

Industries in the Eastern Cape expanded to the rural hinterlands of the Ciskei and the Transkei. Incentives that are noted to have been the best in southern Africa were offered to firms that were decentralising to the Ciskei. These incentives included subsidies for wages, training, rentals, electricity, housing and technology imports, as well as a relocation subsidy (Mager, 1989:52). The most notable expansion was that of textile industries into Dimbaza, a few kilometres from King William's Town. Other industries relocated to Fort Jackson and Sada and Wesley (Mager, 1989:53), as well as Butterworth. The remarkable growth of industries within East London and its hinterland gave a 'false sense' of growth, particularly because Bantustan states were being heavily subsidised by the State. This resulted in phenomenal economic growth, as well as the expansion of urban settlements within the Transkei and Ciskei.

The decentralisation of industries into the surrounding homelands rejuvenated the economy to such an extent that, at one point in time, the East London-Dimbaza corridor out-performed the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage node during the 1970s (Bank & Makubalo, 2005:28). This project is viewed by Hart (2002:127) as having been the state's effort to revitalise and redefine the geography of racial capitalism. Hart also views the initial growth as having triggered a short lived euphoric mood of seeing this industrial growth as a dream of having a 'Manchester in Africa' come true. The slow movement of industries to urban nodes within the homeland states left East London at a loss.

As in Natal, where Hart (2002) describes the sad state of the 'industrial carcasses' of Ladysmith in KwaZulu Natal after the collapse of these industries, the Eastern Cape experienced a similar fate. Bank and Mnyaka (2013:4) argue that from the 1960s, investment in the city dried up as the apartheid state moved investments inland to the Ciskei and Transkei homelands. And as capital moved inland, coastal industrialisation

stopped. Even wholesalers and retailers moved out of the city in the 1960s due to a lack of confidence. This arrested modernisation as the city slumped into economic stasis.

Pressure was, therefore, building on the coastal economy of East London as the state forged ahead with industrial decentralisation causing massive business withdrawals from industries (Holden, 1986; Mager, 1989; Marks and Rathbone, 1982). This slowed down industrial production thereby necessitating the need to gradually drop workers. The working-class Whites were heavily affected by this process and most of those who lost jobs fell into the poor White category.

The 1970s were a difficult period for South Africa, like other global states. With international pressure for reforms, internal problems were escalating with periods of intense resistance against homeland and apartheid forces, particularly within East London. This had a serious impact on the social systems and the economy in particular. For Maller and Dwolatsky (1993), the local political disturbances resulted in capital flight which, in turn, affected the economy. After the 1970s, the apartheid government was very aware that political reform was the only way forward to solve the social problems that were brewing. White middle-class South Africans and the state were also gradually abandoning their agenda of managing and uplifting poor Whites.

4.9 Phase Three: Collapse

This decentralisation gradually withered in the 1990s when the homeland system was dissolved and state incentives for homeland growth were withdrawn. This was in response to the imminent demise of the apartheid system and this fundamentally altered and changed the playing field altogether. The retreat of the state from direct and active control of the so-called 'homeland economies', as well as withdrawal of state-funded protectionist policies with regard to job reservation, plus the demise of influx control, created a problem for the weaker Whites with limited education and skills. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, the racial rhetoric was slowly losing its pivotal position in

the social arena. The process of de-activation was already taking place and its context and relevance cooling down.

The scaling down of industries and the discarding of the false economy affected the lower White working-classes much more than the middle-class. With no cushioning or protection from the winds of globalisation and post-apartheid neo-liberalism, poorer Whites were now faced with the real dilemma of degenerating into a dire economic catastrophe from which preferential treatment had once shielded them. The loss of industrial jobs and panic exit from government jobs at the demise of apartheid gave rise to the number of unemployed poor Whites. The biggest challenge faced by many was the lack of essential skills needed in the post-Fordist economy. Many poor Whites had limited education which could not really secure them good jobs in the face of competition from Blacks who had acquired enough education and skills. The service sector economy that became the mainstay of the post-Fordist system in East London as well as other towns required people with skills and at least tertiary education. As rightly observed by Bank and Makubalo (2005), the demise of the old system transformed the city of East London in a number of ways, the most notable being the rural-urban migration and the internal residential migration. This forced the property prices to escalate in the middle-class suburbs. Thus, the suburbs formally reserved for Whites have almost been 'taken over' by Blacks. These include the older suburbs of Berea, Southernwood, and new suburbs such as Dorchester Heights and Beacon Bay. The latter, in particular, has become the abode of many new middle-class Black families.

During the 1990s, the East London economy began to de-industrialise with various manufacturing industries closing down. The major effects of the decline were experienced when the homeland system was dissolved and the state withdrew the decentralisation incentives (Mager, 1989; Watts and Agar-Hamilton, 1970; Bank and Makubalo, 2005). This led to the rapid collapse of industrial employment in the region. The disappearance of state subsidies exposed most industries to outward competition leading to their eventual downfall which had detrimental consequences on sector employees. For most Whites who had real benefits in this system, this turned into a period of loss and decline that would affect their lives for a long period to come. Most of

my informants indicated to me that times had indeed changed and jobs were not easy to come by. The state was no longer a guarantor of success for Whites and most vulnerable families were exposed to external shocks which pushed some out of their jobs and businesses. Crankshaw (2008; 2012) contends that the decline of manual jobs in the manufacturing sector resulted in unemployment among the less educated working-class. In contrast, however, there was growth of middle-class service sector jobs that benefited the established and better educated.

After the remarkable growth of industries and general expansion in the Eastern Cape, the period that followed reversed the industrial gains. This turned the industrial dream into a white elephant. A decade after the boom in the 1980s looked very different. By the 1990s political support and artificial stimulation of industrial development in border areas evaporated with the collapse of the apartheid state and the increasing dominance of neo-liberal economic perspectives in the country, an economic path that was adopted by the ANC government that replaced the apartheid government. One of the central lines of argument pursued at this time was that the South African economy would inevitably 'succeed' in a global context, particularly once the artificial interventions of apartheid had been removed. The natural conglomeration of industry around the major urban centres was seen as more rational than creating incentives for its distribution into rural areas, far from the key economic hubs. In 1991, the new economic sentiment led to the slashing of industrial subsidies that had been provided through the Regional Industrial Development Programme (RIDP) since 1982. The revised programme radically reduced incentives to productivity rather than inputs. The revisions were a product of political compromise. A strong neo-liberal lobby called for total abandonment of any attempt to influence industrial location but this was opposed by regional interest.

The growing consensus was that the future of South African industry lay in the main metropolitan centres, and that any diversion of resources from these centres represented a distortion of natural tendencies. The argument was supported by organisations like the Urban Foundation, which lobbied for a position that strongly favoured rapid urbanisation (Hart 2002:155). In fact, when the revisions to the Regional

Industrial Development Programme (RIDP) incentives were being discussed, it was pointed out that some former homeland development corporations were inhibiting industry from following its natural paths into the urban conglomerates. One of the critical features in the reconfiguring of local level incentives and political structures was that industry came to fall under new local authority structures and were no longer managed and monitored by the homeland development corporations (the Ciskei Development Corporation (CDC) and the Transkei Development Corporation (TDC) in the case of the Amatola area. These later amalgamated to form the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC).

The changing institutional landscape was as critical as the changes in the incentive packages to the different regional consequences of the new policy framework. Recent work on Kwazulu-Natal suggests that in the 1990s some industries continued to trickle from Asia into de-centralisation areas such as Newcastle-Madadeni and Ladysmith-Ezakheni between 1991 and 1995 (Hart 2002). This seems to have been the result of strong Taiwanese influence in these areas and the continued influx of Chinese capitalists into, especially, the textile trade (which had not yet been deregulated). It also appears that the willingness of Taiwanese capitalists to enter and influence local politics by aligning themselves with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) helped to protect their interests. In Kwazulu-Natal it thus appears that the restructuring of incentives did not suddenly cause industry to simply take flight from the rural heartland of the province. Job losses and firm closures did not follow immediately after the restructuring announcement but occurred relatively slowly.

In the Eastern Cape, the burgeoning rural industrial sector collapsed like a pack of cards when the homelands were unbundled and the incentives restructured. One of the key factors that drove businesses out of areas like Butterworth was the enormous instability and institutional collapse that surrounded the creation of new transitional local authorities. In the 1990s many of the former Transkei towns made national headlines for the chaotic state of their bankrupted local authorities, who were unable to guarantee basic urban services, such as electricity supply or garbage collection. By the mid-1990s

the situation had become so serious that a Presidential Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was launched to arrest the collapse of five Transkei towns. Butterworth was targeted because internal political struggles had brought this local authority to its knees. The town's garbage filled streets, rising crime, municipal corruption, and erratic electricity supply transformed investor confidence of the 1980s into doom and gloom. The announcement by South African Breweries that it would close its depot became a catalyst for others to re-assess their positions. In the period 1995 to 2000, 47 of the 50 industries located in Butterworth closed down (Eastern Cape Economic Update 15/12/2000). Amongst the biggest losses for the town were the closure of a South African Breweries production plant and distribution centre and the closure of a large textile firm which was a leading supplier for the South African retail giant PEP stores. Once these firms announced their closure, others quickly followed suit. A similar trajectory is noted in the former Ciskei. The industrial de-centralisation hub of Dimbaza, which housed over 30 industries and provided more than 8 000 industrial jobs in the 1990s, has, for instance, lost over 80% of its industry and more than 7 000 local jobs in the past decade (Eastern Cape Economic Update 15/12/2000).

The collapse of manufacturing in the smaller towns has also cast its shadow over the city of East London, wedged between the former Ciskei and Transkei homelands, where the manufacturing sector has shrunk notably. The main job losses occurred in the city's textile industry, which has shed two thirds of its labour force since 1990. In the early 1990s, a factory like Waverley Blankets in East London, which had been operating in the city since the Second World War, employed over 2 500 people. By 1998, the staff complement had been reduced to 800 workers, and in November 2000 it was announced that the factory would be closing down completely in East London (Bank and Makubalo, 2005). This has been the trend within the local textile industry and within manufacturing generally. The other large East London textile firm, Da Gama, also announced that it would reduce its workforce by 40% in January 2001. This meant that a further 600 textile workers lost their jobs. Other job losses in the city occurred through the closure of various other light industries, including Triad electronics and various other small footwear, textile and furniture production and distribution firms. The firms that

have been affected fall within sectors that have nationally been hit very hard by global competition, illegal imports and the sudden removal of protectionist tariffs in terms of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policies. In the textile and foot-ware sectors as a whole it has, for instance, been reported that over 100 000 jobs have been lost nationally since the mid-1990s.

The trends of the post-apartheid period continue and this is shown through the Schewitz²² (2012) report which specifies where jobs are being lost. It is not just the battering that textiles took in the 1990s; it is the whole lot that are under threat. The job losses are no longer protected by the variable of skin colour. Blacks and Whites along with other racial groups continue to experience job losses. In the light of the shrinking job market and opportunities in the contemporary period, a large number of people have been left to scramble for survival. The job market crisis is beyond racial divisions.

4.10 Post-Fordist East London and neo-liberalism

The changes that were brought about by the collapse of racial-Fordism which, in South Africa, almost coincided with the end of apartheid has altered people's lives in various ways. The major feature was massive job losses and a change of lifestyle by many people. The most affected amongst Whites were obviously the working-class and poor White stratum that always depended on state provision and support. The post-Fordist period embraced neo-liberalism and the White middle-class shifted their focus as they concentrated more on integration with the capitalist economy and innovating new ways of surviving transformation which was imminent with the new Black government getting into power. The post-Fordist economic approach that was adopted by the new African National Congress (ANC) government when it came to power in 1994 was the neo-liberal approach.

²² See Appendix 2 of the list that was compiled by Schewitz, a business person in East London. The list shows some of the industries that closed in East London; it does not reflect the full complement of all industries that have shut down.

The neo-liberal model was seen as an appropriate economic strategy by the ANC after their negotiated political settlement with the Nationalist government. The neo-liberal approach is an economic model that advocates the free flow of capital and the creation of a business environment that facilitates growth, where the market is left to regulate its activities without any interference (Massey, 2005; Desai, Maharaj and Bond, 2011). The term 'neo-liberalism' usually refers to a blanket acceptance of free trade policies and the centrality of government 'as a business' (Connor and Stuurman, 2011:20). The state's role in a neo-liberal model is to facilitate an enabling environment for market forces to operate unhindered (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001; Ferguson, 2010). According to Barchiesi (2007), the neo-liberal approach believes that the economy is in a position to self-regulate and that as it stabilises and grows, there will be a way in which the benefits will trickle down to everyone. The free market is perceived as a major milestone in boosting ailing economies, bringing about market stability and fostering economic growth (Smith, 2010; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). It is through neo-liberalism that the South African economy was integrated with what is commonly referred to as the global economy (Castree, 2008). The adoption of neo-liberalism meant that the country was not abandoning capitalism, although at the same time it sought to incorporate the poor gradually into the economy.

Many scholars argue that the neo-liberal approach has led to serious disparities and the gap between the poor and the rich has continued to widen without immediate solutions to this dilemma (Hart, 2008; Ferguson, 2010; Boersema, 2013). The model has no sympathy for the poor and the vulnerable; in actual fact, it worsens their situation leaving them in a worse position than before. In other words, neo-liberalism can be interpreted as a tool for exclusion, removing the weak and vulnerable members of the society from participating in the mainstream activities. The process actually seeks to push them to the margins until they personally experience their undesirability from the economy.

The integration of poor communities within the urban zone becomes riddled with complexities that are presented by the market itself. Apart from the history of apartheid,

poor members of the society have to experience another trauma of being sidelined by the market forces. Race has twined with class as a distribution variable. Those integrated within the economy prosper and swiftly move to another class which is not accessible to the poor. The prominent patterns of both inter-racial and intra-racial inequalities in this contemporary period have been widening and can no longer be ignored. The inter-racial and intra-racial inequality is then taken to another higher level, resulting in urban inequality (Massey, 2005). The neo-liberal model does not address or focus on the concept of equality. The state watches helplessly, constantly reminding itself that it still has the poor at heart through the system of social welfare grants. Although these grants are helpful to the very poor, not everyone has access to them. In the South African context, business certainly continues to enjoy a free ride, with the state keeping a watchful eye that protects its interests. Even in small cities like East London where the glory of the racial-Fordist period is certainly a thing of the past for unemployed and under-employed Whites, a new social order is beginning to emerge.

Whilst the neo-liberal approach has been adopted elsewhere with anticipation that it could bring about business sanity and progress, the question that could be asked is: how suitable is the model in the South African context? South Africa has not fully escaped its dreadful past whose traits are still part and parcel of the current context. The exposure of the poor and the working-class to the market forces worsens their predicament whilst significantly altering their standard of life for the worse. The rich, on the other hand, continue to earn more and to increase their wealth, whereas the poor are stripped of the little they have (Ferguson, 2010). The poor continue to be pushed away, with the state failing to offer any comprehensive protection to its citizens who require such protection.

Although neo-liberalism is disguised as the way into the economic future, in reality what it actually does is to exclude the poor from the city. As noted by Boersema (2013), the negative consequences of these neo-liberal policies are now evident for the poor and the socially excluded. The market forces have no mercy on the weak and vulnerable; these actually become even more exposed and pushed to the periphery where they

struggle to survive let alone integrate into the city. The neo-liberal approach is mainly interested in generating more business and more profits and the poor in this framework become irrelevant. This approach does not intend to help the poor or to improve their lives. This approach actually creates more space for accumulation for the middle and elite classes. The negative influence of neo-liberalism within the post-Fordist context is hence evident, even in smaller towns like East London, where the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has explored narratives of the former working-class in East London which began with the nostalgic reflections on the industrial glory as highlighted in the story of Simon and Melissa. The factories had, at one stage, been the provider of decent livelihoods to many families in East London; however, the global recession led to a shift in the business strategies that were partly facilitated by the apartheid government leading to the relocation of firms to the homelands of Ciskei and Transkei. This caused many uncertainties in the lives of the working-class, as reflected in the lives of George and Martha. The eventual collapse of the industrial sector saw the ignition of the service sector in East London. In a similar way, in South African cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg the service sector has replaced the collapsed industrial economy (Crankshaw, 2008, 2012). However, the growth of the service sector is of little comfort to the former working-class that cannot easily get employed in this sector which demands a high level of education and skills. As rightly noted by Bank & Makubalo (2005:39), with the rise of the service sector, the new labour demand is increasingly for higher educational qualifications that cannot be met by the supply of unemployed workers who have been discarded by the declining manufacturing sector. The less educated find themselves axed from the service sector based economy. Many of my informants actually expressed concern that the present economic arrangement was not meant to benefit everyone. The shifts within the neo-liberal economy have benefited business more than the ordinary people. As the narrative of James and Sarah testify, the battle for survival within the neo-liberal economy is far from over. The next chapter looks at yet another transformation that has taken place in many South African towns,

that is, the residential integration, which has been experienced at various levels across previously mono racial White suburbs.

Chapter Five

From White community to melting pot?

The electoral victory of the National Party in 1948 had a significant and symbolic effect upon the development of urban segregation in South Africa. Under the new policy for the restructuring of the urban areas, everyone was to be officially classified into racial groups, and all would have to live in areas specifically set aside for the exclusive occupation of a legally defined group (Christopher, 1992:571).

5.1 Introduction

When South Africa attained freedom in 1994, change was imminent in the minds of many. The envisaged change was expected to touch the lives of everyone in varied ways. The figure of the late former President Nelson Mandela who, like the Biblical story of Moses led Israelites out of Egypt, served as a unifying point. As the country looked certain to shed its dark past many people euphorically imagined a truly united future finally dawning. This was a historical achievement, which in the past era had looked impossible. The attainment of freedom, therefore, served as a marker that all South Africans shared sameness in humanity, and that all the differences that were emphasised in the past were to be buried, and a new page started. This is where all races, who before were very aware of their differences, would blend together and unite in that very difference. Just like the image of a rainbow, South Africans were expected to live in harmony with each other and actually celebrate humanity in their very differences. The diversity of skin colours was likened to that of a rainbow, whose beauty is projected through that colour diversification. These dreams and aspirations of a united South Africa were sealed in the new Constitution which sought to cultivate a democratic path. This chapter seeks to explore how a South African suburb of West Bank transformed from being a mono racial White suburb to a melting pot where different racial groups have integrated. The meanings that have been generated by that integration are explored. The questions to be answered here are: what has become of suburbs since the lifting of bans on residential mixing? How do the residents feel about this integration? How do outsiders view places like West Bank? Is this integration

viewed as a true success story of human settlements' history in this country? What is the anatomy of the integrated places like?

5.2 A place called 'home'

West Bank has been viewed from different angles by various people. Although it officially retains its classification as a 'suburb' rather than a 'township', this suburb was described by some of my informants as now living in its shadow. From the interviews I held with many informants, West Bank, just like any other South African suburb, has changed in many ways. I was interested in knowing what change had actually occurred besides the obvious one where the presence of Blacks living in the suburb was very visible. According to the information gathered, the negative aspects of integration seemed to dominate the inputs by my informants. Complaints were centred on the decline of the suburb since it became integrated. Many of these complaints were driven by the general failure to maintain the suburb. These new changes had come into the suburb through the decay in service delivery, a complaint that was very popular. Apart from the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality being accused of failing to play its part in its service delivery role such as picking up of refuse and maintaining the clean outlook of the suburb, residents themselves were under visible financial constraints that made it difficult for them to keep pace with the requirements of property maintenance. However, since there were many residents that rented properties in this sample, some actually felt that it was not their responsibility to maintain the properties. Although some of these properties were in a dilapidating state, some residents felt that it was not their moral duty to run around with paint and lawn mowers maintaining their properties. Under this section, I will provide the narratives of residents in West Bank on how they viewed their suburb from a cosmopolitan perspective. Most of these perspectives were tied around issues of what made a home, and how they felt like being residents in West Bank. Home owners and renters had different perspectives to share. These narratives offered an interesting contrast to what people view as a standard home, both in its physical appearance and social make-up. The social make-up is not only limited to what

happens in one's own private home, but also depends on the interactions with the community at large. This interaction can be both verbal and non-verbal.

Home owners in the suburb were not all the same; some had the financial strength to keep their properties maintained (and this was very important to them), yet others struggled. As some actually said, a home becomes an extension of one's personality. It reflects the values of the person and hence keeping the property as tidy as possible was very important. The homes of most of my informants actually placed them on a financial scale. As residents struggled under financial strains, that was reflected in the physical appearance of most of their homes. The role of maintaining the properties had become very difficult. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the scarcity of jobs has pushed families to operate under dire financial constraints and hence cash was hard to come by. Some families that owned properties and had remained in the suburb actually indicated that home maintenance was one thing that had become very difficult for them. Keeping their homes looking good all the time required financial resources which were, in most cases, not available. The pensioners actually emphasised that what they earned could not cater for all their needs; as such, budgets had to be cut. However, not all the properties in the suburb were in a bad state. Some were actually properly maintained since their owners had a source of income.

Home ownership in the suburb had also been extensively extended to Blacks who could afford to purchase the properties. Most Black owners that resided in the suburb invested in their properties. Obviously, these were people who were employed and had a source of income. Whilst some of them were happy about their properties in West Bank, their worry was about the holistic outlook for the suburb. Some complained that the non-maintenance of properties surrounding them was a cause of concern since it was lowering the value of their properties. Some property owners were, however, not resident in the suburb, and they rented out their properties to tenants. This is where most of the drama in the suburb actually originated.

It was common to find one property occupied by many people. Most of them rented single rooms with their families, friends or as individuals. The major problem came from

the facilities that had to be shared such as kitchens, bathrooms and toilets. These are very key spaces in a home, and sharing with many different people did not always work well for everyone. Some home sharers had become very uncomfortable with this arrangement. However, the available options out of this predicament were very limited. Because of lack of money, it was always better to share accommodation with others in order to have shelter above one's head²³.

Although several people shared a single house, the set up did not translate into a typical home environment, where members share and have a lot in common. Instead of becoming a 'home', the property remained a 'house' due to different interests pursued by occupants. Top on the list was the issue of property management which was a problematic one. If more than five people rent rooms in the same property, it becomes a problem to manage the house because there is no leadership. Everyone generally wants to be in charge and not be dictated to. Each and every person becomes concerned about their private spaces which do not always have clear demarcations. Different interests pursued by sharers sometimes lead to conflicts. For instance, some people would not bother to clean common spaces such as the kitchen, bathroom and toilet after use. Some never bothered to buy proper detergents for cleaning. In addition, anyone wanting to raise such concerns was usually seen as trying to dominate others, and this was usually not taken kindly. The absent landlords were mainly interested in rentals and did not bother about the situation at their properties. Some of the tenants actually tried to form close ties with their landlords in order to draw benefits such as paying less rent or paying rentals late without dire consequences.

The set up where many people rented the same property seemed to benefit the house owners more than the tenants themselves. Even though the tenants had complaints about the non-maintenance of properties and overcrowding, they continued to reside at the same place, or to move to the next street to join a similar set up. There were many

²³ Sharing of accommodation was not always done with the property owner's knowledge; some tenants who rented a big house would sublet it illegally to raise money to pay for the property. In some cases, however, it was the decision of the property owner to lease the property to several tenants in order to maximise rentals.

complaints from other residents that houses with many tenants were very disruptive. There were problems with noise and lack of general control. Some residents complained that it was actually difficult to know who lived in those properties making it impossible to spot intruders with bad intentions. They further noted that it was a difficult task to attempt to interfere with what took place in the neighbour's property. Most properties rented out to several people were privately controlled by their owners who avoided using estate agents for property management. The loosely regulated property sector made it possible for what has become known as 'slumlords'²⁴ to over populate their properties in the suburb in order to maximise rental collections. This has become a common route in cities where accommodation is scarce and expensive. Although some landlords went out of their way to accommodate the majority of people looking for accommodation, this benefited them more than the tenants who, in most cases, were exposed to health risks under overcrowded conditions.

The extent of desperation to get accommodation in inner suburbs broke the racial lines. In some of the houses, poorer White and Black families would rent a single property. However, the tenants generally complained about how their neighbours conducted themselves. These complaints mainly came from adult occupants. I observed, however, that children seemed to enjoy playing with each other, projecting a picture that they were unaware of their racial differences, or that these differences did not affect their interactions. It was also common to find White people renting from backyard properties of Black people. Although this emanated from desperation in most cases, it also served to show how South Africa had transformed its racial fronts, with people of different racial orientations managing to co-exist on a single property.

However, it is important to note that the influx of Blacks into most suburbs close to the inner city led to the flight of White people (Lemon & Clifford, 2005). Those that could afford to exit sold their properties and bought elsewhere where it was expensive. These

²⁴ The Daily Dispatch newspaper conducted an investigation on how slumlords were profiteering from their overcrowded residential properties. A series of these investigations conducted in Southernwood were published between the period of 2010 and 2012. The Daily Dispatch newspaper has a series of features on East London slumlords and the slums on its website: www.dispatch.co.za

actions have been interpreted in various ways. This fear to integrate was very common soon after South Africa attained its freedom. The quest for suburbia peace of mind has forced people to seek very expensive areas where poor people cannot afford to own a home, and this gives a sense of security. The poor remain lumped together in overcrowded places where their financial situations affix them in that position. As shall be seen in Chapter Seven where I discuss issues of entrapment and exit, it has been argued that it is the poorer people who generally remain entrapped in certain areas as those with financial means make their way out. However, when a place has been depopulated by the middle-class, the sad reality is that it quickly loses its status and becomes down-graded and stigmatised. Limited opportunities then remain available for people failing to escape what becomes characterised as a poor suburb.

Although in the current dispensation in a democratic South Africa people are free to reside where they want, there are various factors that limit them. Lack of capital to explore other areas is one such factor. For Whites who have always been kept as a separate group from other races, their failure to escape from low class neighbourhoods that Black people continue to flood is a case of entrapment. I explore this further in Chapter Seven. All racial groups are now free to reside in any part of the city after the abolishment of the Group Areas Act in 1991 depending on their finances (Crankshaw, 2008:1694). For poorer Whites, on the other hand, moving into a formerly Blacks-only neighbourhood is out of the question. It is not an option for them; as a result they hang on to formally White neighbourhoods but which are now almost 'typically' Black, with little opportunities to sustain livelihoods. As a consequence, the poorly educated, working-class Whites, who cannot afford expensive suburban housing, become trapped in these jobless 'ghettos of exclusion' (Crankshaw, 2008:1694) where they are increasingly dislocated from the mainstream society (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2126). These places are further described metaphorically as one of the 'disabilities' that can 'disqualify the individual' and deprive him or her from 'full acceptance by others' (Wacquant, 2007:67).

5.3 Places of limited opportunities

There is now a growing consensus amongst scholars that place and the labour market intersect. This indicates a general linkage between the spatial location of a person and the economic opportunities available. Places get ascribed certain identities by others and, in most cases, places that are viewed as low class are stigmatised and associated with a particular culture. As noted by Bauder (2001:41):

Cultural identity can be self-ascribed or imposed by others. That cultural differentiation and labor market segmentation are interlocking processes has been established in the literature.

Cultural capital theory links internal processes of cultural identification with economic opportunity and labour market segmentation (Bourdieu, 1984; Jackson, 2004). Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994:100) explains that cultural capital 'constitutes a repertory of symbols that affect the relationship between individuals, social networks and economic structures, including labour markets'. Through symbolic markers associated with behaviour, norms and material traits, individuals affiliate themselves with educational goals and occupational choices (Fernández- Kelly and Schauffler, 1994).

The areas such as West Bank are not seen as areas with potential where modern families can be raised. The locality of the area shapes the social functions taking place in that particular place. Forrest and Kearns (2001:2133) see stigmatised places as agents of isolation and a breeding ground for improper social cohesion:

A primary reason for the renewed interest in neighbourhoods in contemporary policy debate is a concern with the contextual effects of neighbourhood—principally the social consequences of an increasing concentration of disadvantaged people in particular parts of cities. These neighbourhoods are not only seen as a social problem in their own right, but also as a more pervasive threat to the moral order or social cohesion of cities. Moreover, there is often an implicit view that what separates the 'successful' neighbourhood from the 'unsuccessful' is the degree to which there is social cohesion—the underlying assumption being that disadvantaged neighbourhoods lack the necessary ingredients which foster social cohesion. Contacts tend to be between people with networks which do not extend into the world of work.

The isolation of a place through lack of capital and social investment can lead to alienation and marginalisation of residents in such areas. These places become dislocated from the mainstay of the society. As observed by Wacquant (2007), because of the stigma attached to certain neighbourhoods, some residents might even shy away from inviting friends and family to their places and use some excuses to explain their residency in those areas. Wacquant (2007: 69) contends that:

The stigmatised neighbourhood symbolically degrades those who live in it and they degrade it symbolically in return, since, being deprived of all the assets necessary to participate in the various social games, their common lot consists only of their common excommunication. Assembling in one place a population homogeneous in its dispossession also has the effect of accentuating dispossession. (Adopted from Bourdieu, [1993] 1999: 129).

Furthermore, certain neighbourhoods might actually be ignored by prospective employers. The address used on the application could be used as evidence that certain individuals are not suitable for certain jobs. The suburb of West Bank has not received much investment. However, places like Vincent have modern shopping malls which ultimately build a certain identity for the area.

These spatial inequalities and economic uncertainties within neo-liberalism and post-Fordism can be particularly seen within the layout of present East London. This is particularly important because the city is the most divided urban space in South Africa, perhaps the continent. The town of East London in its present day resembles what most post-colonial cities typically turn into after independence. The East London economy is not that of a prospering economy with the unemployment rate standing at around 53% (BCM IDP 2010-2011)²⁵. The town remains divided geographically; there is a clear division in terms of spaces occupied by the poor and the middle-class of this city. As noted by Bank (2011:27), colonial cities are dual in nature with the gap between the poor and the rich rapidly widening. Urban poverty has also been observed to be growing (Wilson, 1996). In East London, this is very evident. The high density locations of Mdantsane, Duncan Village, and Sipunzana remain home to Blacks where they are dislocated from the economy of East London. In between are suburbs that have been

²⁵ Refer to BCM IDP 2010-2011 obtainable at www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/ldp2011 11.stm

abandoned by middle-class Whites and some that were traditionally for poorer Whites like West Bank and Milner Estates. The more affluent suburbs of Beacon Bay, Nahoon, Vincent, Selborne and others, continue to be inhabited by the middle-class and wealthy residents of East London. Both wealthy Whites and Blacks reside in these middle-class areas. The demands to live in such areas keep the poor in check through high rentals, estate agent screening and logistical difficulties in accessing the Central Business District where most people generate income both formally and informally.

Although residential apartheid was outlawed with the demise of apartheid, the city still exhibits traits of partial integration. An interesting observation is that the areas that the majority of Blacks in East London are moving to are areas that have been abandoned by Whites with financial means. The poorer Whites remain occupants in these areas sharing the space with the Blacks who have moved in. It is, however, notable that these areas quickly deteriorate to low standards with visible social and infrastructural decay. There is little maintenance and few repairs and renovations, with most such places becoming harbours for criminals and other social ills.

5.4 Spatial segregation

The city of East London is still geographically separated. There are interesting dynamics that keep reproducing social space, and this has resulted in classes being able to reorganise and to reproduce themselves. Whites, in general, have had a better deal. In the post-Fordist East London, the White middle-class is still thriving, coupled with a small Black middle-class known as the 'Black diamonds'. In theory racial integration is taking place but in reality this is not very visible. As noted earlier, an important question to ask is: who is integrating with whom? This is a question on which Crankshaw (2008) offers insights. It has been noted that the general access to the economy and wealth as opposed to poverty has organised South African post-apartheid communities. People have been organised according to classes, and this is very common in a neo-liberal environment where access opportunities remain very disproportionate, with poor people relegated to the margins.

A comparative picture on the current situation in East London would be that of the city of Johannesburg as observed by Crankshaw (2007). The city of Johannesburg has maintained its status as the economic hub of the country but, at the same time, it continues to inhibit segregation elements. The East London economy, on the other hand, remains much smaller, mainly sustained by a small motor industry, tourism and a small service sector. Poverty remains rampant and the grant recipient economy is growing steadily. The situation in Johannesburg is slightly different. Crankshaw (2008:1692) made an important observation that the de-industrialisation of Johannesburg had taken a particular spatial form with service sector business increasingly located in mostly White northern suburbs, whereas the mostly Black southern suburbs bore the brunt of unemployment and increasingly resembled an 'excluded ghetto'. Crankshaw further contends that the spatial arrangement of Johannesburg has made some scholars argue that Johannesburg's post-apartheid spatial order is just as racially unequal as it was during apartheid.

In East London, the same traits of new forms of spatial segregation are evident. Theoretically, there have been academic contributions on integration but there has not been much interrogation on who is actually integrating with whom. The migration of Blacks into mainly former White suburbs that are close to the central city has caused alarm amongst middle-class Whites who have fled in numbers, leaving the poorer Whites 'trapped' in such areas. I call this a 'trap' because the occupancy of many of these Whites is forced on them by their economic conditions. The property and the rental prices in most areas continue to escalate beyond the reach of many people across all racial groups. Rentals are more affordable in areas that have been discarded by wealthier Whites. Until such a time that people can afford to pay more rentals or be in a position to buy their own houses elsewhere, places such as West Bank in East London remain the only immediate solution to their predicament.

From my fieldwork findings, it became clear that various factors and social capital actually serve to benchmark the classification of a person within the White culture. One knows where exactly they belong by virtue of social products accessible to them. The

multidimensional nature of what constitutes White marginality was brought to the fore through various meanings that my informants attached to their condition. In an interview with a former social worker, she indicated that poorer Whites always occupied certain residential areas which were affordable to them and that this set up drew largely from their past experiences where they knew which areas they could reside in. In the past, apartheid confined people to their respective places of residence²⁶. Hence poorer Whites had residential areas that were marked and reserved for them. However, these residential areas that were previously reserved for poorer Whites have become racially mixed. Although the official demarcation of such areas as places of poor Whites has long gone, such places are now stigmatised as undesirable.

During my fieldwork in West Bank, it became evident to me that people continue to attach certain values to areas of residence. As a response to this, certain patterns emerge. Most of my informants lamented the excessive changes that were now characterising West Bank. They cited that unemployment was high, and unemployed youth roamed the streets causing trouble and indulging in drugs. Other residents had turned their homes into places for brewing and distributing liquor. Such places were referred to as 'shebeens' where unlimited amounts of alcohol were said to flow. These shebeens were patronised by people of varied social standing. Both White and Black home owners and renters participated in running shebeens. Some of my informants were quite disturbed by the new character of the suburb where noise sometimes blasted from galaxy speakers throughout the night with patrons shaking and screaming on the top of their voices until dawn. Peace was something that some of my informants missed dearly, and they lamented the loss of respectability that some parts of their suburb were incurring. Some of my respondents actually indicated that they felt entrapped because they could not escape all these changes that marked the beginning of bad things to come; however, some were already part and parcel of the trend in the suburb. Some of those that had adjusted are people who indulged in beer drinking and were even offered

²⁶ Susan, aged 42, a middle-class White residing in a more affluent part of the city, indicated that apartheid allocated each racial group a geographical place of dwelling; however, for the White racial group, this further involved classification according to classes. The poorer Whites had their own places of residence and rarely came into contact with their rich counterparts. They kept to their own areas and would not try and spill over the boundaries. Interviews with Susan were conducted in 2011.

credit lines in some of the shebeens. Others actually justified that at least people had more options to make money. With the Eastern Cape falling under the list of troubled economies, the job market continues to shrink to alarming levels. The economy of East London has not been spared as it is also in a state of despair, dominated by government capital.

West Bank has also been suffocated by the economic downturn. Its location in the industrial hub does not offer it extensive advantages as the de-industrialisation of the city left permanent scars on the economic outlook. Although the economic recession is currently a global phenomenon, the Eastern Cape has been hit hard since historically it has been a struggling province which is actually ranked as the second poorest province in the country. In this context, poor Whites that depended on industrial jobs are faced with a gloomy future as the economy continues to bleed. There are no immediate solutions to the predicament of this group since the role of the government and aid agencies is to focus mainly on the poor majority of this country who are Blacks. In such an environment where competition for both skilled and unskilled jobs has reached its peak, poor Whites feel the worst blow.

The gaps between the economic activities in West Bank when compared to other areas within the city, such as Beacon Bay, are phenomenal. To borrow from Crankshaw (2008), the suburb of Beacon Bay would pass for the 'edge city' whereas West Bank could almost qualify as an 'excluded ghetto'. Like Sandton in Johannesburg, Beacon Bay has modern shopping malls, restaurants and better social facilities. Crankshaw further calls these 'totalised suburbs' in the sense that they now function independently of the central business district. In contrast to Beacon Bay, in West Bank there is a vacuum in terms of modern investments. There are no shopping malls in the area, hence the sprouting of informal businesses which, alongside a few formal businesses, are now big players in the economy of West Bank.

5.5 Reversal of White space

Apartheid has been abandoned in South Africa even though some of its structures continue to be visible in East London. Apartheid might be officially dead and buried politically but it continues to breathe spatially, socially and economically. This argument is premised on the fact that the spatial patterns in many towns in South Africa, and East London in particular, have continued to provide a vivid and graphic picture of the divide between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', the rich and the poor. van Ommen (2005:528) classically summarises this as follows:

The cityscape is a text for which the social, historical and ideological categories of race and class provide the most salient interpretation of its morphology. East London is a place where racial and class distinctions are etched in the physical distribution and interconnections of its various areas as well as in the representations and experiences of its citizens.

The pattern of residential occupation also clearly dictates where the middle and upper classes should reside. In similar fashion, the poor are automatically allocated residential spaces in areas that are cheap, run down and, consequently, stigmatised as crime ridden and unsafe zones. This fear of poor suburbs ascribes negative attributes to both the physical and social spaces. It has been observed that, as racial integration in residential suburbs becomes a reality, silent battles continue to characterise this integration. The reality of urban integration in its current form is the accompanying change that takes place in areas where mainly Black people flood to reside. The suburb takes on an unpleasant form and its character and its former glory are replaced by a sad picture of its opposite, a downgraded space. The suburbs, from which the middle and upper classes have withdrawn, therefore, continue to deteriorate. Most of these suburbs in East London are at close proximity to the CBD. Residential suburbs such as West Bank, Southernwood, Milner Estate, Collondale and Quigney are known to be occupied by struggling classes and the typically poor in contemporary South Africa.

There has been a lot of transformation in those suburbs formerly occupied by Whites as evidenced by the new set of codes and cultures that are emerging in these suburbs. Besides the deteriorating infrastructure, inner city areas are becoming overcrowded by large numbers of people and families sharing houses in order to cut down on the ever

escalating accommodation costs. Decent accommodation is now beyond the reach of many, with rental prices soaring to levels that many cannot afford. It has become a norm for more than ten people to occupy a single house. Hence, a single room can be shared by up to four or five people. This is one way in which people try to manoeuvre in order to survive in the city. Backyard shacks and illegal extensions of houses are characteristic of these suburbs.

Figure 4: Inner city suburbs around East London CBD



Source: BCMM GIS Unit, 2013²⁷

In West Bank, there are many of these backyard structures whose rental is generally high. My informants occupying such structures indicated to me that they pay above R700 per backyard room in central West Bank. This kind of rental is very high for the

²⁷ <http://gis.bcomm.gov.za/> Map accessed on 10/12/2012

unemployed. As a result, tenants tend to be mobile, in search of cheaper rentals. One of my informants, Viola, a sixty year old woman from West Bank, commented that she had lost count of the number of times she had been moving around the suburb due to creeping rental prices. She said that:

We move as many times as it is possible, we are always looking for affordable accommodation, and at one point, I even moved to live on a farm outside East London (Viola, 2010).

Viola had been moving around different properties with her daughter, grand children and son in-law. This was necessitated by financial realities. Since everyone in the family was unemployed, the little that they made from various activities was not enough to create a normal life for them. Sometimes they failed to raise the required amount for rent and this had potential to get them evicted from their lodgings thereby creating an unstable environment. Such a life as that being led by Viola characterises various struggles that many poorer families within West Bank have to endure. Life is as difficult for most people due to lack of employment. Even for those employed, living standards are a nightmare as most people are almost indigent.

Picture 1: A backyard caravan in West Bank



Source: Author, (2012)

The crisis in the housing supply in East London is confirmed by the sprouting informal settlements that are so visible and also scattered all over the city. They have ‘unofficially’ become part of the town settlement patterns. Most of these informal settlements are, however, occupied by Blacks who hope to occupy an RDP house at some stage in their life.

Finding decent accommodation is not only a struggle for Blacks but White families also find themselves in the same situation. In the past, it was unheard of for various families to share a house or flat, but this has now become the norm rather than an exception. In West Bank, White families that have fallen on hard times have also become lodgers in backyard shacks. Those on the extreme financial end have sought informal accommodation at places like Cocobana within Race Track where rentals are as low as R250 per month. The accommodation challenge for low-income families has spiralled into a crisis which has negatively impacted on residents.

Table 4: Average cost of rented properties in East London in 2012²⁸

Suburbs/Informal settlements	Property size	Average cost per month (in Rands)
Cocobana	2 roomed semi-detached house ²⁹ (without electricity)	R250
Backyard room (West Bank)	1 room	R700
West Bank	2 bed-roomed house	R3 500-R4 000
Southernwood/Quigney	2 bed-roomed flat	R3 500-R4 500
Nahoon/Beacon Bay	3 bed-roomed house	R6 000+

²⁸ These figures for informal structures were confirmed by my informants during interviews. Rental figures for properties were advertised in the Daily Dispatch newspaper in the period of 2009-2012.

²⁹ The rent charged at Cocobana was described by their landlord as sympathetic rent to assist the struggling families who could hardly afford to pay anything above this. This nominal rent is hardly affordable to many residents as reflected in the erratic payment practices.

The social housing schemes that have become very common in East London have not done much to ease the housing crisis. The social housing schemes target workers who earn little but the unemployed and those of seasonal occupation cannot qualify for such accommodation. As a result they have to resort to shared accommodation and backyard slums.

The crisis around housing for the poor is not only typical to East London³⁰. Throughout South Africa, the Department of Human Settlements still battles to cater for accommodation for the needy. The urgency of this matter is laid bare by the extent of informal settlements in the country. These settlements appear to be expanding daily. It is the poor who suffer under such conditions with no immediate solutions in place; the poor can only hope to have their situations improved in some way or other. Although it is unsafe and unhealthy to be in such desperate situations, most have no choice but to endure the hardships which are now a typical part of all cities, big and small.

5.6 The 'intoxicated suburb'

As stated above, West Bank has been gradually evolving from being a suburb to sharing characteristics of a township. In the past, a suburb was characterised by peace and order with low density in occupancy whereas a township is usually defined by high density properties and equally high population volumes. Moreover, townships are unique places that have an internal culture of their own while at the same time being part of the colonial and racial history of South Africa. They have survived the test of time whilst at the same time providing permanent residency for many Black families. The question to be asked at this point is whether a suburb can become a township through its style and culture.

The townships of South Africa carry a particular history. They served to house Black migrant workers who served White interests. When the townships of East London, such as Duncan Village and Mdantsane, were initially created, they were not meant for

³⁰ In East London poor Whites are found in former middle-class and working-class suburbs and in backyard dwellings of these areas.

permanent settlement since people were meant to settle in the surrounding homelands of the Eastern Cape such as the Ciskei and the Transkei. The housing of cheap Black labour was, therefore, meant to be temporary but this did not go as planned. People have continued to live in the townships. It is currently rare for people other than Blacks to reside in the townships in East London. As alluded to earlier, such spaces are seen as no go areas for Whites. An attempt to move to a township by a White person could be seen as a self orchestrated suicide as townships have a long history of violence, mainly because of high poverty levels and unemployment.

One of the most important traditional components of township life is a shebeen. Beer has often been referred to as a 'site of struggle' (Krige, 2010:231), and has provided a vantage point by which to observe state policies. The regulation of beer selling, as well as the role of alcohol consumption in the process of identity and status (van Wolputte & Fumanti, 2010), is particularly important. Shebeens, in particular, have been associated with the unlicensed sale and consumption of beer, mainly by working-class individuals who can purchase liquor cheaply. In West Bank, shebeens are part of the economic and class network that distinguishes different people. This case study thus serves as a focal point around which to situate a more nuanced discussion of the differences between people in West Bank.

There are two forms of beer-drinking in West Bank. Pubs and licensed establishments are similar to those in many parts of middle-class suburbs in East London, where liquor is regulated and patrons (from all races) usually socialise within the ambits of the 'working-class'. However, there are also unregulated, unlicensed shebeens, which in West Bank are divided according to race. Whites also operate shebeens which are patronised according to race. Blacks go to Black shebeens and Whites also go to White shebeens. In general, there seems to be open engagement with 'street liquor'.

During my fieldwork, I was able to visit two Black shebeens in the area to chat with the patrons. The first impression that one gets from these places is that of degradation – patrons were all (seemingly) drunk and enjoying their time there. Music blasted the popular beat of the time. The shebeen was visible from the street as a place of

enjoyment. The clients at this shebeen were Black people from all walks of life. Some were in the civil service and others were tertiary students. There were some who were unwilling to disclose what they did for a living. When interviewed people made general and prejudiced statements regarding the status of White people in the suburb whom they described as poor. When I asked why they thought so, the response was that the majority of Whites in that suburb had left to reside in other White suburbs and that West Bank had become a 'Black suburb'. What really surprised me was to see people drinking in that manner on a working day with no intentions of breaking off to go to work. When I asked if the shebeens were not in contravention of the Municipal by-laws, they seemed not bothered by such questions. The existence of shebeens where unlicensed liquor was sold to anyone also created another identity for the suburb of West Bank which represented it as a 'liquor city'. Such an identity generates images of lawlessness and rowdy behaviour associated with drunkenness. Shebeens also play an interesting social role. At times they become places where rumours are spread, information leaked and controversial issues discussed. Sometimes business deals are struck at shebeens and networking takes place.

Save for the noise that is associated with such places, the patrons seemed to be excited to be in those shebeens. They explained to me that patronising such places was one way of getting rid of boredom and also a platform where the latest breaking local news was heard. They did not mind the noise; they actually enjoyed it and danced to the sound that was beaming from the sub-hooper in the lounge. The 'aunt' or '*usisi*'³¹ responsible for selling beer occasionally emerged from the kitchen carrying bottles of beer to serve the clients. After experiencing the shebeen atmosphere, I wanted to find out how other residents felt about what was happening. Some White residents that owned houses in that area were outraged. 'You see, nothing happens to them, there is too much noise, even if you reported nothing happens,' complained Christina³². In contrast, White shebeens were very quiet – people drank there or took their beer home, but generally consumed their stuff without blaring music or loud conversations – even

³¹ An 'aunt' or '*usisi*' are names used to refer to the owner of the shebeen who in most cases is a woman.

³² Interviews with Christina, a 50 years old woman, were held in 2009.

the structure itself was hidden away as part of a normal 'house'. White shebeen customers generally seemed to be more aware of stigma – and perhaps are often more ashamed of their drinking habits and more liable to hide them away than their Black neighbours.

5.7 Melting away of suburb dignity

In sum, the in-migration of many Blacks has certainly had an influence on the character of many inner city suburbs that are close to the city centre. These suburbs are preferred by Blacks moving in from the townships, the village and foreign countries. Besides the prevalence of shebeens in the suburbs, drugs and thugs, previously confined to townships, have become predominant.

In light of all the activities that have taken place in the West Bank, the suburb has certainly transformed its image and now carries a stereotyped identity of being second-class and, therefore, not really preferred or even considered by most middle-class White South Africans. One may pose a question as to why there is always that kind of deterioration of the infrastructure. From my observation, the calibre of people that move into most of the former White suburbs have less economic power and less capital to maintain the infrastructure. Moreover, overcrowding and sub-letting of properties to many people often leads to its decay. In turn, serious crime and violence also become part and parcel of these suburbs. In a sense, the Whites of West Bank have developed less sociable and more isolated lives because they seem to be embarrassed about the level of decay in their suburb. Moreover, although township locations are known to be cheaper, there was no mention of them by my White informants as an alternative for them in difficult times. When I asked my Black informants if they thought they were integrating with White communities, their response was that they 'did not have problems with anyone, but were simply renting properties or buying wherever they preferred' as the law allowed them to be wherever they wanted.

However, there were still tensions: one lady whom I spoke to indicated to me that her White neighbours were sometimes unfriendly to them but when they ran out of grocery

supplies, they always asked for help from her. At times they even asked for small amounts of money but when she asked them to at least do the garden for her since they had a lawn mower, they were not too keen to do that for her, whereas they would do it if asked by another White person. In her mind their reluctance to assist her in gardening was linked to her race. She made her own assumptions based on the past experiences where Blacks were viewed as servants of the White people and not the other way round. Some of my White informants made it clear that there was now a reversal of roles which pushed them to their marginalisation.

In sum, the issue of urban residential integration is very complex. Currently, it is the cheaper, former White suburbs that have been physically integrated involuntarily by way of Blacks moving in from elsewhere and the middle-class Whites exiting to more expensive suburbs that are sparsely populated and only accessible to those with enough money. In the newer spaces, it is not racial categories that create the tone but a matter of class. The new spaces in leafy residential areas are accessible to a particular upper class composed of different racial groups and racial categories do not matter that much.

I noted that poorer Whites who remain trapped in poorer suburbs still see the relevance of racial categories in the current societal ordering, and they tend to hang on to categories of the past. Racial integration is, therefore, to some extent viewed as an invasion of their space over which they have little control. The visibility of Black shebeens in West Bank attests to this, as well as the fact that Whites view them as intrusions. Only groups with financial backbones are able to make decisions about moving to other areas. Those without money have no choice but to adjust and make sense of their new situation. The majority of my White informants indicated to me that, if they had a choice, they would move. Older people, however, who had lived there for the rest of their lives, were not too keen to go elsewhere, since they had little economic options to vacate the suburb. Elderly people, in particular, bemoaned some of the negative changes that had taken place in the suburb - the enduring noise and uncollected refuse, the booze and drugs and criminal elements - were regarded as clear pointers to social decay.

5.8 Urban racial spatial integration: changing patterns?

The notion of transforming the urban areas in order to open them to more integration has been an important post-apartheid urban policy in South Africa. As noted by Spinks (2001:24) the post-apartheid government had to deal with this crucial issue of desegregating the social space, particularly the residential milieu. This quest to transform urban areas emerged earlier on in the policy development in the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)³³. It was core to the principles of the 1995 Development Facilitation Act (DFA) and was later included in the 1997 Urban Development Framework (UDF) and in several other White papers and policy statements (Todes, 2011). Just how far these policies have contributed to urban integration will be discussed in this section.

In light of the history of segregation in residential areas of South Africa, the question that can be posed is just how far South African urban communities are integrating. Most scholars such as Crankshaw (2008), Jürgens (1993) and Smith (1992) have written extensively on the complications of building post-apartheid integrated urban communities in the context of its complex legalized segregation. Others have seen the process as slow and complicated, yet others have pointed to new possibilities in urban South Africa. The old suburbs that were previously governed via the Group Areas Act have been the most complex to understand and interpret. Although there are no official laws that demarcate where people of different races should settle, there are new dynamics governing space and place and how it is viewed by people. These dynamics influence settlement patterns of a certain area and also migration from the other.

As noted by Roberts (1994:60) the problem created by apartheid is yet to endure as people still place much importance on racial categories. He further asks a question as to

³³ The RDP became one of the most important integration strategies to be adopted by the post-apartheid state. The RDP most importantly appraised the disintegration of the apartheid geography and called for more compact cities that redressed urban imbalances. Housing for the poor close to the urban areas was identified as one of the core issues in order to house poorer communities closer to their places of work and job opportunities. Just how far the RDP achieved some of its objectives is subject to a lot of scholarly contestation.

how long it will be before the categories in people's minds disappear. Will there be a stage when most people will see others in South Africa as people rather than categories? The division of people according to their races is, therefore, likely set to endure in various other forms. The post-apartheid euphoric rhetoric of seeing South Africa as one big rainbow nation totally united by their difference has itself been met by silent resistance.

According to Muyeba and Seekings (2011:656), the discourses of the 'rainbow nation' held out the possibility and hope that South Africans would overcome historic divisions and build a common identity and solidarity. But the current reality problematises this image. South Africans still see the 'Other' when dealing with people from different racial groups. The 'Otherness' is so widespread in the South African context that I was also able to experience it as a non-local. South Africans see 'foreignness' in each other, and people coming from other African countries are viewed as 'alien' - people of unknown origins and speaking languages whose sound is strange. They refer derogatorily to these sounds and people who speak the languages as '*amakwerekwere*³⁴'. South Africans also view other local people from other provinces as foreigners or refugees who come to occupy their space and crowd them³⁵. If South Africans still see such vast differences in each other, then to what extent can they integrate or what is their understanding of integration? These questions remain difficult to find answers to in the present dispensation. Charles (2003:167) observed that residential areas played a pivotal role in either accelerating or reducing racial-based disparities. He further noted that:

Sociologists and policymakers have long viewed racial residential segregation as a key aspect of racial inequality, implicated in both intergroup relations and in larger processes of individual and group social mobility. At the dawn of the

³⁴ '*Amakwerekwere*' refers to various languages that are spoken by African migrants in South Africa; these languages are not understood by the local Black South Africans and hence they are coded as alien.

³⁵ Even the Premier of the Western Cape, Hellen Zille, referred to South Africans who come from the Eastern Cape to seek a better living in the Western Cape as 'refugees' and she was not apologetic about it (SABC, 23 March 2012). This contradicts the citizen right of movement. It is enshrined in the Constitution that South Africans have the right of movement and can be in any part of the country without feeling guilty. Silently however, there is mistreatment of people from other provinces. The abuse is normally emotionally through derogatory statements meant to alienate the person.

twentieth century, this significance of neighbourhoods was recognised-the physical proximity of home and dwelling-places, the way in which neighborhoods group themselves, and [their] contiguity - as primary locations for social interaction, lamenting that the "color line" separating Black and White neighborhoods caused each to see the worst in the other. Whether voluntary or involuntary, living in racially segregated neighborhoods has serious implications for the present and future mobility opportunities of those who are excluded from desirable areas. Where we live affects our proximity to good job opportunities, educational quality, and safety from crime (both as victim and as perpetrator), as well as the quality of our social networks.

In South Africa, despite many attempts at reconstruction, cities still reflect the footprints of the past in the spatial leftovers of apartheid, which serve as a constant reminder of inequity and segregation (Landman, 2006; Rex & Visser, 2009). A lot of transformation has so far taken place since the time of apartheid. As observed by Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo (2009), the end of apartheid in 1994 signified a considerable shift – not only in South African politics but also in social relations. These new relations are expressed in new urban practices that are changing South African cities. The once mono racial residential suburbs have basically been left to the forces of the market to rearrange themselves. The government has had no clear-cut policy that speaks to how the integration of formerly segregated South African urban areas must take place. When a critical analysis of urban residential development policies is done, what remains are more questions than answers.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) policy that was adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) led government in 1994 promised a solution for the impoverished urban communities. However, the target of the RDP was mainly the poor Blacks as opposed to poor Whites. Houses were built under this programme intended for the homeless urban dwellers who were mainly residing in the informal settlements scattered right across the country. The model already fell short of integrating the people of South Africa simply because the majority of people in the informal settlements were Black. So, in other words, the major beneficiaries of the RDP housing were Blacks and they did not really integrate with other races that were not indigent. The housing waiting list for the indigent population for the RDP houses did not capture the full picture of South Africa. The fact that other racial groups were not

residing in informal settlements does not mean that they all had shelter. Some people have continued to live in rented rooms and backyard structures in suburbs such as West Bank. When I asked some of my White informants if they could consider moving to RDP housing, it was clear that, for safety reasons, they were not keen to move to RDP houses in places such as Duncan Village and Nompumelelo Township. They viewed these places as very unsafe for them. Although the RDP model was meant to bring relief to struggling citizens, an alternative model was later sought.

The RDP model did not fully achieve its goals and hence was replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy in 1996 (Legassick, 2007). Since then, GEAR policy, which is market oriented, has been criticised for its neo-liberal approach which prioritises the capital at the expense of the poor people needing state assistance. The adoption of GEAR effectively ended any attempt to implement far-reaching state funded schemes to undo the apartheid city (Christopher, 2005:2306). After the adoption of GEAR, the government yet again proposed another policy in 2006 under its Breaking New Ground initiatives (BNG). Under the BNG, the main strategy was that of urban renewal. The programme that promised to deliver a lot for the urban areas has not, in fact, done much to uplift the urban face. In East London, this process was aimed at improving the biggest local township of Mdantsane but the programme is yet to take off. One of the urban renewal initiatives was to face-lift the ocean waterfront between the Orient and the Eastern Beach but this process also remains in the pipeline.

Although the government had a vision to provide better housing and improve the living standards of the urban inhabitants, the implementation of such a vision has been a challenge. During the RDP phase, the policy promised a lot but in terms of urban development, there were many challenges that threatened the very essence of that policy. For example, it was discovered that most of the houses that were built were very sub-standard and of poor quality. The then Minister of Human Settlements had to intervene in 2011 and ordered some RDP houses to be demolished as they posed a threat to the inhabitants. Most problems with the RDP housing delivery have had to do with unprofessional sub-contractors who maximize profits at the expense of delivering

quality housing. There could be other reasons as to why sub-standard houses were built such as the use of unskilled builders to carry out the task and the pressure to come up with a high volume of structures within a certain time limit. The RDP housing project, however, has failed to bring about integrated communities. In West Bank there has been no RDP housing project up to this date.

5.9 Failure of urban residential integration?

The urban residential segregation in most South African cities and East London in particular, shows trends of continuities with the past era where each racial group knew the geographical space allocated for it. Categorisations were clear as this was done through the Population Registration Act that classified all people according to their racial groups. An array of other supportive apartheid legislation was put in place to enforce the racial residential separation of people. The legislation that enforced the separation of different racial groups was repealed. However, this has not brought about the envisaged rainbow integration of all South Africans. New residential trends show that intense segregation is still in place. In this way, the apartheid city has failed to die as fast as many people expected. As once remarked by Christopher (2005:2305) 'the post-apartheid city continues to look remarkably like its predecessor, the apartheid city'. Such a state of affairs in post-apartheid South Africa has created a problem of coming up with imagined communities of all colours, living happily side by side and united by their difference. The urban residential space has not been as accessible due to mainly financial factors, and the silent refusal of people to integrate.

The affordability of exclusively former White middle-class suburbs still hinders accessibility for other racial groups, especially the Blacks. The official racial discrimination could be over, but does it translate into integration? Reality has proved beyond doubt that the societal divisions and hierarchies are yet to end as they continue to be fostered by other inequalities that have become part and parcel of the new post-apartheid societies. The official banning of residential segregation has not created the typical 'rainbow communities'. This is because of the 'refusal' of classes to coexist. The

depopulation of certain suburbs by Whites has often led to immediate decline in the value of properties. The fear to integrate in different residential suburb has mainly been due to security reasons.

Through my research, it became clear that urban areas were particularly complex spaces in the study of racial relations. It was found that it is common for people to stick to their own typical routines and get on with their work without worrying too much about their neighbours. However, by gaining access to people's houses through my fieldwork I was able to ask them about the 'meaning of integration' and whether they thought what was happening was the ideal way. Although the majority of my informants played down the issue of race, they had other complaints about the overcrowding, the noise, the uncollected refuse and the emergence of shebeens. Because most people cannot afford to pay an economic rent, there is a lot of sub-letting of properties which leads to their deterioration due to overcrowding and non-maintenance. Most rented properties are not properly cared for and they quickly degenerate. The municipality is also struggling to keep most residential areas clean and West Bank is no exception. Most residents who have stayed in West Bank for a long time actually lamented the new image of the suburb which was deteriorating.

5.10 Conclusion

The repeal of apartheid Group Areas Act saw citizens of South Africa being enabled to reside in any part of South African cities. This meant that there could not be a place reserved for a particular racial group. Because of the new laws that allowed racial mixing, other racial groups moved to formerly White suburbs. This in-migration of other racial groups saw an exit of many Whites to other residential areas that were more expensive. This out-migration of financially stable Whites has resulted in a drastic change in many suburbs, especially those at close proximity to the city. The suburbs that have been abandoned by Whites have been re-categorised and now carry a lower status. It was also noted in this chapter that accommodation and financial challenges have resulted in multiple occupancy of properties, with high volumes of people residing

on one property in some instances. Slumlords have seized the opportunity to cash-in on desperate accommodation seekers. However, these big numbers on one property leads to its deterioration as the pressure on it builds up. As residents continue to struggle financially, this has pushed some to run shebeens to raise money. It is therefore concluded here that the integration issue is complex and is also a paradox. Officially, residential areas are integrated but the nature of social interactions between people of different races is yet to achieve a cosmopolitan community.

The next chapter explores the alternative strategies that have been adopted by the former working-class Whites in West Bank to cope with the challenges of unemployment. The poor are not just passive recipients of state intervention but they are also constantly trying to assert their agency in order to make a living. Some of the ways could be described as legitimate whilst others are illegitimate means to survive.

Chapter Six

Surviving outside the formal economy

For those who are repeatedly rejected from the labour market or who balk at taking dead-end 'slave jobs' in the deregulated service sectors that strip them of their dignity by requiring that they execute menial tasks paid at poverty wages with no benefits, vacation or retirement attached, underground activities offer a bounty of full-time employment opportunities (Wacquant, 2008:66).

6.1 Introduction

The demise of racial-Fordism in South Africa altered the economic prospects of many working-class and poor Whites. With the racial-Fordist economy out of sight and guaranteed jobs in various sectors a thing of the past, and neo-liberalism making inroads, many people have been swept out of the formal economy to seek a living in the marginal informal sectors. In this chapter, I explore the sectors where poorer Whites have found economic solace in face of dwindling formal economic prospects. As such, I engage the sidelined informal economic sector (also known as second economy) as one such arena where the poor and the marginalised find themselves scavenging for survival. I focus on the role played by this sector and also link the failures encountered in this sector with other alternative strategies adopted, be they legitimate or illegitimate, normal or deviant.

The citizenry of the 'second' informal economy in the South African context have been subject to considerable debate (Bond, 2007, 2011; Desai and Maharaj, 2011; Du Toit & Neves, 2007; Callebert, 2013; Seekings and Nattrass, 2005; Williams, 2011). The fact that the South African society has a history of intense oppression and discrimination based on race has problematised the issue of the role of the informal sector in the economy and the citizens in that sector. The debate on what constitutes the informal economy is still ongoing (Callebert, 2013), with diverse scholarly angles on the issue. The issues have mainly been centred on the function of the informal sector in contemporary South Africa and the participants in that economy. Other scholars have bought into the dual model thesis (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005) whereas others have

argued against the notion of parallel economies. Scholars such as Callebert (2013) and Frye (2007) have argued that there is no clear division between the formal and informal economies in South Africa since those working in the formal economy also participate in the informal economy either by supporting relatives operating in that economy or by making extra income for themselves. In other words, these economies overlap. However, the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, described the 'dual economies' as being very distinct and separated from one another. In his speech to Parliament in 1998, Thabo Mbeki was quoted as saying there were two economies: the formal and the informal. Later he referred to the dual economies as the 'First world and the Third world economies'. In his 1998 assertion, he described the informal sector as a 'Black preserve' not out of choice but due to the injustices of the past. The formal economy was described as 'White'.

Former president Thabo Mbeki was quoted speaking in parliament that South Africa was two nations in one, one nation being rich and the other poor. His words were quoted as follows:

One of these nations is White, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographical dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women; all members of this nation have the possibility of exercising their right to equal opportunities, and the development of opportunities to which our Constitution of 1993 committed our country. The second and larger nation of South Africa is Black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the Black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility of exercising what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, that right being equal within this Black nation only to the extent that it is incapable of realization (Nattrass and Seekings, 2001:45).

Mbeki's assertion points to gross and persistent inequalities in South Africa that were inherited from the apartheid system. Although points raised were valid, its blanket stamen on White people raises questions. The emerging question is to what extent does uniform White prosperity and equality exist in South Africa? What of class differentiation within this 'White nation' and intra-racial inequalities? What of the

differences between the elite, the middle-class, the working-class and poor Whites? Can these be summarised as homogeneous? Mbeki's division of South Africa into two nations overlooked White difference by characterizing all Whites as prosperous and wealthy. This meant that poor Whites were overshadowed and invisible. Although Black South Africans continue to experience poverty in alarming numbers, that does not mean that Whites are immune from poverty. In actual fact, Whites in South Africa have never been all equal and prosperous in the same way. Their history is full of discrepancies which as indicated before, are mainly class based. The historical interventions to get rid of White poverty did not actually achieve class eradication amongst Whites, neither were the interventions intended for that. It was more of an identity drive, through redefining what a White person ought to be. Hence the categorization of all Whites as belonging to the formal economy overlooks the current status of poor Whites that have been thrown out of their jobs through neo-liberal processes and continue to hang onto the fringes of the informal economy. Although the informal sector has been assigned and normalized as a Black space; the problem with this stance is that it automatically shields away other poor South Africans who are not necessarily Black.

As advocated by Thabo Mbeki, the informal sector is theoretically populated by Blacks that were subject to oppression and discrimination by the apartheid regime and consciously pushed to this 'unproductive sector'. The other economy which was characterised as normal, more formal and more prosperous was viewed as dominated by uniform White citizenry of all walks of life. The formal economy was considered to be more productive and prestigious whereas the informal sector was an underprivileged space in which participation was seen as one of the last desperate attempts to survive. In summary, according to former President Thabo Mbeki, there were two distinct economies; one White and formal and the other Black and informal. The socio-economic policies that were adopted in the post-apartheid era also seemed more aligned to this line of thought. The population of South Africa was, therefore, conceptualised as clearly divided in economic terms in this manner. This homogeneous categorisation of the population into two competing yet unequal parallel economies

creates economic intervention challenges due to the oversimplification of the economic matrix. Within this model what then happens to the surplus White poor who have been ejected from the formal economy and cannot be matched with the identified categories?

In this chapter, I argue against the general contention that racial categories can be divided into distinct uniform halves, as this professes ignorance on new socio-economic realities of poor Whites, triggered by deindustrialisation and neo-liberalism. I further link my argument to issues raised in Chapter Four where it was demonstrated how the demise of racial-Fordism in South Africa had altered the lives of the working-class. It is a fact that the most Whites ejected from the economy through various ways have been faced with numerous challenges in the quest to regain their economic seats.

It is my contention that the contemporary economic arrangements in the South African economy have no respect for race. This is because; the doctrine of neo-liberalism now dictates the functioning of the economy. Although White South Africans in general continue to dominate the economy in various ways, a segment of poor Whites has also been pushed to the margins due to poverty. In this chapter, I show how the economic demise of poor Whites has shaped their current attitudes and strategies to survive. I explore their engagement in the informal economy and also explore other extended activities that have become part of their livelihood strategy. It is also noted in line with Callebert's (2013) argument that it is difficult to prove the parallel nature of the informal and formal economic activities as they seem to overlap because some people participate in both the formal and informal economies in order to make extra income. The participation in both the formal and informal economy seems not to be fixed with people moving in and out of the formal and the informal economies depending on their life situations. The bulk of the poor, however, dominate the informal economy citizenry due to its accessibility without stringent regulations.

This chapter examines various theoretical interpretations of the 'formal and informal' dimensions of the South African economy and this is followed by an exploration of

various engagements that my informants undertook in the informal economy. The formations and conditions of the informal economy in West Bank are also explored.

6.2 The 'formal and informal'

Understanding the nature of the informal economy is problematic and, as such, various descriptions of the activities in the informal sector have been used to capture that informality. In defining the informal economy, Williams (2010) described it as encompassing the following variables: 'underground work', 'cash-in-hand', 'undeclared', 'Black', 'informal', 'hidden', or 'shadow' economy/sector/work'. It has been observed that the definition of the informal sector derives from the opposites of that which is formal. Williams (2010) further contends that the definition of the informal sector denotes underground work in terms of what is absent from or insufficient about it relative to the legitimate economy.

Although not much attention has been given to the informal sector, it continues to be a force to reckon with. There has been considerable growth of the sector in South Africa and elsewhere globally despite the widespread belief during much of the twentieth century that the informal sector would face its demise as the legitimately declared economy gains an upper hand. Lemanski (2007:449) notes that:

Third World cities are traditionally perceived as places with a strong informal sector, weak economic growth, rapid population growth and crumbling infrastructure, quite different to the formal, regulated and sanitised spaces of cities in the North.

Williams (2010:248), makes different remarks in that 'nearly in all global regions, there has been evidence that the underground economy has grown rather than receded'. This, then, calls for serious consideration, not only of the economic role, but also the social role played by the informal sector.

The noted growth in the informal sector has been met by challenges; as such, the sector has continued to thrive under considerable pressure. One of the most noticeable difficulties experienced by the sector is its under-development in comparison to the

formal sector. The under-development of the sector is also worsened by the fact that it is hardly regulated. Although there have been initiatives to boost this 'second economy' in order to improve its operations and foster livelihoods for the urban poor, there still remain a lot of challenges in realizing a clear roadmap for this sector. As South Africa battles with challenges of the growing army of poor urban dwellers and the swelling numbers of the unemployed, the importance of the informal sector cannot be over emphasised. For most urban poor dwellers, their citizenship and the right to the city has been limited by their lack of economic opportunities to attain a decent living for themselves and their families. Their lack of or non participation in the formal economy has pushed many to find solace in the informal sector. As noted by Wacquant (2008:67):

Nowadays individuals durably excluded from paid employment in the neighbourhoods of relegation cannot readily rely on collective informal support while they wait for new work which, moreover, may well never come or come only in the guise of insecure and intermittent sub-employment. To survive, they must resort to individual strategies of 'self-provisioning', 'shadow work' and unreported employment, underground commerce, criminal activities and quasi-institutionalized 'hustling', which do little to reduce precariousness, since 'the distributional consequences of the pattern of informal work in the industrial societies is to reinforce, rather than to reduce or to reflect, contemporary patterns of inequality'.

Although there are problems facing the informal sector, it has nevertheless become the hope for many marginalised urban dwellers that have little options for livelihood. The membership of this sector goes beyond the politics of race. As such, Whites and Blacks as well as other racial groups have active membership in this sector. As opportunities in the formal sector continue to dwindle, there is little hope of ever being absorbed and people explore alternative means for a living. As stated earlier on, the informal sector in South Africa operates alongside the formal sector and tends to absorb those rejected from the formal sector. Most of my informants that were unemployed mainly eked out a living in the informal sector either as workers or owners of small struggling informal businesses. The basis of membership and citizenry in this sector were mainly based on personal option and failure to acquire membership in the formal sector.

During my fieldwork, I encountered numerous narratives of both exclusion and personal exit from the formal economy. To most of my informants, participation in the informal economy was just one way to rescue oneself from falling deep into the claws of poverty. Although there was a lot of despair and disillusionment amongst my informants, the informal sector was viewed as a viable alternative source of income even though it did not literally translate to a better well being and economic stability. There were numerous struggles within the informal sector and most of my respondents felt that their struggles were made even worse by the fact that they carried a contested identity into this sector and therefore their sincerity was questioned.

The informal sector appeared to have always operated in the shadow of the formal sector. However, the participants of the formal sector temporarily using the informal sector space are always better positioned economically than full time participants in the informal sector which offers no guarantees and no protection to economic risks and shocks. The economic benefits of the informal sectors are therefore minimal, with employment engagement normally on temporary basis. Shipler (2004:3) described such employment as a trap that remained invisible. Commenting on America's poor working-class, Shipler (2004:3) argued that the temporary jobs kept people slightly above the poverty line and asserted that:

Moving in and out of jobs that demand much and pay little, many people tread just above the official poverty line, dangerously close to the edge of destitution.

However, due to despair and desperation, people participate in order to sustain themselves. As such, most people operating in unregulated informal settlements fail to make any savings because the money is just not enough. This was confirmed by some of my informants who did not have any bank savings account because they did not have any extra money to stash away.

The structuralist school of thought has been particularly important in understanding the participation and the politics in the informal sector. According to Williams (2010:248), the structuralist school has argued that the advent of a deregulated open world economy is causing the expansion of underground labour in that:

participation is characterized by low-paid, unregulated work conducted under 'sweatshop-like conditions' by marginalised populations out of necessity because they have no other options open to them.

The neo-liberal school has viewed participation in the informal sector as a personal choice by those wanting to escape the control of the state and an over rigid economic system. The poststructuralist school, on the other hand, regards participation in the informal sector as exit in a similar vein as neo-liberals rather than as exclusion from participation (Williams, 2010).

The participation in the informal sector was seen as multifaceted by most of my informants and different interpretations were given for their involvement in the informal economy. I discuss the interpretations to participation in the informal economy in the next sections. These interpretations could be summarised as indicating the involvement in the informal economy as; a form of exclusion (from formal jobs), as a legitimised form of exit, as a way of challenging the status quo, and as well as a demonstration of their 'wounded citizenship' which is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

6.2.1 Participation as exclusion

In the midst of a shrinking economy that can no longer absorb all people, there has been a rapid growth of the unemployed in urban areas such as East London who are rapidly sinking deeper into poverty. However, job losses continue to be experienced at an accelerated rate, not only in East London but also in the broader Eastern Cape Province. In a Daily Dispatch newspaper report entitled, '*Eastern Cape jobs bloodbath*'³⁶, it was reported that by the end of 2012, the Eastern Cape had 69 000 people who had lost jobs within the last three months of that year. In actual fact the province was reported to be the worst affected in the country. There was a marked decline of 13.7% in the manufacturing sector. A number of companies were cited as closing down due to the bad business environment. Such a massive job loss was cited as one of the major contributors to the acceleration of poverty. This was also attributed to the global economic meltdown which had narrowed the job platform. The narratives

³⁶ This story appeared as a headline of the Daily Dispatch on the 7th of February 2013.

of exclusion pointed to a contracted job market coupled with economic policies that closed doors on some job seekers. Some of my informants who had voluntarily exited their jobs in search of better economic elsewhere, and others that had opted to take packages offered for them to retire, were now finding it incredibly difficult to reassert themselves in the job market. This was also demonstrated through the narratives in Chapter Four, where employment prospects had melted away. Some of my informants however, indicated to me that they had been systematically left out of the economy through government policies, which to them aimed at replacing Whites with Blacks, especially in the civil sectors of the economy. Although they kept applying for government jobs, they indicated that they were not getting any replies. As a result, the options for them became very limited and hence they sought solace in the informal economy.

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to discuss the issues of 'deliberate' White exclusion from the formal economy with a former White East London member of parliament. She explained to me that most White people had panicked after 1994 and opted for early retirement and resignations without properly planning for their future (Former Member of Parliament, Val, 2011). Some had misused their packages and not properly planned for the uncertain future hence they found themselves in this predicament. In the absence of adequate social welfare funds and reserved jobs, poorer Whites were finding it more and more difficult to function properly, without strong economic backing. She also said that most of these poorer Whites were 'hanging on' to what was 'no longer there'. They were claiming what 'was' in the past but no longer 'is' in the present. For her, this sense of exclusion emanated from the sense of loss being felt by people who were once beneficiaries of an unfair system. As a result, the failure to attain the quality of life which the previous era heralded as the ideal life for people of their race surely counted as a loss emanating from exclusion because no other explanation seems reasonable enough to explain what these people were going through. Furthermore, she pointed out that most White people did not prepare enough for what was to happen to them after democracy and as a result, some were citing reverse apartheid on minority racial groups as being responsible for their predicament.

However, Williams & Round (2008: 301) explain the current disillusionment and concern about 'reverse apartheid' in the very nature of the post-Fordist era formations that are reproduced by neo-liberalism. They reveal that, in such a context, there is little that can be done to utilize surplus labour. They argue that this is the context in which the informal sector citizenry has been expanded due the demise of full-employment and a comprehensive formal welfare state regime that characterised the racial-Fordist era where responsibility for the social reproduction of the unemployed was provided by the state via public welfare provision. The post-Fordist era has different social engineering where the poor are left exposed to the brutal force of neo-liberalism. Williams & Round (2008:301) contend that:

Those of little use to capitalism are no longer maintained as a reserve army of labour and socially reproduced by the formal welfare state; instead they are off-loaded into the informal economy to eke out their survival.

One of informants who in the past worked as a social welfare officer in West Bank said that people who were finding it difficult to secure employment would naturally blame it on someone or on the new governing system. This was mainly because the state in South Africa has always been manipulated to serve the interests of a few people based on racial grounds and that makes the state untrustworthy. In the same vein, since there was transfer of power, the minority groups that do not hold power will point the blame at the current power establishment. It was her belief that even if some of the blame for the present hardships faced by Whites were caused by personal action, this was difficult to admit, and therefore, they would opt to blame someone else (Social worker, 2011). There were cases where people had made bad choices and voluntarily exited their jobs only to fail to get alternative jobs, mainly because of change in the economy.

Some of my informants simply could not get jobs and felt that the Black Economic empowerment policies (BEE) limited their option. The financial difficulties at times triggered unhappiness and violent confrontations at home. This culminated in physical confrontation due to stress induced by unemployment. However, this does not mean that all confrontations were related to money, some grew out of alcoholism and drug abuse, although money problems seem to dominate in the destabilisation of families.

During my fieldwork, I was told of a case of a middle aged couple that lived in the backyard of a Black landlord in West Bank. This couple had serious financial problems because they were both unemployed. They had two children and they frequently fought over many things in front of their children until the husband moved out leaving his wife and children behind in debt. Violent confrontations between couples that fought over money were very common in many narratives. This often led to separation and divorce. Some teenagers being raised by poor and single parents were so overwhelmed by their condition to the extent that they ended up abusing drugs and alcohol. This was common especially amongst boys. Teenage pregnancy was also said to be rife with cases of under aged girls reported to be engaging in sexual activities as a means of survival.

6.2.2 Informal participation as protest and exit

Although some of my informants explained their participation in the informal sector as emanating from their exclusion in the formal sector, some actually indicated that it was out of personal choice that they quit or were never engaged in the formal sector. They preferred to participate in the informal sector for a wide array of reasons. Although they indicated that they did not make enough money in order to improve their lives and be in a better position than they were before, they were optimistic that their lives would improve if their businesses took off. Most of these people who opted to participate in the informal sector ran small businesses which were not formally registered in most cases. Such businesses struggled to survive and did not have a large customer base.

Some of my informants indicated that they participated in the informal sector as a form of protest at their exclusion from the formal economy. They traded in goods and services that generated income, yet they were not keen to register their business or to contribute anything in the form of taxes. They used all the money generated from their activities and since these were not regulated, they were able to move from one activity to the other depending on which one was viable at that time. Their homes were rent free business thereby reducing the burden of paying rent. Some of my informants indicated that they actually saw nothing wrong with their home business operations where they

sold a variety of goods for money and pocketed everything that they generated. To them it was one clever way to avoid exploitation by unscrupulous landlords and also to avoid ditching little money they earned by exposing themselves to the tax system. This was just one way of making a living in protest of their 'exclusion' from the current economic dispensation. The fact that the state had no clear set objectives to rescue poor Whites often made them engage in both informal and illegal activities that were not accountable to the state to generate income.

The participation in the informal activities - some of which were illegal - at the end of the day provided financial back-up that rescued many of my informants from being on the red mark of desperation. This therefore became a rescue strategy in a context where their plight did not capture any urgent reactions. One of my informants who operated a workshop in West Bank indicated that he slept short hours and worked longer hours in order to 'make it' financially. He woke up very early to open his small workshop in order to capitalize on early customers. The business did not have one focus; there were electricians, mechanics and plumbers amongst the team employed. Although they did not possess professional skills, they still knew how to handle such work. It was mainly individuals and other smaller businesses that sought their services.

Some of the participants in the informal sector felt that it was their democratic right to be able to earn a living. Their participation in the informal sector became a strategy to earn a living. Although my informants felt that they were in a disadvantaged social space, their active agency in the informal sector was one way of claiming their right to the city. The circumstances in their lives had forced them to stand on their own and sought ways of maintaining their lives within a context where economic rights were vanishing for the poor. Although this participatory citizenship was marred with other challenges, some of my participants were determined to improve their lives in this way. Wacquant (2008: 244) contends that:

... it has become increasingly clear that citizenship is not a status achieved or granted once and equally for all, but a contentious and uneven 'instituted process' that must continually be struggled for and secured anew.

Rather than to be viewed as passive recipients of assistance from different sectors, some of my informants felt that by engaging in activities to improve their lives, they were expressing their active citizenship and agency in order to be able to self-determine and to be in charge of their lives. In this way, they became actors even though their challenges were invisible to many. To my informants, citizenship could no longer be guaranteed by the state, and at the same time insurgent citizenship (discussed in Chapter Eight) was not their option.

6.3 The formations of the informal economy in West Bank

Although there were various narratives about engagement in the informal sector, it also came to light that most of my unemployed informants did not possess any professional qualifications and significant skills although some had basic certificates in typing and mechanics. They did not have training in business management, although some ran small businesses that struggled. In some families, there was only one bread winner who generated an insignificant amount of money on a monthly basis. Many of those in lowly ranked employment indicated that their salaries were so poor that they could hardly cover their most basic monthly budget. Some of my informants worked in grocery shops and car workshops. Others did menial jobs for other Whites in their suburb. Some offered services such as lawn mowing, laundry and cleaning of houses for other Whites at very low wages. Although some of my informants were not keen to discuss the nature of their jobs, especially in the domestic sector, some of their neighbours divulged the information. Some of the jobs that they did to make money shamed them and hence their hesitance to reveal the information.

6.3.1 State social welfare grants

Some of my informants relied on welfare grants. However, this was not a very common source amongst those interviewed. My research established that the most popular form

of grant that was being accessed was the old-age pension grant³⁷ which was pegged at R1200. Some of my informants that were at pensionable age informed me that they relied on social welfare grants and had no other means of income. However, they were quick to indicate that the money they received was insufficient as some of them shared this small amount of money with their children and grandchildren. Another form of grant that seemed to be accessed was the disability grant which is meant for those who are sick or suffer from any physical disability.

The grants were generally viewed as very insufficient because of low rates that were not adjusted in line with inflation. Most of my informants complained that prices kept going up but nothing was being done to top up the grants. At the present moment the South African government provides various categories of grants to their citizens. These range from the child support grant, the old age grant, the disability grant and the care dependency grant. The government pays out R280 for the child support grant and R1200 for the other categories of grants such as the old age grant, disability and care dependency grant.

6.3.2 Women and their struggles

In some less fortunate families, girls resorted to using their bodies in order to get money to buy things that were not accessible to them because of poverty. One of my informants indicated to me that it was difficult to control teenage girls who came from poorer White families. In most cases, they tended to fall pregnant because they prematurely got into relationships as a survival strategy. The unfortunate ones ended up with more than what they bargained for in the form of pregnancies. One under-aged girl who already had two children before she turned eighteen indicated to me that poverty had pushed her to engage in relationships in order to get money. She came from a broken family and had left school before she completed Matric because she fell pregnant. It was actually difficult to chat with this girl because she had a small baby and her boyfriend always wanted to be part of the conversation. I assumed that there was a

³⁷ More information on government social grants can be obtained from: www.sassa.gov.za

lot that he wanted to shield away from me and maybe he was feeling guilty about his relationship with this under-aged girl. I obtained information, however, that the parents of the girl had consented to the relationship and always had something to gain from it. Although teenage pregnancy is not always talked about as a very visible social problem in the White communities, amongst Blacks it has been a big threat and a cause of concern because of the huge number of girls who fall pregnant each year. The parents of such teenagers who fell pregnant were helpless because of their own vulnerable economic positions.

The pressure that women faced also pushed some to prostitution. Such stories were rife through gossips from neighbours and other people especially in shared accommodation. For example, I was told of two married women who, out of desperation, had become prostitutes and their husbands were aware of their activities. This had become just one of the ways to eke out a living. As one neighbour put it, 'desperate situations need desperate solutions'. The plight of these women had pushed them to use their bodies to bridge the financial gaps.

Some unemployed women who mainly stayed behind at home indicated that the burden of looking for resources to support their families was shifted to them. Some had small children and this pushed them to borrow money and food items in order to feed their children. Also the financial difficulties sometimes exposed women to different forms of violence in the home. There were many narratives where women had to bear the brunt of stressed husbands and partners who turned against them in difficult times.

6.3.3 'Down and out!'

One of my informants indicated that some poor Whites had reached a state of desperation although people were reluctant to admit that. Ronald, a 42 year old informant residing in Cocobana complained that problems facing them were not being solved by anyone. 'We do not even have a platform for our grievances, people just come here to promise us things and we never hear from them again' (Ronald, 2011). It

became very common to encounter such emotional words during my fieldwork from many of my informants who are battling with poverty. These words were said with despair and limited optimism for the future. With little to survive on, poor Whites regarded themselves as having been pushed to the edge. The informal sector, as it was demonstrated had not solved their problems.

As the economy bites deeper and deeper, the backyard structures and caravans have become home to some of the poorer Whites. They struggle with what to eat and are constantly mobile, moving from one backyard dwelling to another. Others rent rooms that they share with their sons and daughters. When poverty is part of one's life, there is little privacy. In one family at West Bank, even the son-in-law shared a room with his wife, their son and their ailing mother-in-law. The small spaces that are shared by some of the poorer Whites become multipurpose. An old two-plate stove sits on top of an old cupboard, a bed is on the opposite side, a small table contains many empty lotion bottles, while under the table usually serves as a storage place for the little food reserves.

However some of my informants like Donna (44 years old) were also convinced that they were on their own. Donna had little optimism for her situation and this was expressed in the following words; 'It is difficult for people to know what we are going through, anyway who cares! No one comes to our home, we have no platform to voice our issues, and everyone thinks to be White means to have money!' (Donna, 2011). As I spoke to Donna, she was busy with her laundry whilst her mother, who suffers from arthritis, sat on the dusty veranda. She continued to tell me that all the domestic chores were her responsibility and the family could not, by any chance, afford a domestic servant. At the same time, when she has to carry the burden of the domestic chores, she also has to find time to move around looking for employment. Her unemployed boyfriend was also in the house, wandering about. They indicated to me that their current source of income was their mother's grant. She said that:

Being White does not guarantee good life, one just has to struggle with life like everyone else, we do not have a house of our own, and we are renting a room as you can see (Donna, 2011).

The house that Donna shared with other poor White occupants formally belonged to one family whose life story I had followed from 2009. I was told that the house had been sold cheaply because of problems that emanated from divorce. The house was still in a state of disrepair; there were no renovations that had taken place for a long time. The occupants of the house also cared little for the structure. Cleaning of the house seemed not to be a priority nor on their minds. I was informed that the new owner who had bought the house for almost nothing was now developing flats at the back of the house to rent them to more desperate tenants. The lodgers of the house explained to me the extent of their desperation and the difficulties faced by other families in that house. The house was shared by many people.

6.4 Non-governmental organisations and religion

In the attempt to address the poverty and helplessness of people without formal jobs, and a regular income, there are two parties that have played a key role in assisting poor Whites in West Bank. These are, firstly, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have played a crucial role by bridging the gap between the state and the communities. In West Bank, particularly the Cocobana area, the NGO called 'Meals on Wheels' has been active in providing relief services to very poor people in that area. The manager of this organisation, whom I interviewed during fieldwork, indicated to me that there was a lot of poverty in communities which they served amongst both Whites and Blacks. Although most of the beneficiaries of their feeding services were mainly Blacks, there were also a considerable number of poor White recipients. They fed people at Cocobana twice a week mainly with bread and soup donated to them by well wishers. Although the NGOs played an important role, their services were only for relief purposes and did not actually offer other services that could pull people out of their poverty. The services were only meant to avert starvation and malnutrition. The residents of this area indicated to me that this NGO played a very crucial role in their lives as it fed their hungry families. They told me that they view their role biblically as that of servicing the poor and giving them hope in times of their need. They were quick to point that their services were limited in nature and that they expected other

organisations and the government to be in strategic partnership with them in order to assist poor communities.

The role of the church was also prominent in helping the poor. My informants also viewed the church as important in that it consoled them and motivated them to face each day. Many respondents identified their religion as Christianity and also indicated that they regularly went to church. The older people indicated that they went to church but not frequently due to their health conditions. Many kept a Bible in the house which they frequently read. Religion had always been a very significant part of the White community in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church actually played a very prominent role in the politics of South Africa. Most of my informants however indicated that they belonged to other church organisations and did not associate with the Dutch Reformed church. They indicated to me that Sunday remained a very important day to them which they were able to dedicate to God. Most found solace at church and various other networks were established through church. As such, some indicated that they regularly got donations from the church and were 'adopted' by church well wishers who provided them with some of their needs.

Some informants even indicated that the church had become a place for moral regeneration especially to their children. They indicated that due to the challenges in their lives, it had become very difficult to mould the characters of the children and the church was now bridging that gap. The older people indicated that, during their youthful years, religion had always played an important role in their lives and that did not get out of their systems even in the midst of their challenges.

6.5 Conclusion

The economic downturn in South Africa has necessitated the rethinking of the notion of a dual economy which is structured according to races. It was argued in this chapter, that there is an overlapping functioning of the economies and that the participation in these economies is beyond race. Both Blacks and Whites participate in both the formal and the informal economies. However, this chapter concentrated on the narratives of

Whites that operate outside the formal economy. It was found that there were various reasons why White people were involved in the informal economy. These ranged from voluntary and involuntary reasons. It was however shown that the participation of unemployed Whites in the informal economy has been very challenging. Most have struggled to improve their lives. Due to the economic difficulties, social problems such as alcohol, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy have been encountered. The NGOs and the church have played an important role in the communities, through feeding schemes and moral support.

Chapter Seven

Entrapment and poor White stigma

Having made the determination that something belongs or does not belong in a given category, we can then cognitively mark off the boundary that separates and divides that which belongs from that which does not. (Wray, 2006:8)

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore two concepts: that of entrapment, as well as the stigma of enduring White poverty. Teppo (2004) raised the concept of poor White stigma in her work on poor Whites at Epping Garden Village where she noted that after the Second World War in South Africa poor White reformation became central mainly to Afrikaner capitalism which needed healthy bodies for labour. Teppo (2004:61) noted that the 'existence of poor Whites represented a racial weakness and an illness of social body'; hence there was a concerted effort from interested parties to deal with this social problem. In line with Teppo's argument on poor White stigma, my work demonstrates the immense pressure, disappointment and anxiety triggered by White poverty in contemporary South Africa. Hence as shall be seen in this chapter, poor Whites in contemporary South Africa are caught within the 'geographies of shame'; where they carry both the stigma and the burden of being poor. Entrapment by poverty is stigmatised, and this mirrors a life where people are traumatised by their imprisonment within a cultural category of 'shame'. This shame is cultivated by the failure to be a 'member' of a particular society, the ties having been severed by the condition of poverty. This alienation leaves unpleasant footprints in the lives of poor Whites that get 'criminalised' for failing to live up to the expectations of whiteness. As illustrated in Chapter Four, with mounting social and economic problems amid political wilderness, most poor Whites across the country remain 'entrapped' in uncomfortable zones of impoverishment, where they find it difficult to exit their precarious circumstances. This failure to escape the condition of poverty leads to entrapment, physically, spiritually and psychologically. In line with Quillian's (2003) theory of 'entrapment' and 'exit', this

chapter conceptualises the 'entrapped' as those who have failed to escape from the stigmatised built environments to a more respectable one. In such a situation, the will to relocate is there, but the resources for such a move are not enough or non-existent altogether. This translates to involuntary spatial entrapment. The other form of entrapment is the psychological one where a person fails to move the mind from the past and constantly refers to it, often wishing for the revival of the past. This psychological condition of entrapment can also be referred to as nostalgia – for a lost lifestyle, or a lifestyle that is always a chimera.

The means of 'exit' refers to a move from a relatively lower and poor neighbourhood to a relatively better one. The people who are considered as having exited are those who move to residential areas that are much better than the ones from which they exited, and, in turn, offer better life prospects. As contended by Briggs and Keys (2009), people considered to have exited are those who have managed to move up the ladder to better areas and not those that move to even worse areas. It has been noted in this study that 'exit' is not always a permanent condition as some people relapse into their former status which pushes them out of their exit options back to where they came from. The concept of stigma is central to the character of entrapment as it is applied to poor Whites in impoverished places such as the Cocobana. The horrific conditions under which these poor people have to endure, torments them frequently. The illusion of White wealth that reminds and plays the same tune of what a White person should look like, where they should live, what they should eat and how they should conduct themselves has worked like a fast current to erode the status of poor Whites, criminalising their condition and dismissing them. The very condition of poverty amongst Whites seems to threaten the hegemony of those who still wield power, wealth and influence, a space in which a poor White can only dream of. Poor Whites are regarded as the opposite side of that which is perceived as normal, thereby making them 'abnormal'. Above all, they are seen as the 'Other', a threat, and a danger. This 'Other' is therefore feared like a contaminating object. In this way, White poverty is not only a problem to the poor but also to the non poor - the middle-class (Teppo, 2004). Poor Whites are perceived as an

embarrassment and it is against this backdrop of fear of poverty that admitting to be poor as a White person is stigmatized.

7.2 Spatial entrapment and exit in West Bank

In this section I show how the 'entrapped' poor Whites continue to exercise their agency in various ways to try and find an exit from their present predicaments; however, others have remained involuntarily tied to positions of despair, and their chances of escaping are very slim. I re-visit the entrapment thesis in-order to understand the present situation of the poor Whites in West Bank. As mentioned before, unlike in the past, poor Whites in contemporary South Africa operate outside the nexus of full state provision, protection and monitoring. Without access to the essentials of life that were guaranteed in the past, poor Whites have to work out new strategies to forge ahead with life. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Four and Six, the available exit options are limited.

The free fall from working-class strata has created serious contradictions in terms of the expected standard of life and one actually attainable. The dilemma that this poses is that the economic traps are not acceptable. Living a life marred in poverty is treated as some an alien condition. For the unfortunate poor Whites who, by virtue of misfortunes, find themselves trapped with no exit options, there are consequences.

However those failing to escape despised conditions are seen as failures. The traps on one hand are not always easy to break away from as such others are entangled in a cycle of escape-relapse. This is because some escape to better areas as soon as their economic situations improves (a rare occurrence), but others do not last long in new places, often being forced to return to the old place by economic pressures. As indicated in Chapter Five, the majority of my informants did not own the houses they occupied. As a result, there was no sense of permanency in properties that they occupied. Most were mobile, often moving from one place to another within the same suburb or to poorer ones being pushed by their economic situation. I had to be

cognisant, therefore, of the temporary factor associated with renters when I was conducting my interviews. However, I interviewed both the owners of houses and the renters to understand their views on 'entrapment' in their suburb.

Catherine, one of my informants, indicated to me that she had 'seen it all' in the suburb having been part of the community for many years. In 2009 I interviewed Catherine, a 70 year old widow who lived in West Bank with her ailing daughter. She indicated to me that she had seen many sides of the suburb; she had followed its 'everyday' transformation and had been an eye witness to the changes. Catherine had resided in the suburb for more than fifty years from the time when she married. She told me that she moved from her family home in Gonubie³⁸ to join her husband when they got married. Ever since, she had never moved from the suburb and there was little chance that she would ever move. She was now a pensioner and she looked after an ailing daughter although she also had health challenges. With the pension as her only source of income, chances were very slim for her to move elsewhere. Although she was not happy with the state of her suburb, it was difficult for her to come up with an alternative plan. She simply could not afford to move elsewhere. She owned her house which she struggled to maintain and some sections of it were dilapidated. Her neighbours were other old White people whom she described as not too friendly. I soon figured that out myself when I went to ask for an interview. They were not too keen to talk to me, instead telling me to make an appointment for some other time since they were resting. They kept giving excuses every time I tried to talk to them. Catherine had many stories to tell about West Bank but mainly described the area as diving to its worst state at an accelerated speed. Although the suburb was rapidly transforming into its worst image, Catherine could only watch helplessly from her house without many exit options from the uncomfortable situation she was in. She indicated that the suburb was no longer being maintained and that it was noisy, getting overcrowded and criminal activities were escalating.

³⁸ Gonubie is a middle-class suburb which is about 15km from East London town. Moving from this suburb to a place like West Bank would qualify as downgrading.

Catherine's sentiments were similar to those of other older residents on pension who felt that they were too old to start building new lives elsewhere. As a result, although they were unhappy with the changes taking place in the suburb, their options were limited. They had little or no financial back up to support such a move. Selling their properties to buy new ones elsewhere was also not an option. Although most of the older residents owned houses, they were aware of their little market value which did not give them liberty to move to other areas. Besides, they would struggle to raise the differences. As such, they preferred to adjust to all the changes in the suburb. It was, therefore, out of their difficult circumstances that older residents preferred to continue residing in the suburb. They did not want to sell their properties at a loss and then fail to acquire another one. That would certainly worsen their predicaments.

The situation was, however, different for those who rented properties in the area. The Delfier family, for instance, had options to move easily to other areas that were of higher standards. But that also had its complications. Judging from my interview with them, it became apparent that escaping decaying suburbs by moving to alternative residential places does not always act as a sustainable solution since financial demands always determined where one's life ended. The members of the Delfier family were all renters and had lived in and out of the West Bank for the past ten years and had never owned a property in East London. In the past they had relied on a regular income from Mr Delfier who was a civil servant at a correctional facility in West Bank. After his death, they moved out of government accommodation to rent in various places. West Bank was one of the suburbs in which they had spent a considerable amount of time often exiting and coming back again on several occasions. They had once left West Bank to reside in a small holding that was a few kilometres out of East London. They thought life would be better at that small holding which they rented, but their situation did not change or improve. When the rentals kept going up, and the cost of living escalated, they decided to move back to West Bank from where they had exited. They made this decision to come back to West Bank in order to be closer to job opportunities which did not materialise during the course of my fieldwork. When they arrived back in West Bank, they could not afford to rent a full house because there was no one employed among

the adults. As a result they could only afford to rent two rooms in a house that was in a very bad state. That is all they could afford under their difficult circumstances. For rent, they used an old-age grant from the government to pay for the rooms. The owner of the house did not really bother to fix windows and doors that were broken.

Although the Delfiers were embarrassed to be in this house, they had no other better option. The state of the house summarised it all. The grass was over grown, the paint peeling off, the windows broken and door handles not closing properly. The occupants of the house were very uncomfortable and they told me that the owner kept making empty promises. The Delfiers had often wanted to move from that house but cited financial constraints as hindering them. The depressed economic market also discouraged some home owners from selling their properties.

This situation was echoed even by some Black families in West Bank who also attempted to leave the suburb. Others, however, were determined to exit. Noluto, one of my research assistants, for instance, had bought a house about six years ago in West Bank and decided to sell it and buy another property in Sunny Ridge³⁹. I asked her why she had decided to sell her house on which she had spent a lot of money through renovations but she indicated to me that she did not think West Bank was the best place to invest her money. Opposite her house, the neighbours had decided to turn the place into a car workshop and residential flats for rental. The neighbours on her left side were barely maintaining their property and this was affecting the value of her property. She decided to move out before the value of the house depreciated. Noluto had a steady job in a government department and had regular income. As such, it was easy for her to move out of the area which could no longer cater for the kind of life she wanted for her family. As observed by Quillian (2003:223) poor neighbourhoods have an effect on both the poor and non poor:

.... poor neighborhoods are a source of concern because they have a negative influence on the quality of life, both for the poor and non poor

³⁹ Sunny Ridge is a lower middle-class suburb; properties in this suburb have more value than the ones in West Bank. This suburb is still being maintained and the properties are in a good state.

residents. Poor neighborhoods tend to have problems such as dilapidated housing stock, inadequate public service, and high rates of violent crime.

It is such strains on residents that normally push them to exit from poor neighbourhoods. Those who have no capital to escape remain trapped.

One of my informants, Mathew, a 50 year old man whom I interviewed in 2009 indicated to me that he had decided to expand his informal car workshop to Butterworth (outside East London) in order to make extra money to improve his life and that of his family who resided in Cocobana. Although his business is still very small, the income that he generated had improved their life. Before intensifying his business, his family of four was cramped in one small room in West Bank but in 2011 had upgraded to two rooms and hoped to generate enough money to buy his house elsewhere. It was noted that there is constant pressure for occupants of poorer neighbourhoods to seek ways to escape their predicament in order to lead better lives.

The ethnographic accounts that I detailed above indicate that the 'entrapment' model of poor neighbourhoods should be understood from various angles, such as the non-permanency of the condition entrapment and the re-entries. Quillian (2003:223) contends that:

Long stays in poor neighborhoods may be the result of several patterns of entry and exit, ranging from relative residential stability to complicated patterns that involve switching back and forth frequently from the same area.

It is important to note, then, that there are a number of factors that attract people to an area and, at the same time, push people out to other areas. I encountered a number of cases where some of my earlier informants could not be located after some time. Some had moved to other suburbs yet some had been fortunate to get jobs in other areas or provinces. I noticed, however, that there is a continuous cycle of exit and re-entries in most of the poorer suburbs as residents sometimes find life more difficult in alternative areas. The reality, then, pulls them back to the very area and the very social space from which they sought to escape. Those that eventually fail to escape and remain fixed in

decaying sites. Some of my disillusioned informants lamented the rate, at which their suburb was degenerating, especially those in central West Bank.

7.3 Feelings of nostalgia and despondency

The nostalgic discourse on the past social orders and privileges has become a regular feature of everyday life in contemporary South Africa mainly because of the challenges poor people encounter. The longing for the 'lost old days' and the sensual escape to the 'good old days' has gripped the minds of those feeling disposed in the present South Africa. Why all this nostalgia, one may ask? To contextualise those nostalgic feelings and sentiments, it is proper to provide a working definition or explanation of the concept of nostalgia. Jacob Dlamini in his book entitled 'Native nostalgia' describes nostalgia as 'a sentiment of loss and displacement' (Dlamini, 2009:16) which has become endemic in the modern society. It is about the past as well as the present. It is the occurrences of the present that trigger the past reflections. Dlamini further contends that nostalgia is 'about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past'. The seemingly 'disorderly present' cultivates that nostalgic feeling. It is ideological in its form and sometimes romanticises the past reflections. Nostalgia knows no boundaries and is not limited to a particular reference group. It could sometimes be an everyday occurrence and experience.

The nostalgic engagement of poor Whites is mirrored in their relationship with their everyday life, their joy, sadness and their feelings of displacement and loss in the current dispensation. As observed by Stewart (1988:228):

nostalgia is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context - it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present.

It also creates an atmosphere for dramatisation of the past in the present context. It gives meaning to present evolving social orders. Social experiences are not static; they are fluid and keep changing in response to various forces, and the nostalgic feelings resurrect the past to grasp the present forms of social order. The past becomes a point

of reference and comfort in time of great loss and discomfort. Steward (1988: 228) notes that, 'In a world of loss and reality, nostalgia rises to importance as the phantasmal, parodic rehabilitation of all lost frames of reference'. When the present alienates the nostalgic, only through past references can meanings develop and provide points of reference to the current. The past has its stories, it has its history, its art, its music, and its people, and the nostalgic reflections pump into life these, to create a temporary 'mind home' that can console, comfort, and sometimes provide direction. The resurrected stories are sometimes transformed into hero stories, into ideal life, into the appropriate and the exemplifier of appropriate orders. The truth can either be breathed into these 'hero' stories or be dissolved into idealised worlds. These situations are particularly notable among refugees, or other displaced people, where nostalgia tends to idealise the past and construct very idealistic memories of 'better days' (Malkki, 1995).

Most of my informants tended to compare the present with the past often indicating that things were more orderly and easier than they are now. There was a lot of romanticising the brutal apartheid state especially in terms of economic prospects that were available; albeit for Whites. One informant also alluded to the sense of order that was a typical feature of the apartheid regime. When I queried if the regular disturbances in township could be equated with order, they were quick to point out that they were not referring to the township phenomenon which many knew little about.

The irony of the past experiences was, however, that the apartheid system exerted a lot of pressure on White people as well as other racial groups. There were certain expectations from them. To preserve their race and their identity, White lives were to be shaped and maintained in certain ways. For example, the areas resided by Whites were separate and expected also to be orderly in many ways. Whiteness in this way was associated with a sense of order (Garner, 2007). The risk areas resided by Whites were, therefore, closely monitored through social workers to avoid the risk of degeneration. Various control tactics were put in place to civilise (Teppo, 2004:16) poor Whites in their areas of residence. Although West Bank was a typical working-class

suburb in the past, Catherine, remembered with fondness how clean West Bank used to be with its magnificent ocean breeze, flowers and magnificent views. Catherine lamented the deterioration of West Bank, which is now characterised by all sorts of social misdemeanours like shebeens. The issue of crime was mentioned as a social ill that had damaged the suburb. The worst part was that people were not scared to commit crime anymore because nothing seemed to happen to them. She remembered how the suburb was 'green with maintained lawns and well groomed gardens and street trees', and where police were there to protect the residents and their properties. Today, she noted with a lot of despair and disappointment, that:

The beauty of the suburb has been taken away, it is just melting away. No one cares. The suburb is turning into a shanty town, houses are being turned into illegal liquor shops and no one cares. Litter is left lying all over the streets and in front of people's houses, no one really cares, criminals freelance all over the suburb and no one can stop them, not even the police (Catherine, 2009).

When I probed further as to why she thought criminals were freelancing, she indicated that criminals roamed all over even during the day making it difficult for people to enjoy piece. 'Just try and walk towards the Fulasi Beach and you will understand what I mean, you will be attacked, you will be mugged' lamented Catherine. Catherine however indicated that she was not advocating for the return of apartheid but that she was just disillusioned that the post-apartheid government, although democratic, had failed citizens on many issues. Most of my informants were unhappy with the performance of local government which was the closest to people and was, therefore, in a better position to improve their lives. The local government was described as dragging its feet and treating residents with a lot of disregard.

Clearly, there has been a lot of despair amongst both Blacks and Whites in South Africa over the government's failure to deliver services to their expectations. This has in many cases resulted in people taking the law into their hands through a display of insurgent citizenship which is explored further in Chapter Eight.

7.4 The concept of stigma

In informal settlements such as Cocobana, a life without support or income means a life of stigma. Stigma has been defined by a number of scholars as encompassing issues of abnormality versus that which is considered normal (Goffman, 1974; Meisenbach, 2010; Teppo, 2004; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Wray, 2006). As a consequence, that which is considered abnormal attracts stigmatisation, and exclusion. Scheper-Hughes (1992:374) defines stigma as:

As a discourse, a language of human relationships that relates self to other, normal to abnormal, healthy to sick, strong to weak. It involves all those exclusionary, dichotomous contradictions that allow us to draw safe boundaries around the acceptable, the permissible, the desirable, so as to contain our own fears and phobias about sickness, death and decay, madness and violence, sexuality and chaos. The tactics of separation allow us to say that this person is gentle, one of us, and that person is other.

This definition by Scheper-Hughes already shows that wherever stigma is applied, there is a comparison that is made between that which is considered as 'normal' and that which is considered as 'abnormal'. The stigmatised are seen as abnormal and to some extent as suffering from some form of illness. Furthermore, the stigmatised are viewed as carrying and displaying undesirable attributes. This point is further elaborated by Goffman, the famous stigma scholar who in his seminal essay advanced that stigma is that feeling of worthlessness which accompanies cultivated social exclusion on a stigmatised individual. He further noted the intentional categories created by the society as a way to 'complement attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories' (Goffman, 1974:2). Stigmatisation of individuals is, therefore, done intentionally so as to corrode the sense of pride in an individual and make them internalise the sense of shame so that they see a need to reform and conform to acceptable norms. As such, it is shameful when a White person sinks to the level of being classified as poor for poverty is not viewed as normal. Because of the negativism associated with the condition of poverty, unpleasant attributes and meanings are attached to the condition which is viewed as going against that which is viewed as normal. Within the context of White culture, poverty contradicts the representation of

whiteness, the very essence of power domination and a privilege to accumulate. Because of the symbolic representation of whiteness, poor Whites represent a conflict of interest and a contradiction of White normalcy. Link and Phelan (2001:365), in quoting Crocker, et al. (1995), further elaborate on the concept of stigma by asserting that:

... stigmatised individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context. Furthermore, stigma can be seen as a relationship between an "attribute and a stereotype" to produce a definition of stigma as a "mark" (attribute) that links a person to undesirable characteristics (stereotypes).

It is human nature, therefore, to distinguish and label human differences. Those labelled different and possessing undesirable characteristics are then seen through negative lenses and this allows for the separation of the normal from the abnormal, and a distinction between 'us' and 'them' is then generated in order to mark that difference. The labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes (Link and Phelan, 2001:367). The 'them' are then rejected within what is perceived as 'normal social processes' and placed in marked distinct categories that are disapproved of and therefore alienated, leading to exclusion.

The conceptualisation of poverty as something unacceptable for Whites has thus justified the separation and the 'naming' of members of this dreaded category. Being a poor White is severely stigmatised to the extent that even the poor Whites themselves would sometimes go to great lengths to try to hide their circumstances in order to avoid attracting negative labels and subsequent alienation. The unfortunate Whites who cannot hide the reality of their impoverished lives and remain evidently entrapped and suffocated by poverty are, in most cases, abandoned and shunned by their families and dumped from some of their social networks. As noted by Phelan, et al. (1997:323), poor people have long been stigmatised and blamed for their situation. The consequence of being in this situation sometimes leads other poor Whites to internalize their condition and give up improving themselves. Phelan, et al. (1997:325) further contend that:

According to theories of ideology the survival of stratification hierarchies depends on systems of beliefs, values, and attitudes-disseminated by dominant groups

and internalized by most members of the society that justify the existing social order. For example, if those at the bottom of the economic heap are viewed as having arrived there because of their own shortcomings, responsibility is shifted from structural components of the stratification system to the individual, and the status quo is legitimized.

Hence the poor are always stigmatised and carry negative connotations. Poverty is not only defined by lack of a job and financial power but also by mere place of residence and social networks. As Goffman (1974:3) further notes, some people would actually hide their occupations, especially for those with higher qualifications, in order to avoid being labelled failures and outsiders, hence marked as very different. Once a person is treated as very different, discrimination and marginalisation and further alienation from access follow. This reduces life chances at the disposal of such a person. As noted by Arneson (2007), being placed on the low rung of a social hierarchy in many actual human societies, one finds oneself regarded as a disgusting and contemptible being by those perched on higher rungs, by others at one's social level, and perhaps, as a final indignity, by oneself. Interestingly, stigma is then justified by the stigmatisers; as Goffman (1974:5) puts it, a stigma theory is constructed. This is an ideology to explain someone's inferiority and also a way to account for the danger that person represents, sometimes rationalising and justifying animosity based on other differences such as those of social class.

A person carrying a stigmatised identity will then be treated as not very normal and as partly, if not wholly, responsible for the positions and situations they find themselves in. Obviously, once a person carries a stigmatised identity, life opportunities shrink and networks close on him. He then carries that identity with shame and feels like a second class citizen with no sense of belonging (Hughes, 2010). Above the shame that one feels, the society avoids and isolates such individuals further, pushing them to the periphery where there is little hope for their lives. It is, therefore, clear that poverty amongst Whites is a condition that is seen as alien and supposedly only the failures get trapped in this condition through failure to explore whiteness to their advantage. Being a poor White is an identity that one carries with shame and humiliation. It contradicts the ideals of whiteness and represents a point of weakness. Arneson (2007:42) notes that the 'society might employ shame and disgust as tools of social control'.

Drawing from the history of South Africa, it is very clear that White poverty has always been treated with both fear and urgency. The historical attempts to get rid of the problem on the face of White lives serves as clear testimony that poverty for Whites is treated as an extraordinary occurrence. Minkley (1994:68) also contends that there were efforts made towards preventing White people from getting trapped in poverty during the early stages of industrialisation in East London. This period was during and after the South African war. Poor Whites were beginning to emerge from unskilled White men as industrialisation initially relied on the skilled labour of Whites and unskilled Black labour. He observes that in:

The existence of White unskilled labour outside of 'industry' was notable in the city during and after the South African war, and while this generated an East London variant of 'poor Whiteism, the local commercial and public sectors, tended, overtime, to absorb and allocate 'the hands of civilisation' to the unfortunate souls of tent-town' and those 'dangerously close to losing their way to the inferior status of the native' in locality' (Minkley, 1994:68).

The poor Whites were rescued because they had become the 'weakest link' and an embarrassment to the middle-class Whites, contradicting the values of a properly disciplined working-class. They represented stray bullets that became a waste. Minkley (1994:68) notes that in 1908, the Town Council retrenched African workers and replaced them with 'unskilled White unemployed'. Reputable firms also absorbed poor Whites. The Whites in East London were thus able to secure their privilege through industrial jobs that were offered to them. A sense of pride was maintained over many years with White lives marked as very different from the other races. In comparison to other places in South Africa, there was not much hype around poor Whites in the city and it would appear that the rescue measures to contain the growth of a poor White strata was well maintained in the East London area.

7.5 The trap of poverty

The wheels of fortune have, however, turned and this so called 'prosperity of all Whites' is now a thing of the past. This emergence of poor Whites in South Africa is nothing more than a dilemma for the elite White classes as it contradicts certain ideologies. Trapped in their situation and representing a failure of the initial White middle-class

(Teppo, 2004) project to rescue the poor Whites, they are a constant reminder of the collapse of that 'grand identity project'. Presently, for the poor Whites, the only umbilical connection to their whiteness is the colour of their skin but it can no longer rescue them from the negative effects of neo-liberalism. They only can cling to a 'sense of loss', of all the privileges that were facilitated through race. As noted by Weis, et al. (1997), this sense of loss makes an individual feel that 'there is no longer a space that belongs to them in both physical and psychological terms'. With mounting global economic pressure on financial businesses and the industry, job losses are likely to continue to be a global feature, resulting in a racial, cross-cutting, jobless people. This has led to a lot of suffering and also resulted in people living under unhealthy conditions which are overcrowded.

The Daily Dispatch newspaper has captured several stories on accommodation crisis in the city of East London. At one time, they featured a story where as many as 20 Whites shared a single house in the decaying suburb of Quigney⁴⁰ due to lack of money. This was one way of sharing costs although it introduced its own health hazards. In West Bank, backyard structures that are rented by desperate Whites who have nowhere else to go have sprouted. Unlike in the African set up where one has both a rural and an urban home, poor Whites find themselves stuck in the city that has little to offer. For Africans, when the city life becomes a burden, they normally exit to their rural homes where they can survive through other means which do not require a lot of capital, but for poor Whites such an alternative is not there. The duality of home is not common among Whites, so when difficult times arrive, exit options are limited.

Link and Phelan (2001:363) assert that stigmatization probably has a dramatic bearing on the distribution of life chances in such areas as earnings, housing, criminal involvement, health, and life itself. As such, poor Whites having been pushed out of the previous life processes by both their living conditions and the judgmental society, have turned into beggars, the last blow to their self esteem. Most poor Whites that look worn

⁴⁰ Article appeared in the Daily Dispatch on the 22nd of May 2012. Due to housing inadequacies, slum communes have mushroomed. In this particular case, more than 20 people shared a house without electricity or any safety measures. It also had toilets without doors, and also housed rats which were described as big as cats.

down and tramped upon carry tiny cardboard posters begging from motorists on various busy street corners but they still draw little sympathy from the public. Most gaze at them in amusement, asking themselves questions as to how these Whites fell into such a low state of existence⁴¹. Yet others are quick to diagnose them with mental disorders. The majority of those who beg on street corners are men and physically they seem to be in state of poor health due to lack of adequate food and proper housing. They are treated as psychologically unsound. Their life stories are varied but they are generally all out of employment. They normally carry boards that give short descriptions of their predicaments⁴². Begging has become a popular way of raising money on the busy streets of better parts of the city. Most White beggars lack education and are treated as failures and subsequently disconnected from their families. I was informed by some of informants that some of the White street beggars use the little money that they get on beer, turning to alcohol in order to escape their misery. The sight of them in the middle of the road represents the downside of the industrial revolution and the failure of the factory to provide lasting solutions to the question of poor whiteism. The competition in begging on busy streets is also rising between Blacks and Whites who normally switch positions when asking for money from passing motorists. White street begging is not a typical East London phenomenon; in other areas such Cape Town and Pretoria, White begging is also very common. In East London, White beggars do not operate in the city's central business district but mainly beg on roads that lead to middle-class suburbs such as Nahoon, Beacon Bay and Vincent. They are also visible on the N2 Highway connecting East London and Durban. Although some people donate money and food, others dismiss them as opportunists.

Poor whiteism is, therefore, still treated as a cancer that afflicts the White body. This cancer is something that the White community would want to escape. It is a shameful condition that causes the inflicted to feel guilty about their condition. It reduces the self, making one with such an identity feel inferior. I have treated poor whiteism as cancer in

⁴¹ I heard numerous negative comments from people on how poor Whites had found an industrial space through begging on most roads leading to low residential suburbs.

⁴² Normally on the cardboard, they write that they are out of employment, have no food, and are desperate for help.

that it has a potential to tear individuals into tiny shreds and cast them out of normal existence into the dark ends of marginal existence. Poor whiteism goes against the very ideology of whiteness as synonymous with being White. It is through whiteness that the privileged access is made to look like a natural, universal and expected process (Willoughby-Herald, 2007:486). As such poor Whites represent a threat as they cast contradictions on representations of whiteness. They remain as scars that now continue to inflict the White body. They stand in opposition to the perceived 'factory future' and the coastal whiteness promises, hence their continued discrimination and marginalisation. As a result, they possess a dented citizenship which is discussed under 'wounded citizenship' in Chapter Eight.

As observed by Castro and Farmer (2005), stigma which leads to discrimination has the effect of reproducing relations of social inequality that are advantageous to the dominant class. This point is supported by Link and Phelan (2001) who note that having a status that is devalued in the wider society can lead to very concrete forms of inequality in the context of social interactions within small groups. This then automatically qualifies stigma as an agent of social control and social arrangement. They further contend that stigmatization helps to create a sense of control and immunity from the perceived danger at the individual or group level. The stigmatised person loses status and gets treated as separate. The negative stereotyping has potential to take over and affect one's life. As noted by Scheper-Hughes (1992:373), stigma reactions 'make people turn away from another human being in fear, disgust, anger, pity or loathing'. This consigns the victim to a living death on the margins of human interaction. Stigma has pain as its package. When people view an individual as different, that corrodes the inside of the stigmatised individual. It triggers feeling of not being a 'full human being' or normal human being. Because the person who carries a stigmatised identity is continuously blamed, that takes away self worth and confidence from that individual.

7.6 Poverty, shame and social alienation

When I first met most of my informants in 2009, they had various stories to share about their lives which had been shaped by their marginalisation. Their situations were distant from the generally perceived White privileges. This is because of images of normalcy usually used to describe Whites. It has often been taken for granted that being White equals having loads of money to spend on a chain of luxuries, being educated, living in a large luxurious and suburban house, driving a nice car and having extra cash to donate, but for my informants such a life is one that they can only dream of, for the realities of their lives are very detached from such romanticized images of whiteness.

In 2009 at Cocobana, I met a lady called Mary, a 42 year old mother of one. Mary was born and raised in a struggling working-class family. Her father worked in a blanket factory in East London as a foreman; her mother was a house wife. But as tragedy would have it, her parents passed away when she was still young. This ushered in a difficult childhood. According to Mary, after the death of her parents, unfortunate events began to unfold in her life. When her parents passed away, she was taken into a foster care home where she grew up. At school she was not academically gifted, and always struggled to cope with all the 'academic stuff'. Her foster parents did not take it lightly that she could not cope at school; as a result they often got back harshly at her, blaming her laziness for all her school troubles. Because of all the problems she experienced at school and home, she covered up her sorrows through misbehaving. That did not go down well either with her foster parents which led to constant clashes. They ended up sending her to an 'institution' because they thought that she was not mentally stable. She was eventually transferred to a special school where she continued to struggle. When she turned eighteen without a qualification to be proud of, she quickly married her boyfriend who was much older than her and moved in with him to Southernwood. She had one child, a boy. Not very long after her marriage, her husband tragically passed away leaving her with no source of income and responsibility for their child and a flat to pay for. Obviously, life was very difficult and she could barely afford to 'keep things together'. She had managed to trace her sister who also grew up at a foster care home

but did relatively better than her. She had a job and a house in Amalinda⁴³. She was aware of all her troubles and occasionally rescued her financially. After a lengthy span of living on hand outs, she was in deep financial trouble with mounting debt. Her sister offered to take care of her son. Her problems were 'driving her crazy' she says and most people thought she was 'losing it'. She told me that she agreed to give her son to her sister in fear of having the social workers come and take her son away. Although she thought her sister was being helpful, she eventually discovered that they were a lot more issues than her son's rescue.

When she was kicked out of her Southernwood apartment, she moved in with her friends and her stay was temporary in most of those places as she felt like she was crowding her 'connections' and was actually becoming a burden in their lives. Her sister could not keep her, and communication between the two of them became less frequent. 'I think she actually wanted nothing to do with me, probably I embarrassed her,' she said. Eventually, she even turned her own son against her and was no longer welcome to visit her son. Still unemployed and living from hand to mouth, she fell in love with another older man who took her to her present place of residency at the Cocobana informal settlement. Mary bitterly talks about the man whom she thought loved her only to find out that their relationship was based on secrets and lies. In tears she said that:

He was poor but at least I thought he loved me and was honest with me until he started getting sick. That is when I discovered that he was lying to me all the time. He infected me, I am now on medication, I am sick also. He died recently leaving me with the burden of the disease. None of his relatives cared about him. It was just the two of us in this place, in this house. No one cares, no one visits I now depend on hand outs and disability grant. I am suffering! I have nothing and I struggle to keep things together in this place (Mary, 2009).

Mary had lost hope of ever having a normal life again. She was barely surviving alone, without anyone to take care of. She could hardly afford to keep her own life together. She was very worried about her health and she also indicated that sometimes she felt

⁴³ Amalinda is a middle-class suburb in East London.

weak and there was no one to take care of her when she was sick, even her sister did not care.

In her dusty room that shows no signs of maintenance, Mary has nothing to show. In the middle of the room there sat a pot close to a place where she made her food. There was also a black tin that she used to boil water on the fire to bath. There is no electricity at this place. All the houses in the Cocobana are not electrified and do not look like they will be electrified anytime soon. Most houses in this place are deteriorating with some already very dilapidated. Mary indicated to me that because the area had no electricity, the smoke from fire made her condition worse. The walls of Mary's house had smoke patches. It is unbelievable that the fire was made right inside the small room but the state of the walls and the scatters of ashes all over the floor were proof of this. Mary said that because of her condition, she could not get a job and had to rely on state welfare. She also repeatedly mentioned that she wanted her son back but the trap of her current condition could not allow her much liberty to do that. She could not understand why her sister enjoyed watching her suffer like that. She did not travel much and was around the compound most of the time. Her relatives did not really want to be associated with her. With her health condition keeping her indoors she could not have friends or sustain a decent livelihood. Her poverty had initially made people associate her with a mental condition. Because of her hardships, she lost access to her son. She basically had no one on her side. She had lost hope of ever regaining a normal life; her life was full of misfortunes, which subsequently alienated her from her family members.

She was trapped in this condition and was aware that because she had not made much progress in her life, she could never be treated as 'normal'. She would always be the 'Other' to be avoided, not only by her relatives but also by her own biological son whom she could not raise due to her life circumstances. When concluding the interview, I asked her if she wished her family could visit her but she was quick to say that she was not too keen to get people to visit her under such conditions. The house had no basic facilities inside such as the toilet and taped water. When I visited later in 2011 Mary was now working part time, cleaning the house of one resident who was the oldest in the

compound earning very little for her services. But that did not really change her situation. She was too embarrassed to even talk about it. But there were no other jobs available for her. She had lost contact with her sister who still lived with her son. She was embarrassed to go out in her condition to visit her son as she feared that she would be rejected. The last time I saw her at the beginning of 2012, she was still living at Cocobana and had no plans to move elsewhere although the Race Track management kept threatening to close down the place. As a result, there is a lot of uncertainty in this area, as the Race Track management has been planning to close down the place for sometime but the residents have nowhere to go. This impending closure was confirmed to me by the Chairman of Border Track when I interviewed him in East London on the 8th of November 2012 citing the deterioration of the place as a motivation to take such stern measures. He went further to say that it was difficult to help the residents of Cocobana, neither was it possible to maintain the place as residents kept blocking the drainage system and spoiling the infrastructure. To stress the extent of maintenance challenges, he indicated that when houses were repainted, before the painters had even done half of the houses, the first ones that had been painted looked worse than before due to extreme negligence of the residents. As such, the first phase of closing down Cocobana was already in place. When residents move out of the property for whatever reason, they are not replaced by other tenants. As a result by the end of 2012, some properties were now vacant but other desperate families could not move in as the Race Track management had run out of patience with the current tenants. Facing an uncertain future, the remaining tenants were very anxious.

Another informant of mine who had been cut off by her family because of her situation is Annette, a 38 year old woman. She also resided in Cocobana with her husband and children. Annette⁴⁴ was married and originally came from Greenfields⁴⁵. Her mother had a steady job and income but they had fallout when she got pregnant with her first child. Her mother did not approve of her relationship with her boyfriend who was unemployed and came from a poor family. Their misunderstanding eventually led her mother to throw her out of her house. She moved in with her boyfriend and they got married

⁴⁴ I first met Annette I 2009 and was in constant communication with her until mid-2013.

⁴⁵ Greenfields is a middle-class suburb which is near West Bank.

privately. Her husband's family was already living in Cocobana by that time. She did not have any professional qualifications but just matric which she had failed. Her husband also had little education but 'he knew some stuff' she said. Her husband relied on piece jobs at various places.

Picture 2: 'Competing for space': home and garbage



Source: Author, (2012)

Her house was also in a state of disrepair. It encompassed what used to be a garage. She had two children a boy and a girl. She indicated to me that life was tough for them and it was a battle to put food on the table for her two children. Her husband, however, 'worked hard' and was always on the look-out for opportunities in order to support his family. 'They only had themselves,' she said. They were constantly looking at ways to improve their situation. The interior of their house in Cocobana summed up their despair. Their house was in a bad state and partially dilapidating. It also had few old items that dotted their tiny house. Their old furniture was covered in dust. Although Annette was always home, there was little maintenance or cleaning being done. The house was very untidy with two beds in two rooms that they occupied. They also had no electricity and cooked outside the house using firewood. There were piles of wooden planks scattered all over her yard that were used to make fire.

Annette and her family were in deep financial problems and struggled to survive. Every time I meet Annette, she would inform me that she was about to clean up her house but there was no evidence that she really cared about cleaning the house. The situation was always the same on all occasions I visited the family. The untidiness of the house was blamed on the children. She would say that her children liked playing in the house and that made it untidy. I did not observe any people visiting Annette and her family between 2009 and 2012 when I was conducting interviews. It was apparent that life was difficult for this family but there was little external help. The relatives of Annette did not offer any assistance and she was also too ashamed to ask for help or even to visit anyone in her situation. I was keen to know if this family would consider moving to an alternative accommodation such as the government RDP houses but there was resistance to that suggestion. They preferred to be where they were than to go and reside in an RDP house at a Black township.

Annette expressed pain at her failure to provide for her children. Her husband was out of employment and could not secure a long term contract. Their children attended a local school which was a bit far from their house. The children had to walk to and from school and she accompanied them on foot. Because they could not provide enough for their children, their identity of being poor was carried right into the school where other children would despise them. They could not even afford to pay school fees for their children but luckily they were exempted from paying fees by school authorities. Buying school uniforms was always a struggle and their children looked different from others because of their poor background. They could not make friends with other children for fear of being teased and judged by other children. This obviously was taking its toll on the children who battled at school. They struggled to obtain good grades and that was worrying as their future did not look so bright.

As observed by Quillian (2003), children who grow up in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to experience outcomes such as delinquency, teenage childbearing, dropping out of high school and low academic achievement in comparison to similar children who grow up in more affluent neighbourhoods. When I asked if their relatives could not

assist them, they indicated that they had to face the situation on their own as other family members were not really interested in their plight. In 2012, I interviewed Julia, a middle-class woman who offered some insights on why poor Whites could not be assisted for long by their relatives. Julia said that poor Whites could only be helped to a limited extent and that they were responsible for this. She pointed out that relatives usually got fed up if there was no improvement in the life of the person they are trying to uplift for some time and hence assistance stops. She also cited bad choices as responsible for the position poor Whites found themselves in (Julia, 2012). The views aired by Julia were shared by a number of middle-class Whites that I interviewed in East London. The blame for poverty was normally blamed on the victim.

Another narrative of suffering came from Mary's neighbour, Ray, a 78 years old man. Ray had now spent several years in Cocobana. He referred to his situation as a case of misfortunes and bad choices. Ray was the oldest in the Cocobana compound and had now spent a considerable time there. His only source of income was the old age government pension. He also occupied a two roomed section of the semi-detached house in the compound. The two rooms were almost empty. A radio (commonly known as wireless) was hanging on one of the corners but was off since there was no electricity in the house. The water source was from a tap in the shared bathroom outside the house. When I began an interview with him, he was quick to point out that his life had not always been like that. When I first met him in 2009, the frail looking man was quietly sun basking outside his room. He sat there gazing at the horizon resembling someone in deep thoughts. After greeting him and explaining the reason why I was visiting him, he had no problem talking to me about his life story. He indicated to me that he had gone through a lot and his eventual settlement at Cocobana was the final nail to his problems. Things had gone from bad to worse:

I never thought I would find myself in this place but here I am! I have lived here for some time now and as I sit here, there is one thing that I am waiting for, that is my death, I have nothing to live for and I have lost everything that I valued. I am alone and no one visits me and not even the children (Ray, 2009).

I was actually surprised when Ray wished for his death. What would actually lead such an old man to want to fast-track his death? I wondered. 'Look what my life is like now, I have no electricity, no water, no house, I have nothing,' Ray said. His rented house was clean but with broken furniture, he had a small but old bed and a couple of utensils. He said to me that he loved listening to the news and would soon buy batteries for his radio. At the moment, he said he did not have extra money for batteries because he always gave small loans to people just to help them out. Although he was impoverished and isolated, he considered his life to be better than that of other residents in this area who always asked for money from him. He indicated that he was always willing to give out small loans without any interests but complained that some people failed to pay him back.

He invited my assistant and me inside one of his rooms where we sat during interview. He then narrated his life story to us. 'You want to know why I am here'. He paused then gazed up the roof and said, 'Bad business, bad relationship, bad choices and bad luck, all these things combined. I lost everything!' He then went on to say that before moving to Cocobana, he had led a normal life at a small holding where he kept sheep and poultry. He spent many happy years at his small holding and sent his children to good schools. His children were now grown up and were employed. He then started having serious problems in his marriage and these had been going on for some time. Ray said; 'My wife was pushy and always wanted things to be done her own way, I provided for her but that was never enough for her'. Eventually his business was hit by economic hard times and his wife filed for divorce. There was no one from the family to help him during his financial troubles. His business was already in debt and there were many lawsuits against him. When the divorce went through, his small holding was sold to pay off debt and some of the money was split between him and his wife. His share of money vanished before he could use it on something substantive. Soon after that, he got broke and fell into depression. He could not even afford to pay an economic rent. He did not have money and could not get help from relatives. He actually owed a lot of people and it was difficult to approach people for more. 'Probably they thought I would just blow the money on alcohol,' he said. Before he knew it, the only place that could accommodate

him was the Cocobana compound. He indicated that he always paid his rent of R250⁴⁶ every month although most residents did not pay that money at all or paid late.

His wife and children moved out of his life and he has not heard of them ever since. He was, however, aware that his children were working somewhere in East London but had no interest in him whatsoever. 'May be I hurt them somehow because they are angry. I can't mend the relationship, I am alone here and no one takes care of me. I am old and I just want to die,' he repeated his death wish as he inhaled a deep cloud of smoke from his cigarette. He then threw his cigarette on the floor and put it out using the sole of his shoe. He coughed a little bit and continued with his story. He indicated that life was not easy at Cocobana as it was difficult for him to get medical care since there was no clinic nearby. He had to walk to the nearest clinic either in central West Bank or in Greenfields. There were days on which clinic services were provided in the West Bank and in most cases the queues were very long. In that area, as mentioned earlier on, there is no public transport to connect with places where there are services such as clinics. Ray told me that he had once lost all his groceries to the 'tsotsis' (thieves) after travelling on foot from the Greenfields shopping mall. I wondered how such an old man could walk all that distance alone. I knew how difficult the journey to the main road was as I had once walked after failing to get connecting transport. On hearing that I had walked, most people told me how lucky I was to have arrived there without any incident of mugging. I saw Ray on several occasions during my fieldwork and he was alone almost on all occasions. He had to look after himself and make food on a tiny gas stove. He indicated to me that he did not see himself moving out of Cocobana because, at his age, there was no hope of ever getting a job and his government pension could not pay for an economic rent.

The Saunders⁴⁷ also portrayed another similar picture of struggling. Before I conducted interviews with the family, I already had some basic information from the neighbours

⁴⁶ This amount translates to about \$28 American dollars and the average rate of 8.5 against the rand.

⁴⁷ The Saunders lived in the West Bank; I interviewed them in 2009 and was constantly following their life story. By the end of 2011, they had sold their house for close to nothing and moved to a rented property in the same neighbourhood.

who knew the condition of the family. There was initially a resistance for interviews with this family; however, I eventually managed to get their attention. I interviewed Wilson, the head of the household, and his teenage daughter, Samantha, who already had two children at the age of seventeen. There was always a lot of interference when I tried to interview Samantha either from her father or her boyfriend. It was clear from me that they did not want her to release some information to me. This frail looking girl was soft spoken and very shy. She looked unwell. I had been told by neighbours that Samantha got pregnant at fifteen and had to drop out of school. Her father welcomed her boyfriend who was his drinking partner and a sponsor of his drinking habits into their home. I was informed that Samantha's boyfriend had given Wilson an old car 'as a way to negotiate his acceptance into this family'⁴⁸. He eventually moved in to stay with the Saunders at their family house in the West bank. Wilson's wife had eloped to Butterworth with his brother who was in a better financial position than him. Eventually they got divorced. He was left to raise and take care of his daughter. He got into depression and started drinking alcohol heavily.

Wilson could not manage to raise his daughter and to take care of his house which was deteriorating. The walls were cracking and the plaster was peeling off. The windows were broken and the doors were in a bad state. The floors were pale and dusty and there was no sign that the place was being cleaned. There were bottles of whisky on the floor. In most cases, Wilson was drunk. He sometimes spoke to me without wearing his shirt. His tattooed skin was frail. He told me that he had worked for many years at Daimler Chrysler until he decided to 'quit'. There was little coherence in this story. In most cases he would say to me that he was out of employment out of choice and as a protest against the current government. He would also not maintain his place because of the same reason. He claimed to have two more houses that were in a better state than the one he occupied. Obviously his present house embarrassed him. He would say that he chose to live in the worst house to protest the condition of the White people in the country.

⁴⁸ The neighbours were actually referring to this as some form of 'lobola' (bride price) paid in most African cultures for marriage exchange.

I later learnt that Wilson actually did not own any other property. He was too embarrassed to tell the truth and actually felt better pretending to be what he was not. In 2011, his wife who had deserted and later divorced him contested the house. The house was sold for a mere R120 000⁴⁹. After that, he had to find an alternative accommodation and move out. He went to rent a room with his daughter and grand children. When I went to see the family on another occasion, they already had moved out and a number of other White families had moved his former house. Wilson could not get another job after he had stopped working for Daimler Chrysler in the West Bank. By early 2012, I was informed by Wilson's friends that he had started working as a security guard at another firm.

I was particularly struck by the extent of poverty some White families had to endure. Another informant, Rosaline, a 45 year old lady who occupied an informal shelter, was living with piles of trash in their home at Cocobana. In 2009, when I went to interview them at Cocobana, their present home, a disused warehouse, was partially filled with broken wooden planks. The warehouse was a big disused hall that was partitioned with old torn curtains. When I knocked at the door, a dog emerged together with the owner of the house. I spoke to her and I also got an indication that no one worked in the family and they relied on selling odd things. Their house was in a bad state. Just by the mere sight of the property, no one would actually believe that people lived there. They kept themselves indoors most of the time but their teenage girls were hardly at home. We could not conduct the interview inside the house; so we sat outside. On other occasions, we would chat by the door. Their house shamed them and they could not invite people in. The other young couple with whom they shared this accommodation had one child. They indicated to me that life was very tough and they could not even apply for a child grant because of their marital status. They constantly asked me to help them find employment⁵⁰. Unfortunately I could not offer them much help in that regard. Eventually after about a year, they moved to Johannesburg to start a new life there.

⁴⁹ This amount translates to \$13 483.15 at the exchange rate of \$1=R8.5.

⁵⁰ I was able to explain to my informants that I could not get them jobs since I was only conducting this research for my dissertation.

During the course of my fieldwork, it became evident to me that some of my informants were consumed by 'fear of themselves' and internalized feelings of shame and of being classified as poor. They were aware that their alienation was a consequence of their condition. From my interaction with my informants, it was clear that they were aware that because of their failure to have sources of income and failure to reside in certain areas whilst at the same time maintaining certain lifestyles, they had disqualified and divorced themselves from the 'normal' White communities. Some of my informants actually kept stressing that they were working hard to improve their situations and pushing blame onto various factors. Others indicated that it was just difficult to get a job, and that things had changed in that front. They were not very sure why the situation was changing so drastically. They indicated that it was now difficult even to conduct 'business deals'. Although these are the struggles facing poor Whites on a daily basis, the society continues to place blame on the victims of changing times by regarding their situation as 'abnormal' and not acceptable. The poor Whites have, therefore, found themselves even further marginalised and isolated because of the rejection of their condition by the society. As observed by Teppo (2009:204) 'in the post-apartheid South Africa, poor Whites seem to be an ironic joke. Not much warmth is felt towards them and almost everyone despises them'. Because of the difficulties endured once one qualifies as poor White, everyday living becomes a struggle.

The lack of power, access to jobs, financial means and the failure to live according to the demands of White culture has not been treated with sympathy in White communities. That failure to dominate landscapes (Hughes, 2010) and the social goods that come with that domination have more than often been viewed as 'unacceptable' and ultimately push such a victim of poverty to the periphery of existence. Above that, the failure to adhere to and operate within the acceptable standards already categorises that person under a class whose citizenry is that of poor people. Being poor, however, attracts ostracism. In comparison to Black poverty which is viewed as 'normal', I was surprised by the extent of stigmatization of the condition of poverty amongst Whites. Urban poverty has been growing at an accelerated rate amongst Blacks, who are pushed to reside in worse conditions within non serviced informal settlements, but this

condition actually attracts sympathy and the government has also been working towards improving shelter amongst Blacks.

The challenges facing poor Whites are at times overwhelming. It is no longer only about failing to find employment but it is also about failing to be part of the White community by commanding a life that is deemed respectable and decent. Because of this, poor Whites now carry the identities of being the 'Other', are outcasts and are deserted. Carrying the identity of being the 'Other' attracts a plethora of stereotypes against the poor Whites. They are viewed as operating in very different worlds and having a different attitude and approach to life. Once a person is stigmatised by being labelled a deviant, a self-fulfilling prophecy is initiated with others perceiving and responding to the person as a deviant (Horan and Lee, 1974:649). They are considered as a weak link and a betrayal to whiteness.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that the lack of economic prospects by many poor Whites has pushed them to endure particular lives, often marred by poverty and suffering. The limited economic opportunities have entrapped many Whites in poor suburbs, where, the escape options remain limited. The majority of informants, who indicated a will to exit to other places, were limited by the unavailability of finances. I also indicated that the entrapment model was not a permanent condition as some people were able to exit through various exit options. Others that had initially exited, however, returned and this marked their re-entry into the same poor neighbourhoods. Others remained entrapped in the poor suburbs due to age and emotional connection to their suburbs. I then further mentioned that the decay of poor suburbs has invoked nostalgic feeling about the past. Others view the future with pessimism. They do not see a bright future for the poor Whites of this country mainly because their cause remains invisible. The majority of poor Whites have continued to suffer in silence and have not resorted to street demonstrations to protest over their condition.

Although Whites have generally dominated the social space in South Africa, their own members who fall on the way side and become consumed by poverty are marked as different and are treated as the 'Other'. This intra-racial stigmatization represents conflicts and a severe crisis for poor Whites as they are ostracised and treated as some form of cancer that resists treatment. They represent an illness and an affliction of the body which triggers feelings of shame and alienation on the victims. Being marked as distinctly different and not as 'quite White' is an extraordinary embarrassment and loss to the victims. Being alienated from the White social body, pushes them to the periphery where there is little hope and exit, and many remain trapped in misery.

As a result, the 'logical' explanation for this condition gets stereotyped as laziness, alcoholism, dishonesty and lack of work ethics amongst other things. In this way, poor Whites are isolated and despised, and treated as alien and inferior. This demonization entraps poor individuals, especially in certain residential areas, such as informal settlements, which are viewed as low-class. Also getting shunned by successful relatives was very common in the narratives of my informants. As Wacquant (2008:176) observed, children and women in inferior residential places find it particularly difficult to develop personal ties with outsiders once they learn of their place of residence. The embarrassment caused by their condition leads to their isolation, and can lead to permanent psychological scarring. The failure to find decent employment has torn apart individuals who now survive within the context of poverty. Due to their varied experiences, my informants constituted a particular class that seemed to have different patterns of life. Their limited life opportunities and the treatment they received from the society and their general isolation ascribed to them a 'wounded citizenship' claim which I pursue further in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight

Poor Whites and paradoxes of citizenship

'To freely say that South Africa is my home requires me to be sufficiently comfortable with the values, practices, and words spoken within its boundaries. It must be a source of safety both physically and metaphorically' (Ballard, 2004: 51).

'There is an acute sense of loss of the familiar, loss of certainty, loss of comfort, loss of privilege, loss of well-known roles' (Steyn, 2001b:156).

8.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualises the predicament of poor Whites in East London within debates around questions of citizenship and belonging in post apartheid South Africa. The chapter uses the concept of wounded citizenship as a touchstone to reflect on contemporary poor Whites experiences and the paradoxical nature of their citizenship in the city today. Whereas in the past, it was taken for granted that all Whites had access to 'first class' citizenship through the privileges afforded to them by the apartheid state, I have argued in this thesis that the former position of privileges that Whites enjoyed have been eroded by neo-liberal forces and this has exposed poor Whites to vulnerability, and a loss of status. The complication to this claim however, is that Whites in South Africa are doing well relative to other racial groups and in this way are still perceived to have retained their first class citizenship. It is for this reason, that I argue that the predicament of White poverty is often invisible and has received far less scholarly and media attention than it deserves. The socio-economic indicators in South Africa now suggest that White poverty is growing. It is clear that White poverty is on the increase in both relative and absolute terms and this is particularly evident in a city like East London through the fragile industrial economy.

One of the most influential studies on citizenship in the South African context was undertaken by Mamdani (1996). Mamdani argued that under colonialism and apartheid there was an essentially bifurcated form of citizenship in South Africa where Whites enjoyed first class citizenship status by virtue of their access to property right, political

participation and social domination of other groups. Blacks on the other hand were either designated as second class citizens in the city where they enjoyed neither property nor political rights, or they were incorporated into tribal areas where they remained subjects within a patriarchal tribal system. With the transition of South Africa from apartheid to a democratic society, Mamdani (1996) notes that Blacks have been able through the new constitution to acquire equal citizenship status with Whites in the cities. He however expresses concern about the lack of transformation in the citizenship status of those confined to the former Bastustan areas. Within this context, some of the most intense struggles in post-apartheid South Africa have involved the demands for inclusion and access to basic services and a better life from those who were previously excluded under apartheid. Scholars like Holston (1998, 2009) have classified these assertions and demands for rights and access as versions of what he calls 'insurgent citizenship'. These demands and struggles are certainly not confined to South Africa and are widely evident in the global South. What Holston's perspective does not consider are the transformations that have occurred under the pressures of neo-liberalism within the more established neighbourhoods of the cities, which have often experienced processes of quite fundamental transformations, frequently for the worse. In these areas, residents have experienced a loss of access to resources and services and this is the position that many of the poor Whites found in the study have found themselves in since the end of apartheid. This journey has been documented in great detail above in relation to communities in the West Bank area of East London. I would like to end by reflecting briefly on the implications of these experiences for the understanding of citizenship.

8.2 Post-apartheid citizenship in South Africa

Rights in South Africa are equated with citizenship – belonging to a nation state, with all the privileges that this encompasses. However, in reality, citizenship is a concept riddled with ambiguities. As observed by Yalcin-Heckmann (2011), citizenship is a multi-faceted and contested concept in the social sciences; for citizens themselves, citizenship is sometimes contradictory. Citizenship, in the modern nation state, has

unfortunately become something to be claimed and thrown somewhat indiscriminately into the grab bag of rights and entitlements along with decent housing, labour rights, social support and other imaginations of a decent life. Susen (2010: 262) describes citizenship as 'both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity'. Purcell (2003:574) notes that, 'in its broadest sense, citizenship involves rights, duties and membership in a political community of some kind'. Glenn (2011:3) also contends that; 'Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of belonging, which requires recognition by other members of the community'.

Theoretically, the liberal notions of citizenship give individuals a space to exercise their rights and pursue their interests without interference. All citizens of the state can claim such rights and exercise their agency to reform the state. Faulks (2000:1) notes that because 'citizenship has a universal appeal, radicals and conservatives often draw on the concept of citizenship to support their policies'. The strength of citizenship has been noted in that it appeals 'as an inherently relational idea that entails cooperation between individuals in the running of their lives'. However, there have been growing debates and an increased emphasis on the limits of this 'liberal' notion of citizenship, which in actual fact marginalises disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Faulks, 2000).

Some scholars such as Hartley (2010) allude to the difficulties that one encounters when accessing citizenship in that it involves a discursive struggle. This means that it is a box of contested identities and symbolic meanings, differing power relations and strategies of inclusion, exclusion (Lister, 1997) and action, and often there is unequal room for manoeuvre or productivity as groups jostle for the appropriation of citizenship. Due to this competition, citizenship has at times played a paradoxical role of excluding and marginalizing certain groups of people. In his use of the term 'insurgent citizenship', Holston (1998) invokes both these discursive strategies by which the poor demand rights of belonging and the practical actions of protests by which they seek to operationalise those demands. Holston also argues that citizenship has historically always been differentiated with criteria such as education, race and class being used to

differentiate citizens. Under neo-liberalism new forms of differentiation have emerged and the relationship between citizenship and neo-liberalism has been characterised by tension. The concept of citizenship is paradoxical because, it claims to assign rights yet at the same time, excludes those who are 'not deserving' of these rights. As noted by Eckert (2011:310):

In a peculiar paradox, citizenship has resurfaced as a central format of struggles for justice and social well-being today. That is, social and political struggles of individuals and social groups are often expressed in the form of claims on the state with reference to rights entailed in citizenship regimes. This is paradoxical because it occurs at a time when states' aspirations to sovereignty and their presumption of responsibility seem to have been abandoned to some degree, ... What we are witnessing is the diminishment of state accountability, particularly in terms of the social rights of citizens.

Whilst citizenship seeks to ascribe rights and justice, neo-liberalism creates inequalities and widens the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Others have actually questioned the validity of citizenship in solving such ambiguities. The question then is: are there conditions that might inhibit the attainment of citizenship or which may shape the citizenship that certain sections of the society have access to? What drives those conditions and what role does each member of that society play in terms of facilitating fair access? Most scholars are agreed that poverty, discrimination and exclusion can undermine the benefits of citizenship (Faulks, 2000; Sen, 1999; Mamdani, 1996). Faulks (2000) contends that the status of citizenship implies a sense of inclusion into the wider community, while at the same time granting a person individual autonomy. Therefore, for one to be a citizen and be part and parcel of the wider society there is need for participation. Furthermore, citizenship is viewed as reciprocal and therefore a social idea. Citizenship stands for the duties and obligations of each individual as well as their rights (Mitchell, 2005). It defines belonging to a society through the entitlements associated with service (Engin & Bryan, 2007). But, in the end, Faulks (2000) also reminds us that citizenship is inherently contested and contingent, always reflecting the particular set of relationships and types of governance found within any given society. It is thus important to understand that relationships are formed and maintained within a particular social and political context. The challenge for poor Whites is to navigate such a sense of belonging, inclusion and autonomy within a context where their economic

and political position has been fundamentally transformed. This quest, as Faulks (2000) anticipates is riddled with paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions.

The neo-liberal environment has reinvented the state and its duties in various ways because in a neo-liberal environment, the role of the state becomes less visible as it withdraws from protecting the weak against the negative effects of new forms of capitalism. In the typical neo-liberal scenario, the state cuts back on social services and infrastructural investment as it creates conditions that are favourable for capital investment and accumulation. Neo-liberalism tends to promote private business and entrepreneurship with little or no state intervention (Ferguson, 2010; Hart, 2008; Harvey, 2008), resulting in the exposure of those most vulnerable. However, South Africa has not been a particularly weak state in the past decade and a half. The ruling ANC has massively increased the size of bureaucracy and its influence in the society and has also rolled out significant social services for the poor in form of pensions and social grants. However, its economic policy has been firmly neo-liberal in the sense that it favours private capital, privatisation, competition and open market access (Kasmir & Carbonella, 2008).

The adoption of neo-liberalism has introduced a more competitive capitalism in all South African cities and this has intensified inequality. A comparison can be made with cities in India that 'mirror uneven and varied neo-liberal interventions' (Desai and Sanyal, 2012:2). One of the key points Desai and Sanyal (2012) make is that neo-liberalism has encouraged an emphasis on entrepreneurialism in the city, a shift from a language of government to governance in partnership with capital and the roll back of the state in certain areas. Although the South African case differs in some respects from India, Huchzermeyer (2011) points out that there is now a strong emphasise in cities to compete with one another for capital and investment and link their economies to global circuits. The problem is that not all cities are equally able to compete and the neo-liberal competitive model leaves some cities behind, especially smaller or secondary cities like East London. Through the auto-motive industry, East London has managed to stay connected to global economy, but has also fallen behind in others areas and sectors.

This has taken its toll on the traditional working-class in the city which has experienced all the negative effects of deindustrialisation and increasing economic marginality.

It is now a reality that the less and poorly educated Whites have no automatic claims to better life and job opportunities. In fact, educated local Blacks now stand a better chance of employment than Whites. With dwindling life chances and erosion of White privileges, new meanings of citizenship are developing. These are deeply paradoxical and often insecure, as competition for limited resources has heightened. Hence neo-liberalism has created new forms of belonging within these traditionally White working-class communities. It has worked to exclude those who cannot find jobs and opportunities. People without jobs and opportunities cannot afford life in the city, yet many have stayed on, and fought for their rights which are promised through the constitution. They have also fought to retain a place in the city often because they have nowhere else to go. They have also fought to redefine their role and belonging in a city that is experiencing rapid economic and political change. The city in this way has become a site of struggle, a place where boundaries are constantly shifting, definitions of place contested and identities changing.

8.3 Right to the city and insurgent citizenship

Through their struggles, poor working-class White communities in East London are still claiming a right to the city. The idea of 'rights to the city' is often invoked in relation to the French Marxist, Lefebvre. In Lefebvre's concept, membership in the political community is not defined by formal citizenship status bestowed by the state. In his view, the right to the city is earned by those who live in the city (Lefebvre 1996:158). In other words those who live in the city have a right to the city and the city's resources and opportunities. The everyday life in the city should reflect those rights.

The 'right' to the city therefore, entails being part of city processes and practically experiencing the membership of the city. As advocated by Lefebvre (1996), the right to the city has to guarantee full participation in city affairs and also influence the direction

of urban development. Having the 'right' to the city thus goes beyond the notion of political rights, but infers that people have a sense of entitlement and belonging. The right to the city extends even to the poor, making them to be part of the city and enabling them to make independent decisions. However, Desai and Sanyal (2012) contend that capturing the voice of the poor in an urban space is often difficult. This raises the question; how then is the right to the city asserted? In order for full membership to the city to be conceived, the city dwellers should be able to integrate to the city in many ways. However, the current economic situation that derives from the neo-liberal framework opposes such aspirations. Instead of extending urban citizenship for many urban dwellers, the right to the city leads to the marginalisation of the weak in that people in the informal fringes are always excluded. As Huchzermeyer (2011) puts it; 'the urban world is made for investors' contrary to the belief that all urban dwellers have legitimate right to the city. Whereas, theoretically all urban dwellers can claim a right to the city, economically, the city is able to exclude the poor.

As problems facing the poor in post-apartheid South Africa continue to mount, various forms of citizenship have been expressed through strategies adopted by the excluded. These various ways of framing and claiming citizenship have generated intense debate amongst scholars and activists (Holston, 1998; Isin, 2002; Lister, 1997 and von Holdt, 2011). One of the common strategies used to claim rights has been 'street protests', which in South Africa are also known as 'service delivery protests'. These occur frequently in South Africa and are often mobilised around claims for basic service delivery such as housing, sanitation and municipal services. Karl von Holdt (2011:5) observes that these protests have 'become increasingly violent, marked by the destruction of public and private property and confrontations between armed police and stone-throwing crowds'. He sees these protests as expressions of 'insurgent citizenship' where urban marginal often from shack areas are redefining what it means to belong to the city, how the city should be controlled and managed and what constitutes basic entitlement for the poor. In constituting new discursive formations based on notions of rights and entitlements, the urban poor are redefining what it means to belong to the city and who is entitled to inclusion. von Holdt (2011) notes that within these new discourses

of belonging there are often hidden the languages and practices of violence and exclusion. von Holdt expresses grave concern at the undemocratic, intolerant and authoritarian nature of some of these nascent forms of citizenship found in the South African city. These are related to undemocratic forms to outbursts of xenophobic violence which has become common occurrence in many South African cities over the past five years where Black foreign nationals are blamed for snatching jobs (that should go to locals), committing crimes, blocking a number of opportunities for locals and brewing a plethora of other social ills.

Many of those who have been victims of xenophobic violence have been working in South Africa for many years and have contributed positively to building the urban economy but yet are not acknowledged as legitimate members of the country's new urban communities. The local urban poor are not affording them the same rights that they themselves demanded in the previous regimes. In contrast to the continuous public protests of the Black urban poor and the unpalatable incidents of ethnic and xenophobic violence in our cities, poor Whites are silent. The struggles of poor Whites for connection and belonging in the new society remain silent and barely visible. It is seldom to see White presence amongst those protesting for houses and services on streets. Occasionally older White working-class Trade Unions like Solidarity would be represented in the media making claims for social equality and justice on the shop floor. It will sometimes allude to the plight amongst its former members who have lost their jobs. For the most part the pain of White poverty is borne in private and dealt with outside the circuits of media attention and public protests. In reflecting on these struggles for belonging and the pain and shame many poor Whites have experienced through the loss of former resources, rights and opportunities, I would like to invoke the notion of 'wounded citizenship' as a fair description of the current position of poor Whites. The idea of 'woundedness' implies feelings of loss and pain, and shame which as I have shown are fundamental experiences of communities described in this thesis.

8.4 Wounded citizenship

In order to understand the issue of 'wounded citizenship', it is useful to consider the writings of Myers (2011) on the post-colonial city. Myer (2011) observes that African cities have not overcome the colonial wounds even after independence. Mamdani's promise of a transition from second class to first class urban citizenship has not been realised according to Myers. In this sense, the uneven planning of African cities often haunts residents who seek to overcome colonial legacies. The disadvantages of the past continue to be seen in the physical and economic isolation of poorer residents in African cities. These disadvantages have often created solidarity formations amongst the marginalised that share a common history and experience. Post colonial regimes have in most cases implemented the same strategies as those of colonial administrators, often becoming even more 'exclusivist, authoritarian, and segmented' (Myers, 2011:56). Poverty reduction strategies, structural adjustment programmes and economic empowerment programmes have often worsened the predicament of postcolonial cities. Subsequently, inequality has widened and class formations heightened.

In considering the changing position of poor Whites in post-apartheid East London, it is possible to see how Myers' concept of 'woundedness' might apply to this case. In his description of colonial wounds, Myers invokes a language of denial and the frustration of the failure of post-colonial promises. It is an expression of what Ferguson (1999) in a different context calls the 'myth of modernity'. My use of the notion of 'woundedness', implies something slightly different, a deep sense of loss and shame.

Throughout this study, I have demonstrated that being White has not insulated Whites from poverty and also being invisible has not done service to poor Whites. Their story however is complex in that poor Whites do not have a legitimate claim to retribution because they are seen to carry the stigma of colonial legacy. This partly explains their non-involvement in insurgent protest as these have tended to invoke the past injustices as the basis for protesting for betterment. It would therefore be out of place for a White person to claim such a past. However, although poor Whites carry the stigma of the

colonial past, the new post colonial wounds that have been inflicted on them have not been very visible. Their wounds have been borne away from the public domain, in the private, almost as a form of self medication where the collective failings are personalised in that way. In this way, the pain of their present predicament has been turned inwardly through the psychological, emotional and physical handling of the trauma of shame. Some have dealt with these wounds by turning to private violence as opposed to the violence of turning dustbins upside down, barricading the streets, burning tyres, throwing stones aimlessly, and neck lacing others with burning tyres to vent out anger. This inward violence that has been adopted as to deal with pain is often directed towards their own families and kin. Indulgence in drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism has also been common amongst poor Whites. In dealing with their predicament they have often made the political personal, as they opt for internalisation of pain. The trauma of their life has necessitated a revisit of the notion of 'madness'. The motif of madness, or of mental instability, among poor Whites is important – many poor Whites are categorised as being socially or mentally unfit if they are really down and out. If they have nowhere to go, then they end up 'mad'. However, as Macey (1993) and Foucault (1977) indicate, madness is a social construct and a category that is constantly shifting.

The isolation of poor Whites is also common. When they fall out of the category of whiteness, their belonging becomes compromised, in that when they are failing to hang on to their White membership, they are not welcomed into Black membership. Poverty makes poor Whites very vulnerable to social judgement and social attacks; for to be a poor White is 'not just acceptable'⁵¹. Shipler (2004:5) says in the American sense, 'poverty has always carried a whiff of sinfulness'. This assertion compares well with the South African case where White poverty has actually been 'criminalised'. Holston (2009: 263) also articulated on the criminalisation of the poor which was assumed through the 'elite practices of fortifying and privatising the city in the name of 'security' that

⁵¹ This was a comment from my informant who indicated that it was just not acceptable to accept the condition of poverty or to find one self trapped. She indicated that it is really treated seriously and other members are in most cases not too keen to be associated with such a person. As a result, some poor Whites will go to great lengths to try and escape such classification.

criminalise the poor'. This point is further emphasised by Holston and Appadurai (2011) who observe that the criminalisation of the poor is very common. Willoughby-Herard (2007: 485) observes that poor Whites have been conceptualised as the remnants of a flourishing White civilisation, as evidence that White civilisation is vulnerable to internal disintegration and degeneration – and these people are a 'White tribe' of Africa, they do not belong anywhere else, yet are not able to constitute themselves as a disadvantaged group. However, the blame has always been pointed at the victim in the sense that poverty is seen as 'self crafted'.

But amid these feelings of failure, stigma and inadequacy, the thesis has documented the continuing resolve and resourcefulness of many poor Whites to remain connected and retain dignity and have done this in various ways outside the formal economy. I demonstrated that most poor Whites are finding it difficult to reintegrate into the formal economy and as such, most of them are unemployed. However, although it is tough for them to be employed elsewhere, an alternative form of earning a living had been found by many through their participation in the informal sector. It was noted that, some people had started small business entrepreneurship in order to survive although some businesses were struggling due to the prevailing economic climate and a small customer base. Nevertheless, my informants were determined to do something with the skills and the ideas that they possessed.

Selling of second hand clothes and other items was common. This form of business was preferred as it was inexpensive to manage from home by averting added costs such as high rentals. In such a business, the second hand clothes which would have been acquired from different sources are sold at very low prices. The clothes were normally displayed on the verandas as a way of advertising. The greatest marketing strategy that helps these businesses is word of mouth. I was also informed that people would normally refer others to these houses in order to buy. Selling snacks was another form of business that people ran in order to generate some income. However, the more striving businesses were in form of spaza shops that were also operated from homes. A room in the main house was converted into a shop. Most spazas were run by family

members who would take turns to sell. These types of shops were preferred by people in the neighbourhood, as they reduced their walking distance to the main shops. The spaza shops were also affordable as the prices of some commodities were lower than those of other shops.

Other residents relied on part-time and contract employment which lasted a few months, a few weeks or even a single day. Some of the residents at Cocobana were hired in various capacities during the motor racing activities that took place at Race Track. Two people in that compound were also regular employees at the Race Track. Although part-time employment was very common, most of my informants told me that they had not stopped looking for permanent jobs; hence they kept applying, hoping to get more permanent positions in future. Networking was also important amongst my informants.

In 2012, a couple from Cocobana had managed to relocate to a better life in Johannesburg through networks of friends. I was informed that a number of people that were leaving were being assisted by their contacts especially friends. Even those that regularly got part-time work were being connected to work through their networks. Some of my informants asked for my contacts, and always reminded me to inform them if I heard of any job opportunities. On several occasions, they asked me if I had heard of anything that could help them raise money. Although I was not able to get jobs for anyone, it was revealed to me that networking was essential to job seekers.

Also as a community, especially that of Cocobana, there was some form of solidarity amongst residents. They assisted each other in various ways. Some did small tasks for others. I mentioned a pensioner in Chapter Seven that was helping other residents through small loans and by hiring some to do some chores for him. His source of income was the old aged grant. Another display of solidarity was demonstrated through one of my informants in West Bank who normally helped her friend when she ran out of electricity. I personally witnessed one person who came to bake scones at her friend's house because her electricity had been disconnected. Assistance came in many other ways, although this example typified how in difficult times, it was important for people

utilise their networks for help. The importance of interacting with one another has been emphasised by Sen (1999) who noted that, it is through relationships that people form and hold that facilitates their functioning as individuals, thereby enabling them to exercise their capabilities in an enabled socio-economic and political environment. Nostalgia, which I covered in detail in Chapter Seven, was also one way of coping, being able to live in memory of things that were once right also consoled some. Through nostalgia, history was represented through a collection of oral stories and also physical artefacts.

The role of the church and non-governmental organisations also became very important. Many of my informants indicated that church remained important to them. Religion not only worked to uplift them morally, but it was also in such settings that help came by. Some well wishers at church donated for the cause of the poor. Items such as food and clothes were donated and distributed amongst the needy. Some church members also did home visits to the elderly that had no company. In this way, some help would also come. Also people's morale was lifted through such visits that gave them hope. Their involvement in the church was a way of dealing with pain and a coping mechanism. Some people were even volunteers at church. However, not everyone in my sample was a church goer. The role of non-governmental organisations was also highlighted. Meals on Wheels, a local NGO had played a very prominent role in helping the destitute through their feeding programmes. The needy were given bread and soup, and this eased the lives of many desperate people.

Begging had also become a very common form of raising money and acquiring food stuffs on very busy roads in East London. White begging had become very popular especially in front of malls at Vincent Park and at intersections close to Hemmingways mall. Some well wishers donated food and money to the beggars. Other people however, despised the beggars, saying that they were looking for shortcuts to raise money as they did not want to work. Begging was also very common along the eastern beach walkway in Quigney. I personally witnessed a lot of begging in this area. People would hand out small change to beggars. Most of these beggars were men who would

start by relating their life stories, and most indicated that they were married, with children and out of jobs. Their outside appearance drew sympathy and many people would actually donate, I also did so on various occasions.

In summary, despite adversity, it became clear to me that the human spirit within these poor communities has persevered. There was considerable evidence that poor White families continue to strive for dignity, community and a sense of control of their own destiny. In the study, it has been demonstrated that these people have become poorer and that they have learnt to cope with poverty and have developed new livelihood strategies to cope with their predicament. What has been more difficult has been the struggle to survive the indignity of shame. As pioneers of new forms of White marginality in the post-apartheid cities of South Africa, they face a different set of challenges to their kinsman of the 1920s and 1930s who poured into South Africa's larger cities from the rural areas. Unlike their fore bearers, the poor Whites in East London today have long engaged with industrialisation and the city. This is not an unfamiliar environment for them. Many are also literate and semi-skilled and have developed mechanisms for survival in the city under adverse conditions. What they do not have is the sympathy and commitment of the state to protect their special interests and uplift their material conditions. In fact, the history of privilege during apartheid has become their Achilles heel and, as we have seen, there are no special favours for poor Whites in the new South Africa. This fall from grace has been the source of their collective shame as Whites are trying to make do without relying on the state and the dominant political formations, while making a living in the interstices of neo-liberal capitalism.

The citizenship of poor White South African reads like a novel that has a suspended end. Their existence is riddled with a plethora of ambiguities and their future hangs in the balance. It is hoped that a work of this nature will fill some gaps in our knowledge of the plight of such communities in post-apartheid South Africa. The discipline of anthropology has long been attentive to the histories and experiences of communities and people who find themselves at the margins of society and in an ironic twist of fate,

poor Whites in East London find themselves in such a position. Their story together with that of other communities across South Africa is yet to be told. They are among the castaways of the political economy of neo-liberalism and political change in South Africa. To deepen our knowledge of their sense of alienation, entrapment and poverty remains an important task for anthropology in southern Africa today. As renewed interest has been shown in the field of whiteness studies across a number of different disciplines, this thesis has paid particular emphasis not only to issues of social construction and discourse but has also given painstaking attention to the material conditions of white lives in a changing South African city as well as the political economy of neo-liberalism and deindustrialisation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Cocobana structures

Picture 3: A dilapidated house in Cocobana



Source: Author, (2012)

Picture 4: A tin house in Cocobana



Picture 5: Derelict yard in Cocobana



Source: Author, (2012)

Appendix 2: Population of the Municipal Area of East London 1875-1967.

Year	Population by race					Total
	Whites	Coloureds	Asiatic	Bantu	All Non Whites	
1875	—	—	—	—	—	2,134
1891	4,760	—	—	—	2,164	6,924
1904	14,674	—	—	—	10,546	25,220
1911	14,899	—	—	7,638	9,707	24,606
1921	21,010	2,053	704	12,210	14,969	35,977
1936	31,311	4,011	853	24,388	29,259	60,563
1951	43,411	5,920	1,548	39,801	47,269	90,680
1960	47,830	8,316	722	55,878	65,916	113,746
1963	49,613	9,210	1,806	61,384	72,400	122,013
1967	51,130	10,137	1,898	70,906	82,941	134,071

Source: Watts and Agar-Hamilton (1970:55)

Appendix 3: Race and employment in East London in 1960

Sector	Whites	Blacks (African, Coloured and Asian)	Total	White employment as % of Total
Manufacturing	4 056	6 313	10 369	39%
Construction	1 265	788	2 053	62%
Commerce	4 985	3 867	8 852	56%
Motor business	677	518	1 195	57%
Gas and electric	180	419	599	30%
Banking	762	160	922	83%
Government	1 346	825	2 171	62%
Medical	867	820	1 687	51%
Education	606	293	899	67%
Services (general)	4 212	13 443	17 655	24%
TOTAL	18 981	27 446	46 402	41%

Source: Watts and Agar-Hamilton 1970:47-48

Appendix 4: BCMM Population Distribution

	1996	2001	2007	2011
Black/African	82.7%	85.2%	85.2%	85.1%
Coloured	5.6%	5.7%	7.2%	6.0%
Indian/Asian	0.7%	0.6%	0.3%	0.8%
White	10.3%	8.4%	7.4%	7.7%
Other	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Stats SA, (2011)

Appendix 5: Some of the Industries that shut down/ retrenched in East London

Number	Name of Manufacturing company	Status	Nature of business	Number of people retrenched
1.	House of Durbery	Closure	Belt Manufacturer	140
2.	Vektronics	Retrenchment	TV Manufacturer	150
3.	Ciskei wire	Closure	Power Coating	50
4.	Defy	Retrenchment	Fridge Manufacturing	110
5.	Yarntex	Retrenchment	Textiles	250
6.	Prism	Retrenchment	Lighting, plastics, aluminium die casting	65
7.	Beck Trading	Closure	Textiles	330
8.	Eltex	Retrenchment	Knitwear	150
9.	Castellano	Closure	Textiles	500
10.	Serious	Closure	Textiles	200
11.	Bekker	Closure	Car Radio	90
12.	Da Gamma	Retrenchment/closure	Textiles	1200
13.	J&J	Relocation	Cosmetics	60
14.	Chemex	Closure	Pharmaceuticals	120
15.	Dinky	Retrenchment	Pressing	25
16.	Border Tin	Closure	Metal work	200
17.	Cryscal	Relocation	Bath Manufacturer	120
18.	Firstpro	Retrenchment	Machinists	55
19.	Nampack	Retrenchment	Ready Box	48
20.	Nampack Carton and Print	Closure	Cartoon and Print	180
22.	Kromberg	Relocation		
23.	Mastermind Tobacco	Relocation	Tobacco	
24.	Canneries	Partially closed		
25.	Venture plastics	Retrenched	Plastics	850
26.	Fibreglass Shop	Retrenched	Glass	42
27.	Fat Belly Products			
28.	Daimler	Retrenched	Motor industry	300
29.	Inkwezi Abrasives	Retrenched	Abrasives	85
30.	NCI	Closure	Textiles	550
31.	Waverly Blankets	Closure	Textiles	6000
32.	South Ocean Cables	Relocated	Manufacturing	300
32.	Nestle	Retrenched	Dairy Products	+2000
33.	Eltex	Retrenchment		70

Source: Schewitz (2012)