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Unvoiced and invisible: on the transparency of white South Africans in post-apartheid geographical discourse

Over the past decade South African urban geographers have developed a rich body of research ably narrating the changing spatialities of post-apartheid society. It is the contention of this paper that in mapping this transition the "white" geographies of the apartheid era have merely been replaced by "black" geographies and that situation is frustrating the development of truly post-apartheid geographies since the many-sided dialectic relationships that constitute South African spatialities are being overlooked. Drawing on poverty research as an example, the paper considers ways in which "white South African lives" may be reintroduced to the research practices of South African geographers. To attain this objective it first contextualises the "disappearance" of white geographies with reference to poverty research in South Africa. It then suggests some reasons why South African geographers have failed to offer any analysis of white communities and, in particular, of the marginalised among them. Its final section provides some pointers to possible research themes that might address this oversight.

Ongesê en ongesien: oor die onsigbaarheid van wit Suid-Afrikaners in die post-apartheid geografiediskoers

Suid-Afrikaanse stedelike geograwe het die afgelope dekade heelwat navorsing gedoen oor die veranderende ruimtelikheid van die post-apartheidgemeenskap. Hierdie artikel betoog dat in die kartering van hierdie oorgang die "wit" geografiese gesprek van die apartheidera slegs vervang is deur die "swart" eweknie. Hierdie verskynsel belemmer die ontwikkeling van 'n egte post-apartheidgeografie. Die natuurlike veelsydige kontekste waaruit die Suid-Afrikaanse ruimtelikheid bestaan, word nie in ag geneem nie. Armoedenavorsing word as voorbeeld gebruik om maniere te vind waarop "wit Suid-Afrikaners" weer by die praktyk van navorsing deur Suid-Afrikaanse geograwe betrek kan word. Gevolglik skets die artikel eers die konteks van die "verdwyning" van wit geografie ten opsigte van armoedenavorsing in Suid-Afrika. Daarna word verklarings aangebied waarom Suid-Afrikaanse geograwe nagelaat het om 'n ontleding te doen van wit gemeenskappe, veral van die randstandige wit gemeenskappe. Die laaste afdeling stel moontlike navorsingsonderwerpe voor wat hierdie leemte kan aanspreek.

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It has been some time since the geographies crafted by South African academics were described as "lily-white", insensitive and unconcerned with the histories, lives and experiences of the majority of the country's citizens (cf Beavon & Rogerson 1981; Rogerson & Browett 1988). In fact, since the late 1980s a spectacular body of research in human geographic has emerged in which a multitude of themes, from a diverse range of theoretical perspectives (Oldfield & Robinson 2000), focus on particularly black South Africans, in particular.[1] A defining and appropriate feature of this research is the urgency with which, among many issues, black poverty, unemployment and homelessness are addressed (Rogerson 2000a). If anything, South African human geography has become something of a champion for the narration of black South Africans' interpretations and experiences of both late- and post-apartheid society. Notwithstanding this admirable achievement, an emerging trend in the region's geography is that the interpretation or "mapping" of black spatialities seems to be all that defines post-apartheid urban geography. In this light, the key concern of this paper is an insistence on the deconstruction of the many taken-for-granted assumptions that have developed around the "white category" in South Africa. Indeed, "white" as being unquestionably "normal", middle-class/wealthy, "included", "not marginalised", and a litany of other supposedly white "mainstream" signifiers, should be viewed with scepticism.

It is my contention that white South African geographies are lacking in scope and depth, which, in turn, frustrates the development of truly post-apartheid geographies. Underlying this situation is the insistence that the spatialities of human life are dialectic, temporal and located expressions of societal relations, with race and ethnicity as key variables in this matrix. If this position is taken seriously — and two decades of research in human geography demonstrates that it should be — then cognisance has to be taken of the fact

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1   I use the term "black South African" because it was part of the apartheid system's classification of the population. The use is also deliberate in the sense that "African" suggests that it may only be used by blacks. This excludes white, Asian and "coloured" people from being part of Africa and indeed South Africa, a claim that infringes upon these communities' and individuals' right to describe their own identity.

that the spatialities of South Africa cannot be understood if parts of the dialectic relationships that exist between its racial communities are ignored. This requires knowledge of all participants in the relational matrix, and is the only way in which more complete post-apartheid geographies will be possible.

Seen against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is clear: to consider ways in which "white South African lives" might be reintroduced to the research practices of South African geographers. To attain this objective, the first part of the paper contextualises the "disappearance" of white geographies with reference to poverty research in South Africa. Poverty is employed as reference point since it may be argued that the emergence of "black" geographies was closely tied to the study of spatially imposed marginalisation associated with the apartheid space economy. The paper then suggests some reasons why South African geographers have for some time failed to offer any analysis of white communities and, in particular, the marginalised among them. The final section argues that if post-apartheid geography aims to be more complete than the previous analyses of (white) South African geographies, it also has to address inadequacies in the representation and interpretation of white cohorts' post-apartheid experiences. The concluding section also provides some pointers to possible themes for future research.

1. From white to black poverty … from white to black geographies

The "voicelessness" of white South Africans in a post-apartheid context is viewed through the lens of poverty. This approach requires some clarification as numerous questions arise as to why linkages between poverty and race in South Africa are prioritised when other characteristics might be more important. Historically, white South Africans were the focus of research for much of twentieth-century social science in general and human geographical investigation in particular. A combination of Eurocentric intellectual traditions and the political context of the time underpinned this worldview. Not least it emphasised the need to conduct research that would secure the dominance of whites in the South African social order — if not expli-

citly, then certainly implicitly. Against this backdrop South African scholarship developed a rich literature on poverty from the 1920s. The first Carnegie Commission into poverty in 1932 was responsible for establishing the field of study. These first investigations engaged mainly with what was referred to at the time as the "poor white question", focusing in particular on the problems of the white Afrikaans community. Nevertheless, black poverty was also introduced and the research also highlighted other personal characteristics such as gender and age as important determinants in understanding poverty. Ultimately, however, the Commission's findings would form a foundation upon which politicians could draw to construct policies that would "restore" white South Africans to their "rightful" position in society, as reflected in a range of well-recorded programmes for white upliftment and poverty reduction (cf for example O'Meara 1996).

In contrast to the first inquiry, the second Carnegie Commission on poverty in South Africa (1980-1984) focused mainly on the problems of poor blacks. This investigation was then continued by the detailed work of Wilson & Ramphele (1989), who undertook a comprehensive study which placed the local debate on poverty in a specifically South African socio-political context. More importantly, this research demonstrated that the primary variable underpinning opportunities in terms of quality of life and poverty in particular was race. In addition, however, this investigation also highlighted the importance of gender, age and geographic location. Subsequently, the "classic cohorts" of poverty emerged in a wave of research: black people living in rural areas, black women and children, the black aged and people with disabilities. Similarly, these studies revealed that the apartheid government, along with the preceding three centuries of segregationist rule, had played a major role in creating these "categories" and the conditions underpinning their vulnerability to poverty at time.

The first extensive post-apartheid databases on poverty started to emerge in the mid-1990s with the launching of the *Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development* (South African Labour and Development Research Unit 1993) and its subsequent analysis by Klasen (1996). Following on from this research, *The Report on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa* (Swartz 1998) provided even more in-depth analyses illustrating that poverty had clear racial and regional dimen-

sions. From a monetary point of view, poverty in the South African context has been interpreted as affecting households with a monthly income of less than R352 (Hirschowitz *et al* 2002: 54). This means that 57.2% of blacks are currently poor, as against 6.8%, 18.5% and 2.1% of Asians, coloureds and whites, respectively. Thus, blacks represent 95.4% of all poor people in South Africa. In terms of location it is clear that about two-thirds live in rural areas and 36.3% in urban areas, 20.3% of these concentrated in the four metropolitan regions. A very small percentage of white South Africans are poor (about 2%). The major difference between white and black poverty in South Africa is that the white poor are concentrated in the urban areas, and equally distributed between the metropolitan centres and cities or towns lower in the urban hierarchy. In addition, definitions of poverty have extended their range of meaning and go beyond merely reflecting low income and low expenditure. Poverty is increasingly seen as "the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development, to lead[ing] a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy[ing] a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and respect from others" (Hirschowitz *et al* 2002: 54).

The geographical setting of poverty has provided a further dimension in terms of resource inequality. South Africa's resources are in fact not that limited, but rather extremely unevenly distributed among its population. Thus, from one perspective, poverty is unnecessary in South Africa, as there are enough resources to counter poverty as defined above. Indeed, as Nattrass (1983) suggested twenty years ago, South Africa has "poverty amidst plenty". This is graphically demonstrated by South Africa's human development index, which reveals extraordinary disparities in the level of human development in various parts of the country and among the races. White South Africans have a level of human development similar to that of Canada, while blacks have scores similar to Egypt's or Swaziland's. Whereas the development index does point to differences in terms of gender, age and location affecting individuals, and communities' exposure to poverty, race is the primary causal feature.

Within the South African geographical discourse, poverty has formed a key site of investigation (Rogerson 2000). At the national level the entry point to poverty research is via investigations that at-

tempt to understand uneven development of geographical patterns and the changing space economy;[2] changing population dynamics, in particular new migration movements in South Africa and their impact on employment,[3] and the workings of new government policies for augmenting the asset base of South Africa's poorer communities.[4] In the rural context, poverty alleviation is a key site of research.[5] Indeed, as Rogerson (2000: 337) remarks,

> [...] the critical importance of poverty and the search for sustainable livelihoods is a common thread that runs through much of the literature in South African rural geographical studies in the post-apartheid period.

Similarly, a varied literature has developed with reference to the post-apartheid urban system. While nearly all this work can be traced to issues concerning the position of poor blacks in South Africa's urban hierarchy, a particularly rich vein of research has developed on the restructuring of the space economy to enable participation by the black urban poor. This is clearly demonstrated in work on locational change in the manufacturing and service industries[6] on their replacement by a new economy of informal enterprise, SMMEs and immigrant-owned enterprise,[7] and on the potential of a number of survival strategies for the urban poor.[8]

While in much of this body of research, poverty in South Africa traces its genesis, implicitly if not explicitly, to the apartheid space economy, the irony is that apartheid also underpinned the creation of highly vulnerable groupings of whites who, in the context of post-apartheid socio-economic policy frameworks, have little hope of or apparent recourse to state assistance to alleviate their plight. In the

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2   Cf Bond 1998a; Nel & Hill 1996; Rogerson 1996a, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d.
3   Cf Crush 1997, 1999a, 1999b; McDonald 1999, 2000; Peberdy & Crush 1998; Peberdy & Rogerson 1999.
4   Cf Bond 1998b, 1998c, 1999, 2000; Bond & Khosa 1999.
5   Cf Mather 1996a, 1996b; Fox & Nel 1999; Nel 1995, 1997; Rogerson 1998f.
6   Cf Rogerson 1995; Rogerson & Rogerson 1996, 1997, 1999.
7   Cf Rogerson 1996; Peberdy & Crush 1998; Kesper 1999; Peberdy & Rogerson 2000.
8   Cf May & Rogerson 1995; Rogerson 1998h; Slater 2001; Webb 1998.

context of the South African poverty profile, it is not surprising that white urban poverty has not grabbed newspaper headlines, and is not seen as a national priority. However, if the intention of poverty research is, in addition to its descriptive analysis and policy use, to underline the extreme impact of poverty on humanity, then all cohorts deserve our attention. These concerns are increasingly being presented in Anglo-American research, not only in terms of poverty, but in a range of issues under the aegis of "whiteness" debates.

2. Geographies of the marginalised and the "discovery" of whiteness

The blindness to white poverty in general and urban poverty in particular has to be seen against the backdrop of more general discursive turns in the social sciences and the demise of apartheid in the 1980s. The emergent post-modernist and post-structuralist writings of the time focused on questioning the grand meta-narratives *vis-à-vis* an emphasis on human diversity and difference (Foucault 1980; Lyotard 1984; Soja 1989). Whereas political-economic thought in both liberalism and structuralism tirelessly sought to predict and celebrate the disappearance of racial, religious and ethnic divides, these new currents expected and welcomed their persistence. Subsequently, multiple "subordinated" others in a variety of life histories, auto/biographies and other narratives — "a polyphony of voices" — have been clamouring for attention.

After a decade of post-structuralist and post-modernist investigation (de)constructing/(re)constructing "otherness" and "difference" juxtaposed against the apparent blandness of "white" modernism, a body of literature on "white-blind" social science started to emerge among those working on race and ethnicity (Dyer 1988, 1997). These initially controversial investigations have since led to a range of debates over whiteness, both in geography and in the social sciences in general.[9] These investigations generally conceptualise whiteness, like any other identity-based description in post-modern discourse, as a social construct imbued with the specificities of the locale (Massey 1991). In broad terms these investigations have led to a deepening of

9   Cf Bonnett 1992; 1996, 1997; McGuinness 2000; Sidaway 1997.

important critiques of static notions of white ethnicity and identity (McGuinness 2000).

In some ways, the interest in whiteness has been surprising in that much of the post-colonial critique of Western human geography, or "the geographical tradition" (Livingstone 1992) has been characterised, for the most part, as inherently white, Eurocentric interpretations of the world (Driver 1992; Sidaway 1997). In this sense, then, geographies of whiteness hardly seem novel, or necessary. However, the emergence of whiteness, both as a concept and as part of the human geography vocabulary of "difference", has been very recent (cf Bonnett 1992, 1999). Geographers have started to examine whiteness more closely in much the same way as they would more conventionally consider the marginal identities "given a voice" in post-modern research.

In the South African context, this era of extensive theoretical development coincided with the decline of one of the ultimate modernist grand narratives — apartheid — and underpinned an extraordinary proliferation of research. This surge in academic interest, however, was enabled not only by a theoretical turn toward the narration of those on the socio-economic and political margins of apartheid South Africa's white mainstream, but also by the desperate need for information regarding South Africa's "non-white" communities (Rogerson & Beavon 1988). Basic data on the majority of the country's citizens was simply not produced by apartheid social science (inclusive of geographers) prior to the 1980s. Starting with a few visionary scholars in the late 1970s (cf for example Beavon *et al* 1980; Rogerson 1980), and followed by many in the geographical community, there has been an explosion of work effectively drawing on the "white-racist-empowered" versus "oppressed-marginal-black" binary. This work at first slotted comfortably into structuralist critiques of "racist white capitalism" (cf McCarthy 1983; McCarthy & Smit 1984; Rogerson 1980, 1981), and later into the general thrust of the post-modernist and post-structuralist intellectual endeavour surrounding "the marginalised other". Consequently, South African geographers have now investigated all manner of themes related to (black) poverty (cf Beall *et al* 2000; Rogerson 1999), exclusion, oppression and social

justice.[10] In fact, relative to the community's size, South African geographical contributions are arguably at the forefront of research, keenly pursuing the "spatiality of cultural/social/political/economic marginality" in late- and post-apartheid society.

Nevertheless, none of these investigations focuses specifically on the "white margin". In fact, neither local geographers nor those taking the country as a regional thematic focus have specifically engaged in debate concerning "whiteness" in contemporary South Africa. This lack of interest is in some ways closely associated with the development of geography in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when highly productive Human Geography departments came heavily under the influence of the Witwatersrand University's social and cultural history debates (cf Crush 1993 for extensive discussion). At that stage attention turned to the mapping of the "hidden spaces" of the apartheid city and to reconstructing the "historical geography of the common people" (Beavon & Rogerson 1988: 83). Whereas South African geography underwent a delinking of "mindless metropolitan [theoretical] slavishness" (Crush 1993: 63), with local geography abandoning the elevated terrain of structuralist theory (among others), the strong empirical turn relying on archival, oral methodologies and the representation and explanation of marginal communities, nevertheless, came to fit comfortably with the emerging rumblings of the cultural turn in social science. Indeed, this attention to detailed investigation and the new tradition as chroniclers of black marginality has retained its original late-apartheid focus, as is demonstrated by its prolific scholarship.

Increasingly, too, there is the growing importance of academics having to secure external funding for research. Research thus focuses on what NGOs, industry or overseas donor/charity organisations and similar institutions deem key research issues. Similarly, we construct research programmes that fall within the ambit of the National Research Foundation's research priorities, for example. Given the scarcity of such funds, research money inevitably goes towards the needs base of those whom apartheid neglected most: black South Africans. This means that there is a hierarchy of topics and locations that are deem-

10   Cf Bond 2000; Dirsuweit 1999; Elder 2002, 2003; Peberdy & Majodina 2000; Smith 1994, 2000; Visser 2001.

ed to be important at this time, in which whites and spaces they occupy do not feature. In this context it comes as no surprise that the South African geographical literature is devoid of issues of whiteness. It is simply a theme that (traditionally, if you will) has not been of key interest to highly productive geography research departments. Nor is there research money available for this type of work. What is more disconcerting is that geography departments have not seen this as a potential opportunity, albeit a controversial one, to generate a more inclusive geography. In fact, this "racial re-balancing" could be the starting point for a range of studies concerning new/other/emerging margins in South African society. Understanding only one part of the racial binary is insufficient to generate a geography imbued with relational racially defined social, cultural, economic, and other cohorts.

However, some movement towards whiteness as an issue of social research is emerging. For example, the Witwatersrand University's ground-breaking conference on "The Burden of Race" presented a number of papers focused on the issue of whiteness, although mainly from a historical perspective (Saunders 2001; Verbeek 2001). Moreover, in most cases these papers relayed key themes in the Anglo-American (Nuttall 2001; Rachleff 2001) or Continental (Lauritsen 2001) context, presented as guidelines to how whiteness as an identity fraction could develop locally (Roos 2001). Perhaps the most interesting work came from the critical textual analyses of well-known South African novelists such as J M Coetzee. In fact, Coetzee's work, in particular, has provided key sites for much of this work (cf for example, Barnett 1997, 1999; Ramakuela 2001).

Interestingly, Coetzee's focus on "white guilt" is also a key theme in American studies of whiteness. McGuiness (2000: 227) remarks that the "white studies" agenda slips easily into negative forms of guilt rather than providing a positive reconfiguration of whiteness with an awareness of its own difference and that of others. In fact, Barnett (1995: 418, cf also 1997) suggests that critical geographers have been very busy in "grabbing their share of colonial guilt". While this is certainly not seen in South African geographical discourse, the "acknowledgement of guilt" is perhaps channelled through a research agenda that simply ignores white South Africans

altogether, or continuously ascribes the problems of her people to the mess that was apartheid. Whereas some of this emphasis is understandable and necessary, it will not do for geographers to investigate only one part of a many-sided dialectic, since this denies the richness of South African spatialities and presents, quite frankly, an incomplete geography.

3. So where to now?

The transition from apartheid towards something we might call a post-apartheid society has been an extremely productive phase for South African geographers. However, the "invisibility" and "voice-lessness" of black South Africans during the apartheid era seems simply to have been replaced by that of white South Africans. To adapt Bonnett's (1997: 197) remarks on Anglo-American geography, whiteness in contemporary South African geographical discourse has developed the extraordinary power to appear transparent before the scholarly gaze. What is emerging in local geography is not South African geographies, but fractions thereof. The post-modernist/post-structuralist condition should have sharpened our thinking to a point where it should be taken for granted that:

> once we accept that people have a place in human geography, then we also have to accept that they do not fall out of packets like so many green jelly-babies (Gregory 1985: 65),

but it has not. Implicit in South African geographies is the idea that her white citizens are basically all the same, and can hardly be seen as a "margin" to be engaged with, since the privileging of the white self is apparently insensitive to society at large, or unnecessary, or perhaps a rather tedious means of rendering "normal" white existences more interesting and alive (McGuiness 2000: 227).

As a preface to identifying some research themes relating to the white margin, I would like to (re)emphasise that a focus on "black" geography is crucial to South African geographies, but it is not sufficient in itself. A geography of blacks-only poverty or marginalisation, for example, makes local geographers complicit in a more general binary of black poverty/white privilege, as if nothing has happened in South Africa over the past decade — as if there were no significantly

large black middle class; as if there were not an increasingly educated black bourgeoisie; as if white South Africans were just doing/living "business as usual". If human geographers believe, as is reflected in more than two decades of research, that the spatialities of human life are dialectical temporal and located expressions of societal relations, then all race categories in South Africa need to be included in research in order to generate truly post-apartheid geographies. This is so not only in terms of poverty research, but for all human geographic research, since spatialities are relational expressions of multiple variables and if one side of this "equation" is missing, the "relational set" collapses. What follows, then, is an outline of a number of issues that may contribute towards the broadening of post-apartheid urban geographies to make them more inclusive of new and emerging white margins. These themes are first presented in the context of poor or less affluent white urban South Africans and then broadened to more general white geographies, in the hope that they may contribute towards a post-apartheid geography that is more conscious of the relational character of human geography.

Much has been written about the desegregation of inner-city areas such as Johannesburg's Hillbrow neighbourhood and its subsequent resegregation as a neighbourhood almost exclusively for blacks, both local and foreign (cf Morris 1997). In 1986 120 000 white people lived in Hillbrow, but by 1996 only 5% of Johannesburg's total inner-city population was white (Bremner 2000). While there is an enormous Anglo-American literature on the displacement of communities, the theme is, in different terms, equally true for black South Africans (Meth 2001). The question is: where have these White people gone? For example, what has happened to the White households that formerly lived in Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville in Johannesburg? And how do the blacks who have replaced them interpret this process?

For many South Africans their home is the largest investment of their life-time. In these neighbourhoods, as in other South African cities, it has essentially been impossible to sell housing stock as no bank will provide mortgage finance for a buyer. Consequently property prices are low. Only cash transactions are possible, and very few buyers have that type of money to hand. (If they do, it is anyone's

guess how it was raised.) As a result, thousands of white households hold/held on to what is/was effectively negative equity. While such processes have been extensively investigated in Anglo-American terms, not a single South African geographical study has been conducted on the personal and financial devastation this may have caused.

The shattering of local communities and the adverse effects thereof have been extensively discussed in Anglo-American geographical scholarship. Much is made of the right of poor communities in Britain, or America, to community and a place in the city. Why have these arguments not surfaced in the South African context? Why should we privilege the claim of poor black minorities in New York, Los Angeles, London, but not that of the poor white minorities of central Johannesburg, Pretoria or Durban? Moreover, not all home-owners could, or currently can afford to leave their properties to buy or rent new homes in suburban areas. Consequently the poorer segments of the formerly white inner-city communities are "trapped" in these properties. This issue is important not only to white property owners but also to their black counterparts who rent and own similar properties. So we can ask whether these new occupants feel "trapped" and, if so, in what sense?

In addition, an important set of unanswered questions relate to the potential impact of the enormous "white exodus" on white former inner-city residents' sense of place — in post-apartheid cities but also more generally. The fact that these people were inner-city dwellers presupposes at least in some ways a specific interpretation and experience of urban life. That they now "have to", in some sense at least, engage South Africa's massive suburban sprawl as "urban" has not been remarked upon in the geographical literature. In a burgeoning literature on displacement and its impact on the experience of poverty, it is demonstrated that the shattering of local communities significantly disrupts community-driven survival strategies. Considering that these white communities have been scattered across the wide expanse of South African cities in less than 15 years, how do they? It would appear from the current scholarly silence that it is simply supposed that white communities have the resources and/or the social networks to overcome the problems of poverty, dislocation and so

forth. These issues, of course, have deeper resonance in terms of the white elderly, women and people with disabilities.

Volumes have been written on the changing structure of the global economy and its consequences for a myriad of urban communities. In the South African context a similarly expansive literature has been developed by industrial and economic geography. The restructuring of the local economy has been a traumatic experience for the millions who have lost their jobs over the past decade due to the processes of global economic (re)integration. Even larger numbers of young school-leavers have not even had the opportunity to embark on full-time employment. While unemployment is significantly lower among white South Africans than among other groups, not all are highly skilled or educated. They, like their black counterparts, find it ever more difficult to find employment. One factor that needs to be borne in mind in thinking these issues through is the very necessary affirmative action policies currently operating and their impact on the white poor. Over the past decade many white South Africans in this cohort have been retrenched from positions in local, provincial or national government, as well as from corporatised parastatals such as TRANSNET, ISCOR, and so one. Whereas the impact of this process has been felt by all South Africans, the difference is that those who are black stand a better chance of re-employment in state-driven poverty alleviation programmes. Given this situation, the question is: what has happened to these white people; where are they, and what are they doing to survive?

Furthermore, some poor white communities have remained close to the inner-city areas of South African metropolitan regions, in large part as a result of the apartheid space economy and their own financial inability to find accommodation elsewhere. Yet the employment market-place has changed both locationally and structurally. In Johannesburg, for example, most service producers have decentralised to suburban settings such as Sandton, Randburg and Rosebank. Much is rightly made of the limited access which township locations have to a range of urban services and employment opportunities. Yet in what way are locational changes considered for other urban communities? Do the white urban poor of Johannesburg have access to these urban areas? In fact, it is arguably easier to get from a township

such as Alexandra or even Soweto to the Sandton CBD by means of public transport than it is for Fordsburg's poor white communities. In Pretoria it is easier to get from the distant townships to Brooklyn/Hatfield and other decentralised CBDs than from the poor white Danville. Similar trends may be seen across the South African urban hierarchy. Whereas the spatial fixity of poverty in South African cities is well-known, its post-apartheid relevance in terms of these vulnerable white communities has not been investigated.

While these remarks are clearly focused on the white economic margins, some of these concerns might be considered at other levels too. Thus, we could draw on the characteristic marginality of people and communities in poverty research to include economic factors engaging the social, cultural or political. In this way we might bring white South African experiences of post-apartheid society closer to the more "generic" whiteness debates of Anglo-American scholarship. Within the narrower focus of geography some of the issues mentioned below might be raised.

Given the high levels of unemployment in South Africa, crime has been a persistent problem. There is an increasingly sophisticated international literature on the geographies of fear of crime, and this is also an emerging concern in South African scholarship. In many South African cities the fear of crime has led to an explosion of high walls, security systems of ever-increasing sophistication, and so forth. Extremely critical work is developing which traces the fortification of South Africa's neighbourhoods, in particular mainly white residential areas (see for example Hook & Vrdoljak 2002). This literature draws heavily on the imagery of exclusion; the creation of new and separate "life-worlds"; new social and moral, as well as political, enclosure, and the enactment of the rights of self-entitlement, violent self-protection, and self-government — in short those rights for which this elite no longer qualifies merely by being white. Questions left unanswered, however, relate to the notion that buying into these spaces is an exercise in the (re)definition of identity. What are these identities, and are they chosen or imposed by means of individuals' and communities' relationships to specific post-apartheid spatialities? Thus, how is identity (re)written onto the white body, and in turn lived out through urban space? Conversely, how do those white,

black, or other, communities excluded by these actions respond to city space?

In addition we could ask in what way white mobility in post-apartheid cities has been curtailed by the fear of crime. Whereas poorer communities in general, and blacks in particular, experience statistically higher levels of crime, too many questions concerning white fear seems to be discounted as middle-class *angst*. It is well-known and researched that the fear of crime has particular spatialities, but what exactly are these in South African cities and how do they impact upon a range of issues such as retail, industrial, leisure, and other geographies across the urban hierarchy? Following from this, we might ask: what new meanings urban space has developed? In what way is "old Johannesburg", for example, merely a memory with no post-apartheid relevance? An enormous literature has developed around the symbolism of District Six in Cape Town and Sophiatown in Johannesburg, yet those rehearsing memories of white Hillbrow are merely seen as racists harping on about the old (apartheid) days. Are these spaces knowingly or unknowingly replicated elsewhere, or are white South Africans unproblematically doomed to the suburban shopping mall and similar peripheral spaces?

4. Conclusion

These musings have been deliberately provocative and intentionally raise more questions than answers. The general aim of this exploration was to campaign for the reintroduction of white South African geographies as a component of a fuller post-apartheid urban geography. In some ways it also alludes to a starting point critiquing the contemporary practices of South African academic geography. To attain these objectives, the paper contextualised the "disappearance" of white geographies with particular reference to poverty research in South Africa. It then suggested some reasons why South African geographers have failed in recent years to offer any analysis of white communities or of the marginalised among them. The final section argued that if post-apartheid geography aims to be more complete than the previous analysis of (white) South African geographies, it also has to address inadequacies in the representation and interpretation of the post-apartheid urban experiences of white cohorts.

While in the South African context whiteness remains largely un-explored, there are a number of international investigations thinking through its importance in current urban studies. Although South Africa's cities have generally been understood as a "unique" urban form, many theoretical perspectives and urban processes often reserved for consideration in advanced capitalist societies, such as whiteness, may also be of relevance here. In fact, as Parnell (1996) appropriately suggests of urban studies debates, important contributions towards these empirical and theoretical perspectives on whiteness can be made from the South African urban experience, while also providing a basis from which local scholarship can be integrated into international debates on urban issues.

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