

**A SOCIAL HISTORY OF WHITE WORKING CLASS WOMEN IN  
INDUSTRIALIZING PORT ELIZABETH. 1917 - 1936**

**THESIS**

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## ABSTRACT

The study period saw a significant increase in the urbanisation of whites and blacks in Port Elizabeth induced by droughts and coercive legislation, but also by burgeoning industrialisation. Industry had been given great stimulus by World War 1 and maintained by protectionist legislation in the 1920s which the local state and industrialists came to endorse. The ethos of the town was overwhelmingly British in terms of the population, the composition of the local council, business interests and the prevailing culture.

Whites formed the largest component of the population in Port Elizabeth during the inter-war years. The majority of white women lived in the North End, the industrial hub and a major working class area of the city. Although the provision of housing was initially neglected, economic and sub-economic housing in the 1930s helped to create both racial separation and a sense of community between sectors of the working class. Yet, white working class women did not form a homogenous group, but rather consisted of different ethnic groups, occupations and classes. The Afrikaans-speaking sector, formed a significant component of the industrial labour force especially in the leather, food and beverage and clothing industries. In a centre where white labour was favoured and marketed as an advantage to outside investors, they rapidly displaced coloured women. The female workforce was basically young, underpaid (especially in comparison to wages on the Rand) and temporary. While white women were still in evidence in other occupations such as domestic work and in the informal sector, their numbers here steadily diminished as both racial segregation and municipal regulation, were implemented.

Against a background of chaotic social conditions, large slum areas and the spread of infectious diseases, the local council did much to improve health services particularly for women and children. Poor relief instituted in 1919 was, however, less forthcoming and female - headed households were often left to rely on the services of local welfare organisations. The extended family, however, was the norm affording support against atomization. Although pressurised by social ills throughout the period, the family was increasingly buttressed by state assistance. Prevailing morality was likewise actively constructed in terms of legislative repression and racial division. This often led to social aberrations such as infanticide which was only reduced by the increase of state assistance and, in the longer term, social mobility of the whites.

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Patient archivists of various libraries and government archives deserve thanks. These include the assistants of the Cape Archives; the highly supportive Mr. Marius Coetzee of the PE Intermediate Depot; and the tenacious librarians of the UPE Inter-Library Loan department who were often able to locate obscure papers for me. My countless visits to the Africana section of the PE Municipal Library were always rewarded by the fruits of Mrs. Harradine's endless memory and paper-cluttered treasury, while the Port Elizabeth Ladies Benevolent Society admitted me to their offices at any time I requested it.

A special word of appreciation is due to my colleague Kelvin Watson, who both shared with me his research on the Women Police and enlightened me as to the value of careful presentation.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

South Africa	SA
World War 1	WW1
World War 2	WW2
Child Welfare Society	CWS
National Council of Women	NCW
Women's Municipal Association	WMA
Port Elizabeth City Council	PECC
Port Elizabeth Municipality	PEM
Port Elizabeth Jewish Ladies' Association	PEJLA
Port Elizabeth Ladies' Benevolent Society	PEB
Town Clerk	TC
International Council of Women	ICW
Venereal Disease	VD
Cape Archives Depot	CAD
Transvaal Archives Depot	TAD
Central Archives Depot	CeA
South African Historical Journal	SAHJ

## INTRODUCTION

Writers in the pursuit of human consciousness may say, like Virginia Woolf, that:

"...the set design of standard biography is... 'a convenience, a lie' because it does not see, beneath the platform of public action, the half-finished sentences and half-discernable acts on which the real life turns."<sup>1</sup>

Historians, especially in a social history such as the present one, are forced to fashion something approaching a 'multiple biography'. They are faced with the existential task of merely recapturing fragments of past lives with the inadequate tools of historical research, yet searching for total reality and never finding it. The idea of the total truth in art represented by Woolf and Keats, or for that matter of 'the real life', is somewhat removed from the relative truth of history writing. This problem is compounded in researching the lives of working class women of the 1920s and 1930s in Port Elizabeth. The documents reflecting the particular configuration of power relations of the time, reveal much about white, English-speaking, middle-class men and very little about the shadowy lives of working women. Thus, it is extremely difficult to begin to imagine the variety of attitudes with which droves of young girls and women set out, at about 5.30 a.m. every morning, to the factories around the North End Lake to perform monotonous work such as skiving leather uppers all day, or sewing endless yards of seams, dipping innumerable sweets into pots of syrup or attending dangerous machines. When Martha Venter hit her newborn baby's head against a roadside barrier in South End in 1920, the limitation of court documents consigns her thought processes to the past forever. Thus, historical portrayal of the mind is elusive for the historian who is forced to labour largely with fixed written sources.

Groups without status tend to be ignored by dominant contemporary discourses so that the obvious sources reveal very little. White working class women appeared only a handful of times in the newspapers I looked at and never in more than statistical form in the printed Government publications. Thus the research procedure began circuitously, looking at Population and Industrial Employment censuses in Government publications; the National Council of Women's archives which relate indirectly to working class women; the development of health care reflected in the records of the PE City Council's Health Department; finally the needs of female labour in the Department of

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<sup>1</sup> L. Gordon, *Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Life*, (Oxford University Press, 1984), p.115.

Labour reports. The circle shrunk as the individual experiences of women were revealed in archival files on court cases, venereal disease, hawking and midwifery as well as oral interviews of octogenarians. These were especially useful and underline the enormous work to be done in Port Elizabeth in this regard before the oldest living generation is lost to history.

While Belinda Bozzoli and Mmantho Nkotsae have skilfully managed to represent something of women's consciousness in their *Women of Phokeng*, this was facilitated by drawing largely on a collection of contemporary oral sources and very few written sources.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Shula Marks' description of the balance to be struck between material existence and consciousness points in the right direction:

"Structural preconditions do not, of course, explain personal psychology. The delicate chemistry between the individual and his or her social context can never be reduced simply to that social context. At the same time, however, individual psychology is a profoundly historical phenomenon, the product of the multiple determinations which in the final analysis shape the forms and the meanings of experience."<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, this history is an attempt to approach as closely as possible the experiences of white, working class women in Port Elizabeth during the inter-war years. I have attempted to understand their psyche through the use of oral sources, 'reading between the lines' of written sources as well as selecting those which most reveal personal conditions. Nevertheless, it primarily remains a structural analysis which seeks to locate their position in the social fabric of Port Elizabeth.

I have taken the widest definition possible of 'working class' in order to establish the social and economic connections between groups of blue collar workers and between them and those who, for various reasons, drifted out of wage labour. Thus, 'working class' will be defined by particular earning capacities and the subsequent social relations, embracing a number of sub-groups related to each other either by their dependency on wage labour, such as factory work, shop assisting and domestic work; on unstable earnings from informal work, such as seamstressing, hawking and

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<sup>2</sup> B. Bozzoli and M. Nkotsae, *Women of Phokeng. Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> S. Marks, ed., *Not Either an Experimental Doll*, (Killie Campbell Africana Library, Pietermaritzburg, 1987), p. 24.

laundry work; and also by unemployment and poverty. Higher wage earners, such as teachers and nurses, have therefore been excluded from the 'working class' category due to their social distance from the more marginalized groups. Since the majority of women in Port Elizabeth lived in working class areas, this definition provides the largest window into the experience of being a woman in the 1920s and 1930s.

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This thesis will attempt to show how in the first half of this century, white working class women in Port Elizabeth actively struggled to carve a niche for themselves in the economy. Although most were housewives, the city had a higher percentage of women in industry than any other centre underlining the significance of their role in the city. This together with the low wages they invariably received, also indicates the level to which they subsidized industry. This was especially true for the Great Depression of 1929 - 1933, when many of the industries that were able to survive and even expand their operations, were based on women's labour. Industries that were in difficulties also put women (and men) on short time. In this sense, their continued employment could also be said to have stemmed the tide of poverty and alleviated the burden of welfare organisations.

Not that this past was all pioneering heroism: the study period represented the beginning of job protection for white women and men - initiated as early as 1923 by the Smuts government rather than that of the Pact as is conventionally believed. In this way, the status of white factory workers became elevated above the coloured women with whom they worked in the early 1920s. This was consolidated by separate hostelry, increasingly separate residential areas, easier access to health facilities and in the 1930s institutionalized social welfare. Domestic service, though, was an occupation in which all races still participated. For the purposes of this study, domestic service will be structurally located in the formal labour sector in order to demonstrate that it was the last, fast-fading site of integrated employment between black, white and coloured women. This was so despite the ambiguous demands of the state for white women to enter domestic work while calling on employers to entrench the colour bar in industry. Many women relied on informal work such as laundressing, hawking, midwifery and even prostitution, the variety of earning capacities indicating further class differentiation.



Stability in the very British, urban environment required women to absorb the dominant, gendered morality of the ruling classes ie. 'femininity', 'domesticity' and 'respectability'. These were Victorian concepts structured around the role assigned to women in the preservation of the nuclear family which had been created by industrial capitalism. Yet despite the aspirations of many women to achieve these goals, an analysis of family life, health and poverty, clearly shows that it was a time of intense hardship under which many were still struggling even by 1936. Thus, evidence of family solidarity coexists with that of family breakdown and its consequences such as abuse, promiscuity and infanticide. Under- or unemployment, especially in the developing economy of an industrializing coastal city, tended also to encourage prostitution.

The state of flux in which white working women found themselves reflected local conditions. In respect of social welfare, where local and central state contributions were still in their infancy, it was middle-class women's organisations which stepped into the void, displaying an interest in the racial consolidation of gender roles. Initially, it was they who attended to nearly all aspects of, mainly white, working class life, such as housing, health, sickness, employment, safety and morality, relieving the state of the necessity of providing a welfare security net. By the mid 1920s, both the local and central state, spurred on by the threat of racial mixing, did much to elevate the living conditions and, particularly, the health of white women and children.

The study period has been selected as the most appropriate when Port Elizabeth was (predominantly) a white labour centre and when all the social factors discussed above were converging and being hammered into shape in the heat of industrialization and urbanization. It commences towards the end of World War 1 (WW1) and the concomitant onset of industrialization, when increased work opportunities in Port Elizabeth became available for urbanizing white women. The year 1917 also represents a point when women became eligible for municipal election, a position which empowered middle class women and their organisations to make tangible improvements in the lives of working class women. Although not a sign of merging gender consciousness since British class bias was still strongly divisive, it does indicate a new, more political phase in nineteenth century, middle class concern for the disadvantaged. The study period ends before women's unionization occurred in the city, a new phase signalling the end of dependency on men and one that has yet to be fully

researched.<sup>4</sup> It also ends before the outbreak of World War 2 (WW2) when industry's racial profile changed dramatically, with the entry of large numbers of black women and men into the PE economy.

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The broader conceptual framework of this study will essentially be based on two assumptions: the first is that the possibility of work opportunities has always been the main determinant of urbanization, and that therefore the patterns of women's proletarianization were closely tied to the growing industrial character of Port Elizabeth. Thus the work environment will constitute a major part of this thesis revealing local specifics such as the contradictions between the developing demands of an increasingly industrialized, urban society and its many gender-oppressive constraints. However, recognition will be given to the elements of human agency, individual behaviour and ideas, and the post-modernist acceptance of the "messiness of history". Thus, the notion of work as a liberating task will sometimes seem to contradict the structural evidence of exploitation; the patriarchal practices of male employers were not only endured, but often endorsed in the 1920s and 1930s by women themselves who generally valued their own reproductive roles over formal employment and would often leave the latter when it became economically viable to do so; some women also seemed to admire rigid control wielded by men in positions of authority.<sup>5</sup> Similar patterns were evident outside of the workplace. For example, women who ran welfare organisations, although members of the middle class, nevertheless worked doggedly for the labouring poor, often challenging the complacency of certain men in power; birth concealment was not always a reaction to the prospect of enduring poverty but sometimes a symptom of moral deviance, while the theory that abortion was an instance where women took charge of their own bodies is sometimes refuted by frequent evidence of male participation in the crime.

Gender will also be continually related to issues of race and class. Mainly white and increasingly fewer coloured women gained access to the more stable forms of employment such as factory work,

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<sup>4</sup> Janet Cherry has touched on this topic in "The Myth of Working Class Defeat: Port Elizabeth in the Post-War Years", *Kronos*, 20, November 1993, pp. 66 - 91.

<sup>5</sup> see Chapter 2, section 2.3.4.; Interview, Mrs. Hartman.

while black women had to rely mainly on the informal sector or otherwise domestic work, from which white women were able to and often did withdraw. At the same time, a patchwork of residential settlement occurred in Port Elizabeth with an increasingly racial, class and sometimes even gendered bias reinforcing the segregated work situation and a separate consciousness and culture.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, women's roles were transformed during industrialization as regards their relations to capital, state, and changed domestic conditions. But attitudes also changed since the factory floor, especially, often served as the site of the formation of new social ideas about independence, racial contact, collective awareness and personal identity. The connection has been made, for example, between female urbanization and an increased sense of independence. It is asserted that the subsequent threat to white male dominance led to the transference of their insecurity to black males and the creation of 'black peril' scares.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, many women who had formerly been rural, found and, even to a certain extent, negotiated, greater freedom in the new urban, industrial environment.<sup>8</sup> While there is some evidence of racial tension related to sexual contact and the work situation in the study period in Port Elizabeth, white, male patriarchy in these years was fundamentally secure in its control over female independence. This was so in industry, in terms of employers' control over the stratification of labour, control of the unions, as well as their substantial influence on the local council. But it was also endorsed by government, by the creation of an unfree and protected labour environment, and a society where extra-marital sexual contact between white women and black and coloured men had been prohibited since 1902. Moreover, in the public sphere Victorian morality and female dependency were reinforced by the guardians of middle class morality, such as the press, welfare bodies and the church.

The second assumption is that working class women do not merely represent a sub-group in society - a 'splintering' of class - but provide evidence of the links between race, class and gender and a functional link between the economic structure of a society and its human relations. Although a large

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<sup>6</sup> J. Robinson, "(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History," *SAHJ*, 30, May 1994, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hyslop, 'The Representation of White Working Class Women in the Construction of a Reactionary Populist Movement: 'Purified' Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against 'Mixed' Marriages, 1934 - 1939', African Studies Institute, University of Witwatersrand, African Studies Seminar Paper, 24 May 1993.

<sup>8</sup> E.S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, (MacGibbon and Kee, 1957).

section of this thesis deals with work, it is not intended to be a labour history. Women's class experience is not only tied to work. This thesis will also attempt to demonstrate the different language groups and ethnic divisions among working class white women, their linkages with women of other races and with white middle class women, as well as their relationship with those who had power: male family members and men in central government, the local state and local business. It is an analysis of how all the other major aspects of white women's lives, such as the home, the community, health and morality, complement work in shaping a gendered and racial class experience.

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The establishment of these conceptual principles owes everything to a necessarily selective reading of the prodigious body of gender literature. Feminist history writing was introduced by the application of revisionist theory to SA historiography. The exploitation of women as an underclass was also traced to capitalism (as defined within the racial context of SA) and led to a proliferation of works which attempted to locate the links between gender (usually used synonymously with women), race and class. The focus fell largely therefore on black women. However, during the 1980s, the valuable research carried out often had a tendency to isolate women as a sub-group in history. As far back as 1980, Cock pointed out that the large omissions of women from history made female history writing very susceptible to overcorrecting.<sup>9</sup> More explicitly, Perrot noted that to talk solely along the lines of either women's oppression or their achievements, creates the danger of reifying the gender split which was inherent in male orientated writing.<sup>10</sup>

The early 'structuralist' works usually allocated all power and blame to capitalists and the state with the implication of the passivity of women. In a seminal article in 1983, however, Bozzoli stressed the role of human agency operating within and sometimes against material change. Bozzoli's assertion that the binary opposites of 'struggle' vs 'control' were determining factors in family life as well as between the domestic site and the general economy is persuasive as an integrating theory

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<sup>9</sup> J. Cock, 'Black and White Women: A Socio-Historical Study of Domestic Workers and Their Employees in the Eastern Cape', PhD, Rhodes University, 1980, p. 280.

<sup>10</sup> M. Perrot, (ed.), *Writing Women's History*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992), p. 7.

of the many aspects of women's lives.<sup>11</sup> 'Struggle' by women occurred at various times against local government, living conditions, work and income, health and power relations within marriage. But Bozzoli's concept of 'struggle' has been countered by the idea that often in times of economic hardship, solidarity existed within the household. Thus 'solidarity' vs 'brutality', concepts which would not polarize gender but rather provide a holistic analysis of families, may be more pertinent for understanding the lives of working class women.

Yet, as Robinson has pointed out, theories are dangerously dichotomising and further warns that we in SA are particularly susceptible to seeing everything in terms of oppression and struggle. Thus, if taken as a general occurrence, 'struggle' suggests a one-dimensional view. We need to realise the effects of our position in society and shed "implicit claims to truth." Robinson refers to Mann's reminder of the "messiness of history" and talks of the "subterranean processes" which give form and location in society to gender and the related need to seek the

"research frontiers of language, texts, discourses, institutions and fragmented and decentred subjects, all of which cross-cut these divisions drawn by social historians and which might enable us to research these complex histories in more creative ways,  
..."<sup>12</sup>

Others works, such as the present one, tend to focus on the domestic nature of women's home obligations and fields of employment, such as the clothing industry. Although Manicom is in favour of less 'women-specific' topics such as women and state formation, in order to locate gender more centrally in historiography, it does allow historians to unravel the linkages or divisions between communities, between the job market and family, between men and women, between employment and poverty as well as between different perceptions of morality<sup>13</sup>. As Berger says:

"Uniting the public and private spheres, the household and the economy, formal and casual labor the topic lends itself to transcending the dualities of many theoretical works. ...it also illuminates the diversity of working class experience and its complex

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<sup>11</sup> B. Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, no.2 (April 1983), pp. 139-71.

<sup>12</sup> J. Robinson, "(Dis)locating Historical Narrative", p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> L. Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", *Journal of African History*, 33, 1992, pp. 441-465.

relationship to changing constructions of race, gender, and class."<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, these issues must be explored in order to understand the political economy which made up the world in which these women lived. Thus, in the 1990s, theoretical focus has tended to widen. As Bradford has shown, the gender split, like class, is an important tool of analysis, often crucial to an understanding of the past. While many works in the past have been androcentric - collapsing gender into class so that women become invisible - they are being reworked, taking women's roles into account. The social centrality of women is becoming clear: in their conspicuousness in the process of urbanisation, their usage as a cheap labour force, their reproductive roles, in the formulation of local administration or business patterns and even negatively in their absence in certain areas such as the franchise until 1931.<sup>15</sup> In other words, "all social processes are gendered." Hence, Manicom's warning of the dangers of 'ghettoization' and that the focus should be increased to include women's role in state formation, war, colonialism, nationalist politics, urban class formation, mine labour, since

"...the very fundamental categories of state and politics - like citizen, worker, the modern state itself - are shot through with gender; they were in fact historically constructed and reproduced as masculine categories, predicated on the subordination of women."<sup>16</sup>

By way of example, new sub-histories have come to light in the writing of this history, such as the development of Port Elizabeth's urban infrastructure especially as influenced by poverty and maternal and child health, factory work, the sub-culture of women's self-employment, the women police and social welfare work. Thus, this thesis is not only a gendered history, but in scanning the urban landscape with the wide-angle lens of a general social history, becomes an urban history too. It is, in short, a gendered, urban, social history.

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<sup>14</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity Women in South African Industry, 1900-1980*, (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1992), p.15.

<sup>15</sup> H. Bradford, "Women in the Cape and its Frontier Zones, c. 1800 - 1870: A Critical Essay on Androcentric Historiography", Rhodes, Historical Society Conference, June 1995.

<sup>16</sup> L. Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", *Journal of African History*, 33, 1992, pp. 443, 444.

In the last ten years, an increasing number of works have covered the first two decades of the twentieth century of Port Elizabeth's history but have mainly centred on the economy, black politics, black relocation, the politics of local state and poor whites.<sup>17</sup> The only gendered histories that have been written are an Honours thesis by P. Gibbs 'Morality and Prostitution, 1802 - 1902', and Andre Appel's paper, 'Trying to Make Them Visible: Women in Port Elizabeth Before c1914'. While these two works have a broad multi-racial perspective, the former is confined to the linkage between prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 19th century while the latter is an introductory overview.<sup>18</sup> Recently, international gender historiography has tended to focus on the activities of

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<sup>17</sup> G. Adler, 'From the "Liverpool of the Cape" to the "Detroit of South Africa": the Automobile Industry and Industrial Development in the Port Elizabeth - Uitenhage Region', Conference on Port Elizabeth's Place in the History and Historiography of South Africa, Vista University, Port Elizabeth, 24 - 25 September 1992; A. Appel, "Exploring Some Aspects of Labour and Labourers in Port Elizabeth, 1870 - 1914", *South African Journal of Economic History*, vol.6, 2, September 1991, pp.1- 17; A.J. Christopher, "Formal Segregation and Population Distribution in Port Elizabeth", *Contree*, 24, 1988; J. Robinson, "The Politics of Urban Form: Differential Citizenship and Township Formation in Port Elizabeth 1925-1945", Conference on Port Elizabeth's Place in the History and Historiography of South Africa, Vista University, Port Elizabeth, 24 - 25 September 1992; H. Schauder, "An Economic History of the Boot and Shoe Industry in South Africa", *South African Journal of Economics*, 3, 4, 1935, pp. 502-547; H. Schauder, 'Aspects of the History of the Jewish Community in PE', 7 March 1984; R. Trehaven, "A Note on the "Spanish Flu" of 1918 in Port Elizabeth", *Looking Back*, vol. 27, 2, September 1988; R. Trehaven, "More Memories of the "Spanish Flu" Epidemic", *Looking Back*, vol. 28, 1, March 1989; H.O. Terblanche, H.O., "Louisa Meyburgh: Heldin van die Stad", *Historia*, vol.24, 2, pp. 12 - 20, September 1979; vol.25, 1, May 1980, pp.2 -13; H.O. Terblanche, "Port Elizabeth - 'N Lojale Britse Stad, 1902 - 1937," *Historia*, vol. 38 (2), November, 1992; Theses include: G. Baines, 'The Disturbances of October 1920', (MA, Rhodes University, 1988); G. Baines, 'New Brighton, P.E. - 1903-1953: A History of an Urban African Community', PHD., UCT., 1994; J. Cherry, 'The Making of An African Working Class: Port Elizabeth 1925-1963', (MA, UCT, 1992); J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape and Centre of Resistance, A Social and Economic History of Korsten, 1931-1962", (B.A. Hons. Thesis, UCT, 1988); J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality and State Power in S. African Cities -- P.Elizabeth 1923-1972', (Ph.D., Cambridge University, 1990); H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth, 1902-1937: 'N Kultuurhistoriese Ondersoek", (PhD, UPE, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> P. Gibbs, 'Morality and Prostitution in Port Elizabeth, 1802 - 1902', BA. Hist. Hons., Unisa, 1990; A. Appel, 'Trying to Make Them Visible: Women in Port

pre-colonial black or white colonial women, while there is a lacuna in SA historiography as regards the history of women other than black. Hence, there is a need for research in the social history of coloured, Chinese, Indian and white women, particularly in the industrial 20th century. While the danger of ghettoization is problematic, racial topics are surely justified by the racialising environment of the past, especially if adequate contextualization is provided. As far as this thesis is concerned, a multi-racial focus was initially adopted which would have optimally explored the interaction between all working class women. However, it was aborted because it was felt that an MA thesis was not the vehicle for such an enormous task.

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## **PART 1. STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS**

### **Chapter 1 - THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PORT ELIZABETH, 1917 - 1936**

#### **1.1. DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF PORT ELIZABETH**

The role that women played in the early development of Port Elizabeth must be contextualized within the twin processes of industrialization and urbanisation, as well as the policies of local and central government. While economic, ecological and legislative factors during the first three decades of the 20th century intensified the 'push' of people off the land in and around the Eastern Cape, developing industrialisation in Port Elizabeth attracted and selectively absorbed them. The structure, needs and development of this industrialization were largely directed by the politics of both the local and central state, a complex aggregate of commercial and industrial capitalism, and informed by the ideology of white supremacy modified by British Cape liberalism; as well as regional, social and demographic factors.

As Colin Bundy has shown, 'poor whites' in the Eastern Cape, particularly in the Midlands and Eastern districts had been consistently pushed off the land not only since the 1890s as once thought, but throughout the 19th century by both drought and the invasion of large-scale sheep farming.<sup>1</sup> While many first attempted to find work in the dorps, they were often excluded by competition with blacks already established there in lower echelon jobs, and so ended up in the towns. This urbanisation often involved the whole family. By 1875 in Port Elizabeth, there were already three times more whites than blacks. But it was the years between 1891 and 1904 that saw the first significant wave of white urbanisation to Port Elizabeth of approximately 3 000 every year, the majority of which were Afrikaans families.<sup>2</sup> Bringing few or no skills with them, these families were, in the 20th century, to rely increasingly on their more employable daughters who were seen

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<sup>1</sup> C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen", in W. Beinart, *et al.*, (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground. Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930*, (Ravan Press, 1986), p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> Cape of Good Hope Parliamentary Papers, G.42 - 1876, G.6 - 1892, G.19 - 1905; the annual increase of the white population between 1875 and 1891 was only 285 as compared with 3 000 per year between 1891 and 1904.

by industry as a hardworking, exploitable and even marketable labour force. Between 1904 and 1911, there was a real decrease in the white population, possibly reflecting the decline in commercial activity in Port Elizabeth after the SA War. A steady growth resumed between 1911 and 1921 after the decline of the ostrich feather price in 1913, when many farmers in the Oudtshoorn district who were financially ruined eventually ended up in PE.<sup>3</sup> Also in that year, the railway between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth was completed when George and Oudtshoorn were connected by rail, facilitating Port Elizabeth's absorption of a great number of 'poor whites'. Thus, many originally came from districts along the railway such as Worcester, Mossel Bay and Klipplaat.<sup>4</sup> Another huge jump in the white population (of 30%) occurred between 1921 and 1936, mainly due to drought in 1926 and 1929 in the Jansenville, Steytlerville, Graaff Reinet, Pearston and Aberdeen districts. Numerical preponderance of whites was thus ensured during the whole of the study period: in 1936 they still formed as much as 47% of the total population (see Table 1.1).<sup>5</sup> Thus the period had a markedly different racial character from much of the rest of the century.

While Blacks conducted a more resilient method of family farming, they nevertheless experienced the same pressure on the land. For example, between 1891 to 1904 their numbers tripled in Port Elizabeth, probably as a response to opportunities offered by the SA War.

However, they also had to contend with the harsher onslaught of racially devised economic and legislative coercion, designed by administrations to aid and abet certain capitalist interests. This included the commercialization of agriculture which involved governmental assistance to white farmers only, railway lines circumventing black production areas, the rapid implementation of the Cape Location Acts of the 1890s, and later the notorious Native Land Act of 1913, which laid the

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<sup>3</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth, 1902-1937: 'N Kultuurhistoriese Ondersoek', (PhD, University of PE, 1993), pp. 17 - 18.

<sup>4</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus. The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, (Pro-Ecclesia Drukkery, Stellenbosch, 1932), p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> Union of SA, Census, UG 21-'38, 1921, 1936; J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, pp. 186-7.

groundwork for drastic curbs to their access to arable rural land.<sup>6</sup>

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Population of Port Elizabeth, 1891 - 1936<sup>7</sup>**

Year	White		Coloured		Black		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1891	7340	6445	3109	3773	2108	1621	12557	11839
1904	12748	10027	5792	4918	6489	3261	25029	18206
1911	9897	9886	6489	6331	4533	3525	20919	19742
1918	11112	12227	no 'non-white' statistics available					
1921	13029	13274	6385	6818	6415	5057	25829	25149
1926	16695	16676	no 'non-white' statistics available					
1936	26439	26968	12333	13298	14647	13643	53473	53909

By 1926, blacks constituted 20% of the PE urban population which, according to Taylor "appears to be higher than national estimates" because of the accumulated effects of nineteenth century events like the Cattle Killing and Frontier Wars, occurring long before the Land Act.<sup>8</sup> All of this promoted both urbanisation and some migratory labour (partly to Port Elizabeth, but mainly to East

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<sup>6</sup> The Location Acts limited the number of blacks a farmer could profitably keep on his land (C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 136-7.)

<sup>7</sup> Union of SA, UG32 - 1912, Report of the 1911 Census; UG40 - 1924, Report of the 1921 Census; UG21 - 1938, Report of the 1936 Census. The table does not contain a comprehensive analysis since statistics for Asians sometimes have been omitted. This is because they were not always given in the documents, let alone with a further distinction between Chinese and Indian within this category.

<sup>8</sup> B. Taylor, 'The Role of Urban Removals in Port Elizabeth's Development', Conference on 'Port Elizabeth's Place in South African History and historiography', Vista University, Port Elizabeth, 24 and 25 September 1992, p.2.

London), from the Kingwilliamstown district, Middledrift, Peddie and the Transkei.<sup>9</sup> Most of the available work in Port Elizabeth for black men was of a permanent nature, for example, in the Municipality, stores, the railways, (but a migrant male population had been working on the harbour since the mid-1800's). An absence of influx control until the 1950's permitted the virtually unhindered passage of black urbanisation, while the 'location strategy' - strict control of both access to Port Elizabeth's townships and the regulation of lives within them - was only effective for a relatively small percentage of the black population.<sup>10</sup>

Coloureds consisted largely of Khoi and Malay slave descendants, who were already largely urbanised by the turn of the century. After the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the drift to Cape towns, those who brought with them artisanal skills learnt in farm employment managed to occupy skilled or semi-skilled jobs. But for many, racial discrimination and especially in the case of the Khoi, an apathy to continuous labour, ensured they filled the ranks of the under and unemployed, and the poor.<sup>11</sup> Coloureds, like blacks, showed their first sizeable increase in numbers after the SA War. Between 1904 and 1911 this sector grew by 35%, and this suggests widespread migration from the countryside. Their greatest increase of 72% however, was between 1921 and 1936, possibly due to it being the height of the industrial period. As with whites, the figures show a steady correlation during the entire study period between male and female figures indicating a common urbanisation experience and also the relative stability of the Coloured family in Port Elizabeth. Thus, at the beginning of the study period, coloureds were the second largest group, a position superseded in 1936 by blacks who had displayed the fastest growth rate (165%) of the three main racial groups.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cape Archives (CAD), Port Elizabeth's Town Clerk's Files, 3/PEZ, 1/3/2/15/5, Superintendent's Report, 6 August 1931.

<sup>10</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality a State Power in South African Cities - Port Elizabeth 1923- 1972', (PhD., Cambridge University, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, (University Press, Johannesburg, 1962) pp. 257.

<sup>12</sup> In 1936, 54% of the adult population was absent from the reserves according to the census, as pointed out by C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, p.225.

Chinese immigrants formed an extremely small minority and, as late as 1936, only numbered 705 people, of which 419 were males and 286 females.<sup>13</sup> Initially, only single males tended to immigrate and take colonial wives, leading to the gender imbalance. Evatt Street became Port Elizabeth's 'Malaikim' or 'Chinatown', a cosmopolitan enclave where people of all races lived and traded. Here the Chinese ran mainly grocery stores and laundries, although many also remained unemployed.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in 1921, Indians numbered only 1 208 of which 792 were male and 416 were female.<sup>15</sup> They were hawkers of fruit, vegetables and flowers, who lived mainly in the North and South End.

Generally, the population more than doubled between 1926 and 1936 although a large proportion of this increase was caused by the incorporation of Korsten into the PE municipal boundaries. The role of urbanisation in these demographics is highlighted by Cherry's statement:

"PE has consistently had one of the highest population growth rates in the country: a growth rate not based on a high birth rate, but on immigration from surrounding rural areas.....in certain periods, for example the 1930's, PE had the highest urbanisation rate in the country."<sup>16</sup>

A cause of these growth rates, and one which developed independently of the changes in the surrounding countryside, was the pull exerted by the growth of job opportunities in Port Elizabeth's developing economy, especially after World War 1.

Prior to industrialization, Port Elizabeth's harbour, the rationale for the town's growth, had spearheaded economic development throughout most of the 19th century. Indeed until WW1, Port Elizabeth functioned essentially as an entrepôt of commerce trading in angora hair, hides and ostrich

<sup>13</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 was enforced for 29 years banning Chinese immigration to the Cape, M. Yap and D. Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions. The History of the Chinese in South Africa*, (Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1996), pp.69, 217.

<sup>14</sup> M. Yap and D. Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*, p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> Union Government, UG 40 - 1924, Census, 1921.

<sup>16</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of An African Working Class: Port Elizabeth 1925-1963', (M.A., University of Cape Town, 1992), p.8.

feathers. By the late 1850s, its transit trade surpassed even that of Cape Town's, receiving further stimulus in the 1860s from the establishment of overseas banking concerns and the opening of the Kimberley diamond fields. Much of this commerce was financed by British capital. Gold, discovered on the Rand in 1886, was a mixed blessing for Port Elizabeth, in that it at first increased the through trade but later diverted local capital northwards. In fact, as Johannesburg burgeoned, it drew into its economic sphere of influence, Port Elizabeth rather than Cape Town, which had used its superior political clout to improve harbour and rail facilities. Thus by the late 1800s Cape Town had superseded Port Elizabeth as an entrepôt, causing a decline in the latter's commercial and industrial development. Without the support of national capital for specialisation or diversification, only mixed primary production continued to characterize Port Elizabeth's industry before World War 1. These included tanneries, wool washing, soap, candles, matches, cigarettes and leather goods. Some confectionary and food and beverage factories had also been established.<sup>17</sup>

The SA War (1899-1902) gave a new boost to the volume in port traffic, related services and industry. At the same time, the devastation wrought by the war accelerated rural dispossession and the trek to the towns so that between 1891 and 1904, there was an overall increase in the city's population of 83%.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, the city's economy improved, particularly as regards the manufacture of boots, shoes, confectionary, soap and sugar, all of which was boosted in 1906 by colonial tariff protection. Unification brought a further improvement to the local economy by the elimination of inter-colonial rivalry but by the outbreak of WW1, manufacturing was still relatively undeveloped.<sup>19</sup> It was with the onset of World War 1, however, that local manufactures increased greatly in number, output and employment. The leather and leatherware, the food and beverage and the clothing industries, especially, had a significant impact on employment patterns. Was this the onset of Port Elizabeth's industrialization? While it is generally accepted that national industrialisation began with the mineral revolution in the late 19th century, and that national secondary manufacturing took off during World War 1, further stimulated by the erection of tariff

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<sup>17</sup> G. Adler, "From the 'Liverpool of the Cape' to 'The Detroit of South Africa': The Automobile Industry and Industrial Development in the Port Elizabeth - Uitenhage Region", *Kronos*, 20, November 1993, pp. 17 - 43.

<sup>18</sup> Cape of Good Hope Census, 1904, G.-1905.

<sup>19</sup> G. Baines, 'The Port Elizabeth Disturbances of October 1920', (M.A., Rhodes University, 1988), p.16.

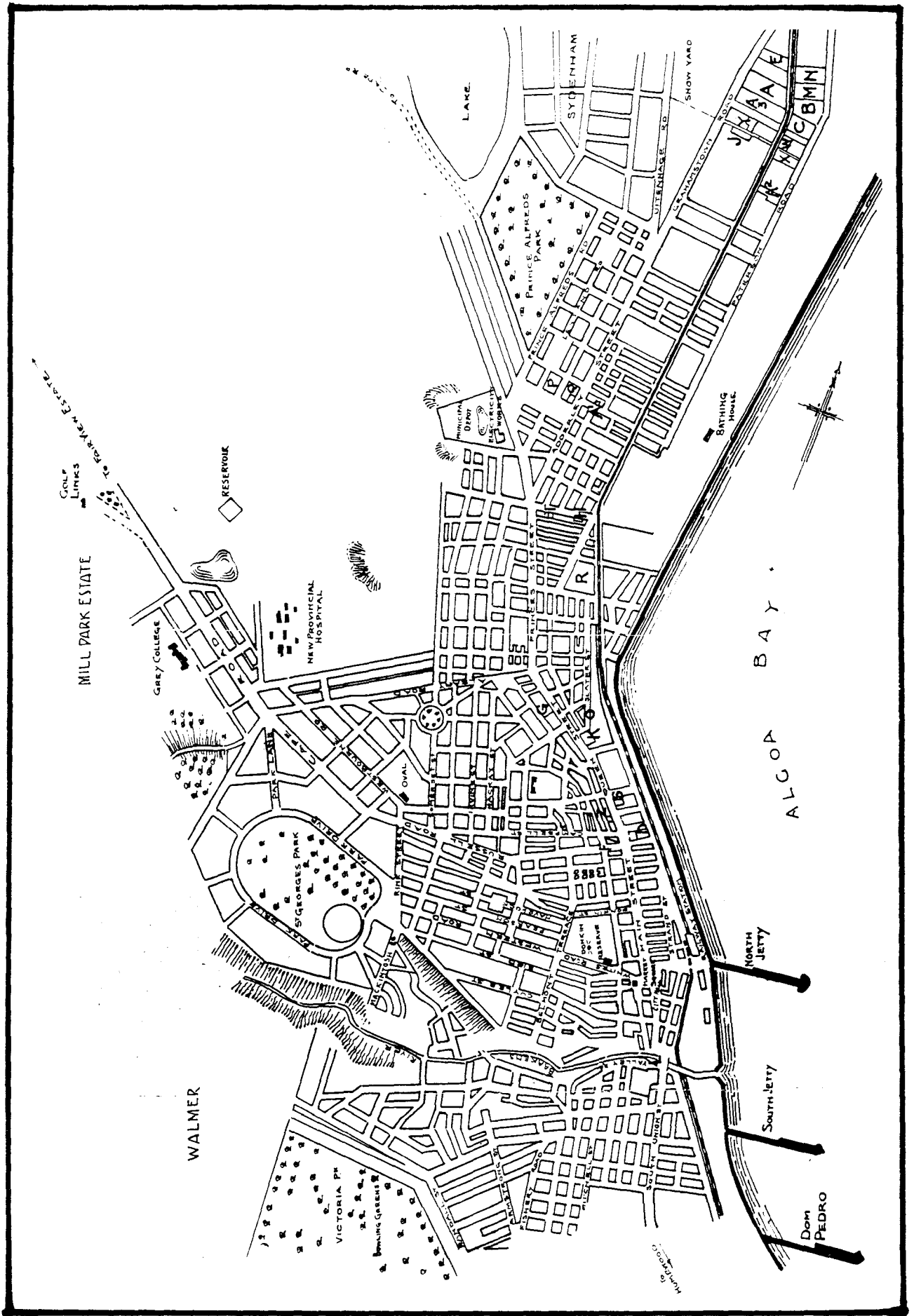


Figure 1.1. PLAN OF PORT ELIZABETH SHOWING PROPOSED FACTORY SITES ('The Industrial Facilities and Advantages of Port Elizabeth and District, 1917')

barriers in 1924, regionally specific explanations must be sought.<sup>20</sup> However, there is little agreement among historians as to whether the war boom also started Port Elizabeth's industrialization or whether it was negated by the ensuing economic slump when overseas products flooded SA's post war market.<sup>21</sup> In delineating three main periods of industrial growth in the PEU area, Cherry refers to the late 1920's as signifying the initial phase of industrialization.<sup>22</sup> She bases this assertion on the establishment of the motor car industry in Port Elizabeth in 1924, and the erection of tariffs in 1925 which, in turn, encouraged motor car component and related industries with a concomitant expansion in population and secondary industry generally.<sup>23</sup> However, since many of the industries which were to play a major role in Port Elizabeth's economy - and more notably for this study, particularly those employing women - emerged during the war, this study will accept that Port Elizabeth started its industrial development in the latter years of World war 1, post-dating that of the Rand; that it was based on manufacturing not minerals and received successive boosts, both from state protectionist policies, and the establishment of the motor car plants. Finally, the devaluation of the SA pound in 1933, was to lift Port Elizabeth (and SA) out of the Depression and to sustain growth well beyond the end of the study period.

After World War 1, an economic recession, followed by another drought intensified the flow of both black and white persons to the towns. Port Elizabeth, in fact, became overburdened as the 'drainage point' of the 'poor white' population of the Cape Midlands.<sup>24</sup> Growing social problems

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<sup>20</sup> J. Mawbey, 'Afrikaner Women of the Garment Union during the Thirties and Forties', and P. Bonner, "The Decline and Fall of the I.C.U.- A Case of Self-Destruction?" in E. Webster (ed.), *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, (Johannesburg, 1978), p. 123; pp. 192-3.

<sup>21</sup> A. Appel, "Exploring Some Aspects of Labour and Labourers in Port Elizabeth, 1870-1914", *South African Journal of Economic History*, vol. 6 (2), September 1991, pp.1-17; G. Baines, 'The Port Elizabeth Disturbances of October 1920', pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of an African Working Class', p.24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12. According to Cherry, the greatest leap in industrial growth in Port Elizabeth occurred just before WW2 lasting until 1948/9.

<sup>24</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", in A. Mabin, (ed.), *Organisation and Economic Change. Southern African Studies*, vol.5, (Johannesburg, 1989), p.85.



in terms of housing, poverty disease and morality intensified, so that the records of these years are punctuated with calls for poor relief, better sanitation and more housing. These trends were repeated in the Depression of 1929 - 1933 when public works programmes were instituted. In the meantime, the temporary protectionism afforded industry by wartime conditions had evaporated and thus, amidst growing debate, both commercial interests (who had initially opposed it) and local industrialists called for state protection. Finally, in 1925 the Customs and Tariff Excise Amendment Act boosted industry anew at both national and local levels. Berger's description of national developments is particularly appropriate to Port Elizabeth:

"Clothing manufacturing increased, greater quantities of textiles, boots and shoes were produced locally; and the processing and packing of foodstuffs accelerated...."<sup>25</sup>

Also in the mid-1920s motor vehicle assembly plants established by Ford and General Motors propelled Port Elizabeth forward in terms of its position in the national economy and its quota of white employment. Cherry maintains that between 1925/26 and 1935/6 Port Elizabeth showed the greatest percentage increase in industrial output of all the major industrial areas. Between 1921 and 1936, the development of manufacturing caused industrial employment to triple, with textiles and footwear, the biggest employers of women, growing from 34% to 43% of all industrial employment.<sup>26</sup> The Sundays River Valley also made Port Elizabeth the chief citrus centre of the Union, employing many women in packing and canning of the fruit. Yet these industrial trends bypassed black women. Cherry points out that there was little correlation between urbanisation and employment opportunities for blacks as the doors to formal employment for them were decidedly closed.<sup>27</sup>

From the late 1920s, increased mechanization changed the face of labour. The simple dichotomy of skilled and unskilled work gave way to 'deskilling', whereby large numbers of, mainly white, semi-skilled operatives replaced artisans. This made way for larger numbers of white women to enter industry, a trend endorsed by the 'civilised labour' policy of the Pact government after 1924.

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<sup>25</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity. Women in South African Industry, 1900-1980*, (Indiannapolis, 1992), p.48.

<sup>26</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of an African Working Class', p.15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

It was the constant availability of this European labour force that was utilised by both commerce, industry and the local state in an intensive publicity project from the mid 1920s to the late 1930s, to attract both national and international capital. This has been termed 'place entrepreneurialism' by Robinson while Nel, who has called it incipient Local Economic Development (LED), places it historically between the two World Wars.<sup>28</sup> Industries employing women were usually comprised of nearly all white labour and pointedly marketed this in their advertisements.<sup>29</sup> Employers were also able to pay lower wages than on the Rand, conveniently putting it down to the low cost of living.<sup>30</sup>

When the Depression of 1929-33 hit, the working class was severely affected. Many factories closed down. However, others such as the textile and leather companies which already employed cheaper female labour were able to continue and even expand, while others which could replace their male with female labour obviously did so in order to remain in production. Thus, as soaring employment figures show, it was female factory hands who, as when they first came to Port Elizabeth, provided a substantial life-line for their men. Blacks and coloureds suffered severely not only in terms of loss of jobs but also lack of governmental aid. The Depression years saw many black males return to the rural areas. After the Depression white employment continued to soar, boosted even further by the Fusion government's stated 'whites first' policy.<sup>31</sup>

At the closure of the study period, the Korsten removals, which allowed the subsequent release of more land to industry, and new surges in the growth of national and local manufacturing, further stimulated by the onset of war, both helped to facilitate local economic development.

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<sup>28</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid', p. 177. Nel points out that such development fell under the domain of the central state, E. Nel and C.M. Rogerson, "Incipient Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape, 1904 - 1947", *Contree*, no. 37, June 1995, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> see Illustration 2.4.; *EPH*, 19 May 1933.

<sup>30</sup> PE Municipality, 'PE, City of Industrial and Commercial Opportunity', 22, South African Pamphlets, vol. 80, p.50; There was, however, distinct resistance to any Wage Board determinations, which threatened this status quo.

<sup>31</sup> Union of SA, Office of Census and Statistics, Pretoria, Statistics of Production, State of Factories and Productive Industries (excluding Mining and Quarrying) in the Union, 1928-1936.

## 1.2. THE PROLETARIANIZATION OF WOMEN IN PORT ELIZABETH

The overall demographic patterns of the period were closely paralleled by those of women. The first most striking growth period for women of all races had occurred, as it did with men, between 1891 and 1904. The second significant growth occurred between 1921 and 1936. White women were numerically preponderant during the study period in Port Elizabeth, followed by coloured and then black women, and in 1926 exceeded the national average of 25%. Other patterns similar to overall trends were that, from as early as 1911, black women showed the fastest growth rate of all groups (see Table 1.1.).

The influx at the turn of the century concurs with Mawbey's picture of white female proletarianization as having generally begun after the devastation of the SA War.<sup>32</sup> In Port Elizabeth, there was a 56% increase in the number of white women, higher than the 44% for the rest of the Cape.<sup>33</sup> While this undoubtedly reflected substantial overseas immigration, it also denoted the fact that Port Elizabeth provided job opportunities in the midst of 'poor white' territory. By 1911, numerical parity, which was to characterize the whole period, was established between males and females denoting a permanent, stable population.

In the PEM, the suburbs and Korsten, the majority of white women were in the prime, work-seeking age group of 21 - 29 years, as were the majority of white female industrial workers. This possibly reflects the link between urbanisation and burgeoning employment opportunities that came with industrialisation. Nearly all of the work-seeking influx to Port Elizabeth from the countryside was Afrikaans - speaking, coming partly from Oudtshoorn but largely from the Midland districts of Cradock, Graaff Reinet as well as the Eastern Cape.<sup>34</sup> However, they entered a distinctly English urban ethos. 69% of all white women in Port Elizabeth were English speaking in 1918, 4% 'Dutch' and 27% bilingual. The vast majority of women belonged to Anglican,

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<sup>32</sup> J. Mawbey, "Afrikaner Women of the Garment Union During the Thirties and Forties", p. 192.

<sup>33</sup> This is without calculating the statistics for births and deaths.

<sup>34</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, Minutes of Evidence, PE, pp. 2103-4.

Presbyterian, Roman Catholic or Methodist churches.<sup>35</sup> Since 16% of all men and women belonged to the Afrikaans churches, Terblanche is probably correct in asserting that about 20% of whites in the magisterial district in 1918 were actually Afrikaans speaking.<sup>36</sup> This component had nearly doubled by 1936 (see Table 1.2.). The constant gender parity throughout the study period indicates that in 1918, Afrikaans women must also have comprised about 20% of the white female population. With the growth of the economy, PE North alone in 1931 housed 10% of this sector.<sup>37</sup>

**TABLE 1.2**  
**Percentage of Afrikaans Speakers Among the White Population** <sup>38</sup>

Year	Total White Pop.	Afrikaans speakers	Percentage
1904	23 892	1 200	5,0%
1911	20 755	1 900	9,2%
1918	24 445	4 900	20,0%
1921	27 236	6 100	22,4%
1926	34 994	9 600	27,4%
1931	46 916	13 500	28,8%
1936	56 265	20 500	36,4%

The usually young daughters of 'poor white' immigrants, who secured greater earning power in the towns than on the farms, were largely responsible for the income of their bywoner families, who

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<sup>35</sup> Union of SA, UG 19-'20, Census 1918, Detailed statement of religions in principal urban areas, pp. 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Union of SA, Votes and Proceedings of the House of Assembly, vol.3, 1920, UG.1 - 1920, Table X1, p.62; UG. 19 - 1920, Table V, p.10; H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> Union of SA, Province of the Cape of Good Hope, Voters' List, Electoral Division, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>38</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p. 83.

were either completely pushed off the land into the dorps and cities by capitalist farming or maintained a tenuous grip on farming perhaps as share croppers. Thus, Afrikaner white women experienced either full or partial proletarianization.<sup>39</sup>

In Port Elizabeth the former status usually prevailed, since in 1931 only 23% of the North End white female voters worked, while the rest were listed as housewives.<sup>40</sup> This indicates the presence of unemployable mothers or older women and therefore whole families supported by working daughters. Those who maintained rural family ties to which they frequently returned had their counterparts amongst the male workforce employed by the large motor companies such as General Motors. Like the women, many unskilled or semi-skilled white men seasonally left the PE hinterland for employment but returned to the rural areas during harvest time.<sup>41</sup>

These parents whose earning power was generally very low would put daughters to work in urban factories. Their lower educational and poor skill level made this reliance inevitable since the only type of work the fathers (and husbands) managed to get, was in the government-owned railways and this with the help of the 'civilised labour' policy enacted by the legislation of 1924.<sup>42</sup> Mr. W.D. Foster, an Attendance Officer of the local school board, told the Unemployment Commission that poor white parents believed that the children could earn between 15/- to 20/- per week, but in the

<sup>39</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.50; Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", p.85; W.A. Murray, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part IV*, (Stellenbosch, Pro - Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), vol.iv, pp. xxiii-xxiv; in her study of poor white females on the Rand, Hansi Pollak found that 1/4 of the women in industry had left families in the rural areas (E. Brink, " 'Maar 'n klomp "factory meide': Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s", in Belinda Bozzoli, (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987) p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> Union of SA, Voters List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>41</sup> G. Adler, 'From the Liverpool of the Cape to the Detroit of South Africa: The Automobile Industry and Industrial Development in the Port Elizabeth -Uitenhage Region', *Kronos*, 22, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. The Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V*, (Stellenbosch, Pro-Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), pp. xxii - xxiii; Interviews: van Soelen, Rose Innes; Union of SA, Voters List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

biscuit factories only five shillings per week packing. However, he also offered the opinion that poor whites were drawn to town for the aid offered by benevolent societies.<sup>43</sup> The additional magistrate reported to the same commission that these parents generally seemed anxious to work and, in many cases, hoped to get into the factories themselves.<sup>44</sup> Brink also maintains that the attractions of a cash economy meant that previously self-produced goods could be bought in stores, and that dowries, around which Afrikaner marriages were organised, made daughters more marriageable. For those urbanized during the post-war recession, moreover, a drop in male wages, also caused families to pressurise their daughters into wage labour.<sup>45</sup>

Education was seen by urbanising Afrikaners as a means to improve social mobility. This was not as cheap or readily available in the rural as it was in the urban areas. Then with the enactment of the 1918 Factory Act, which stipulated that children under fourteen years could not be put to work in factories, and the Free Education Ordinance, which allowed children free education at the nearest school, fewer families came into Port Elizabeth in the post-war period.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless the age profile of the white female proletariat was very youthful particularly in the first part of the study period. As early as 1920, 100 girls in Port Elizabeth, under the age of 18 formed one fifth of the total white female industrial workforce.

As in the rest of SA, the majority who had come to Port Elizabeth from the rural areas underwent a fairly uniform social transition - although barely less difficult than the experience of black women.<sup>47</sup> Most had moved from rural dependency and domesticity in the Cape Midland dorps and countryside, to the relative independence of urban wage earning. As with their black and coloured counterparts - for whom rural patriarchy was further defined by job discrimination and subsequent marginalization into the ranks of the lumpenproletariat - independence nevertheless was attained

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<sup>43</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, p. 2180.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2225.

<sup>45</sup> E. Brink, 'The Afrikaner Women of the Garment Workers' Union, 1925 -1945,' MA, University of the Witwatersrand, 199, p.64.

<sup>46</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, pp. 2181 - 4, p. 2235.

<sup>47</sup> C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (Cape Town, 1982), p.42.

within very definite constraints.<sup>48</sup>

Not only were white women in the urban area confronted with great hardship as regards poverty, health and living conditions but those who had jobs were very often financially bound as the sole source of income for their family. They were also to find, as will be shown in succeeding chapters, that the patriarchy of their rural homes was replicated in the new industrial milieu in terms of opportunity, status, pay and ultimately continuing dependency. However, this was not purely an external imposition. Such attitudes had largely been internalized in that white women only filtered into the wage earning strata when "economic depression, widowhood, war low male wages, drought" made it imperative to do so.<sup>49</sup> When they did, they followed such domestic patterns as food and clothing production, shop assisting and waitressing.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, if the Carnegie Commission assessed that the urban move had been beneficial for the 'poor white', the women of this group had also been a vital agent in the process.<sup>51</sup>

Another, albeit smaller, component in the shaping of the white female working class had been that of overseas immigration, both from Britain or Eastern Europe (see Table 1.3.). In the 19th century, British women had emigrated to SA, usually to take up prearranged jobs as housekeepers, governesses, cooks and domestics, but ultimately to escape unemployment in Britain and to marry and settle in SA.<sup>52</sup> The middle class women of Port Elizabeth were particularly keen to expand and consolidate the city's British character and the politically prominent National Council of Women (NCW) played a role in sending out enquiries to many "influential people as to the best openings

<sup>48</sup> Here they performed such low income work as laundering, hawking, sub-letting and beer-brewing.

<sup>49</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.17.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>51</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White, Carnegie Report*, p.23.

<sup>52</sup> C. Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land. The Emigration of Single Women from Britain to Southern Africa, 1820-1939*, (Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1993).

for British women in this country".<sup>53</sup>

**TABLE 1.3**  
**Arrivals and Departures at Port Elizabeth by Sea - Whites, 1919 - 1935<sup>54</sup>**  
(in transit excluded)

Year	Arrivals	Departures
1919 - 23	particulars	unavailable
1924	1 190	1 030
1925	1 098	967
1926	1 297	1 098
1927	1 274	1 081
1928	1 318	1 242
1929	1 468	1 364
1930	1 405	1 192
1931	1 269	1 185
1932	914	1 170
1933	1 200	1 166
1934	1 486	1 444
1935	1 696	1 517

In 1922 the Mayoress organised a Settlers Day at the Feathermarket Hall in conjunction with the

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<sup>53</sup> TAD A 296 NCW Minutes, 3/22/1/1 14 Feb 1919; The Royal Society of St. George (London) was exclusively English and founded in 1915 to promote British patriotism. This was the only branch in SA, (*The SA Women's Who's Who*, Biographies, Pty. Ltd., Johannesburg, 1938, p. 493). In 1918, a Comrades of the Great War Association was formed, the first President being the Rev. Clapp, M.B.E., and in 1923 it became part of the British Empire Service League (BESL). A woman's auxiliary was formed in February 1919, Mrs. Gibaud M.B.E., an NCW member, being the first President (M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth, A Social Chronicle to the end of 1945*, E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997, p. 145).

<sup>54</sup> Union of South Africa, UG 45 - 1937, Statistics of Migration, 1935, p. 5.



Settlers' Memorial Association along the lines of an old English Fair. This was part of a broader attempt involving other towns, to raise funds which assisted English immigration.<sup>55</sup> However, after World War 1 domestic occupations were increasingly taken over by better trained coloured workers. At this point the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW) was established to find openings other than domestic service with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) as the settlement agency.<sup>56</sup> Subsequently, a Miss Potts was sent to Port Elizabeth in May 1922 to seek employment for women on farms, particularly in the Addo and the Sundays River Settlement areas.<sup>57</sup> Undoubtedly marriage was still the ultimate goal. Although no figures are available for PE, of the first thousand who went to the Transvaal, about 60% married after a year or two of domestic service.<sup>58</sup> Thus many of these women may have escaped their working class origins.

Jews had also provided a small but steady stream of immigrants into Port Elizabeth particularly after the pogroms in Eastern Europe in the 1890s and again after the South African War. In 1928, another steady influx into Port Elizabeth was recorded.<sup>59</sup> It was mainly men who immigrated first in order to establish themselves, with women following later. Thus in 1929, Jewish women formed only 5% of the white female population in Port Elizabeth and an even smaller part of the working class.<sup>60</sup> Initially the orthodox new immigrants found themselves waging a 'precarious livelihood with immense difficulty'.<sup>61</sup> They tended to set up shops in Queen Street, often with community assistance. Wives and daughters worked hard in the family business until the latter could be married

<sup>55</sup> EPH, 25 January 1922.

<sup>56</sup> The Hon. Lady Rockley, "Women Settlers in South Africa", *Journal of the African Society*, vol.3 (3), April 1934, pp. 126-127.

<sup>57</sup> TAD A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 25 April 1922.

<sup>58</sup> The Hon. Lady Rockley, "Women Settlers in SA", p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> PEJLA, Annual Report, 19 September 1928.

<sup>60</sup> M.E. de Saxe and I.M. Goodman (eds.), *SA Jewish Year Book. Directory of Jewish Organisations and Who's Who in SA Jewry, 1929*, (Johannesburg, 1929), p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> H. Schauder, 'Aspects of the History of the Jewish Community in Port Elizabeth,' n.p., 7 March 1984, p.8.

off. When orphans and single girls were brought out to SA they were almost immediately married off. Bradlow has shown in her analysis of the pre-war Jewish community that

"self-employment was not axiomatic. A number of Jewish factory operatives, including women, worked in the tailoring and cigarette industries. (However) In 1917 a changing "occupational conformation - and hence social mobility - begins to emerge. Though the traditional occupations still predominated, individual Jews were entering - at a low level - service industries such as transport and entertainment (as cinema employees). By the 1920s a few had moved into what was variously described as the 'government' or 'civil' service.....Thus within, at most, three decades of their arrival, some Lithuanian families were emerging from their underclass status..."<sup>62</sup>

Education was also part of an intensive Jewish self-help programme, so that daughters of the more educated Jews, particularly from Britain were attending university as early as 1919.<sup>63</sup> National statistics show that only 10% of Jewish women worked in manufacturing thereby forming a 'cocooned working class' for a brief period.<sup>64</sup> Thus within these demographic movements then, separate cultures along the lines of ethnicity, language, residential areas, work and religion began to take shape.

Although the numbers of white women had declined after the SA War, in the first decade after Union, they increased to 28% of the female population. In this period, black women increased by 37% while the numbers of coloured women stabilized, despite their sharp increase in industrial employment mid-way through World War 1 with the increased industrial output.<sup>65</sup> However, at the beginning of the study period, a little more than a quarter of the industrial workforce was already

<sup>62</sup> E. Bradlow, "The Anatomy of an Immigrant Community: Cape Town Jewry from the Turn of the Century to the Passing of the Quota Act", *South African Historical Journal*, 31, November 1994, pp. 103-127, p. 113-4.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews, E. Levy and E.Schauder.

<sup>64</sup> M.E. de Saxe and I.M. Goodman (eds.), *SA Jewish Year Book. Directory of Jewish Organisations and Who's Who in SA Jewry, 1929*, (Johannesburg, 1929), pp. 39-41.

<sup>65</sup> The increase of coloured women was not mainly to replace men who had been drafted, as Grundlingh has assumed, since the figures for male employees did not decrease, but rather because of the increase in industry. (A. Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War : South African Blacks and the First World War*, (Johannesburg, 1987), p. 154.

comprised of women with white women forming 5/6 of this number. The majority were employed by the Boot and Shoe industry. After 1926 whites steadily replaced coloured women in industry, further increasing white female urbanisation.<sup>66</sup>

Thus the process of white female urbanisation in Port Elizabeth was conditioned not only by the loss of ties to the land or by fragmenting family cohesion but also by the availability of work in the city. However, it was the political shaping of the particular environment of Port Elizabeth by the local and central state and the politics of local social welfare that, together with demographic and economic factors, strongly shaped the urban context.

### 1.3. THE LOCAL STATE AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN PORT ELIZABETH

The merging by the 1920s of commercial and industrial concerns in order to pursue 'place entrepreneurialism' was most clearly manifested in the appearance of representatives of these sectors on the City Council. But, in accordance with the Cape liberal tradition, humanitarian concerns also prevailed, shaped in no small measure by the role of women councillors who achieved the right of election in 1917. This had been fought by the politically conscious NCW via its Woman's Municipal Association (WMA) until the passing of ordinance 17 of 1917.<sup>67</sup> This branch of the NCW thereafter remained in place in order to both conscientize women voters and to train the first women councillors for office.<sup>68</sup> Further, during the inter-war years the central state, although increasingly segregationist after 1924, tended to tolerate a certain amount of regional autonomy. Thus the PECC operated within a complex web of interlinking factors and ideologies.

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<sup>66</sup> Union of South Africa, Census and Statistics, Pretoria. Statistics of Production, 1918-1936.

<sup>67</sup> Cape Province, Province of the Cape of Good Hope, Ordinances 1917 - 1936, Ordinance 17 of 1917; CAD, Provincial Administration, PAS 2/343, Letter Mrs. Ball NCW to the Secretary of the Cape Provincial Council, 14 September, 1917.

<sup>68</sup> TAD A 296 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 14 June 1918, 25 July 1922, 13 February 1925; 'NCW', p.2.

Employers were strongly represented on the PECC during the study period. This included the employers of women such as Councillors J.N. Boss and H.J. Millard, representatives of the leather industry, the biggest employer of white women, and an industry largely driven by British capital. Occupying the most important footwear manufacturing location in the country, the leather industrialists exhibited an aggressive, expansionist policy and managed to exercise a crucial influence over the local state. Thus, Millard, manager of British United Shoe Machinery, was instrumental in setting up a branch of British United Shoe Machinery in Port Elizabeth in 1913, which was the cornerstone of shoe industry mechanization here during and after WW1. He also travelled widely to extend mechanization countrywide, and was for many years a member of the Technical Council established to promote a trained, skilled labour force. But he went further in that he established the Midland Chamber of Commerce and the Federated Chamber of Industry, was elected to the PECC in 1925, and became Mayor in 1931. Boss and Millard were both Presidents of the SA Federated Chamber of Industries, while Boss also sat on the Midland Board of the Chamber of Industries.<sup>69</sup> Thus, it becomes clear that not only was this industry crucial in the industrialization of the city, but that its leading figures took concrete steps to exercise influence over the local state and capital. Port Elizabeth's industrialist councillors were not only in a position to market the city nationally and internationally but more specifically, to shape the local conditions in which female labour found itself.<sup>70</sup>

Humanitarianism and social welfare pressure groups were represented on the local council by the Reverend Clapp and the only three women in a twenty one person council: Mrs. Anne Anderson and Mrs. C. F. Gipson in the late 1920s and later Mrs. Ellen May Holland.<sup>71</sup> Wife of a councillor herself, Mrs. Anderson was a prominent member of the NCW executive, a founder member of the local Child Welfare Society and sat on the PECC from 1924 until 1935. Mrs. Gipson had been President of the NCW from 1923 to 1924, a member of the Women's Enfranchisement League and

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<sup>69</sup> PEM, 'Port Elizabeth: City of Industry, 1934,' (Port Elizabeth, 1934).

<sup>70</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid', p. 172.

<sup>71</sup> PEM, 'Port Elizabeth: City of Industry, 1934'; These women always represented Wards two and three, which were in the more prestigious area roughly between Park Drive and Strand Street (PEM, Mayors' Minutes, 1917, General Account, pp. 29 - 30; Mayors' Minutes, 1925 - 1936).

was elected to the Hospital Board from 1929 to 1931.<sup>72</sup> Mrs. Holland who occupied a council seat from 1935 also sat on the PECC's Native Affairs Committee. She had been educated at Oxford University and was the wife of Fred Holland, a local botanist, farmer and liberal who was a founder member of the Race Relations scholarship to Fort Hare and helped establish a night school in New Brighton. Their emergence reflected the interests of middle class women which came to the fore after WW1. Not only were many propertied women now keen to have greater political representation, but their support of soldiers in the war effort and increasing concern with urbanisation and social ills thereafter had stimulated both their psychological emancipation and sense of public participation. Ordinance 10 of 1912 had already established the municipal vote for women who, like men, had to either own property to the value of at least 100 pounds or rent property not less than 200 pounds.<sup>73</sup> Then, as has been noted, they gained the right of election in 1917, which created a slight shift in the gender composition of the council. This was not without parallel in other parts of the Union. In 1923 NCW members in Cape Town and Durban were elected to their respective City Councils; some Pretoria women were elected to the council in 1927 and a woman mayor, Mrs. Malherbe, was elected to the Pretoria City Council in 1931.<sup>74</sup> Besides reflecting the tightly knit political association of middle class women in Port Elizabeth at the time, this achievement further heightened women's political consciousness and provided them with a stake in the development of the city. The question arises as to what the significance of the election of women was, if any, for the daily lives of working class women. These new councillors were usually returned by the more middle-class areas of wards two and three (roughly the area of Central) possibly reflecting the unusually high numerical preponderancy of women here and the fact that the area consisted of more valuable property than, for example, that in North End thus allowing more women to vote.<sup>75</sup> While the assessment of properties in the North End proper, were usually

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<sup>72</sup> *EPH*, 18 March 1922.

<sup>73</sup> Cape Province, Ordinances 1911 - 1915, Ordinance 10 of 1912, p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> TAD A 296 3/22/1/1, 14 September 1923, 1927, 13 November 1931.

<sup>75</sup> In all seven wards, white women were slightly more numerous than men, except for Ward two where women numbered 30% more. This was probably due to a concentration of unmarried women and widows - particularly after the war -collecting over a period of time in what was the oldest area of Port Elizabeth and which contained many ladies' boarding houses to house the working population of central. (PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1927, p.5; Mayor's

well over 200 pounds - the necessary requirement for rent-paying voters - Sydenham shows many 'lots' well below 100 pounds.<sup>76</sup> Thus the 'say' of working class women in local government, though generally small, seems to have varied according to area. Nevertheless, the female councillors were notable spokespersons regarding the basic conditions of living, serving on PECC Committees such as Housing, Health and Licences, Health and Markets and Street Collections.<sup>77</sup> Here they were active in the campaign to eradicate slums, the erection of sub-economic housing schemes and the preservation of open recreational areas.<sup>78</sup> Their membership of the WMA also involved them in addressing health issues, slum living, home conditions, as well as conditions in laundries, free maternity care and infant mortality.<sup>79</sup>

Between 1916 and 1929 the NCW coordinated a long struggle for the establishment of Women Police through its PECC ties.<sup>80</sup> The official NCW History reports:

"Evidence was given to the Police Commission, meetings were called, a deputation twice waited on the City Council, presenting a petition and later the report of a private investigator."<sup>81</sup>

However, despite female representation, the PECC continually managed to sideline the issue. True working class representation on the PECC, in the form of trade unionists and communists, was only established in the 1940s.<sup>82</sup> With women being a minority then on the PECC, gender interests did not gain specific recognition, and less so if they challenged established patriarchal structures.

Minutes for 1921, p. 30).

<sup>76</sup> The total evaluation of property in ward two for 1917 was 1 146 313 pounds as compared with 617 456 pounds for ward seven (CAD, 3/PEZ 6/1/1/388, Rates Assessment Roll, ward two, 1917; 3/PEZ 6/1/1/394, ward seven, 1917).

<sup>77</sup> PEM, Mayors Minutes, 1925 - 1935.

<sup>78</sup> *EPH*, 5 April 1933.

<sup>79</sup> TAD A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 1 August 1933.

<sup>80</sup> NCW, PE Branch, 'A Short History', p.1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>82</sup> G. Baines, 'New Brighton, Port Elizabeth - 1903-1953: A History of an Urban African Community', (PhD., University of Cape Town, 1994), p.25.

Whatever segments of society the councillors represented they were virtually all English speakers, reflecting the essentially British colonial ethos of Port Elizabeth. This was an amalgam of the related assumptions of British class distinction, Victorian patriarchy and morality and racial separatism, the latter tempered by the local expression of Cape liberalism. Thus, until 1934, Port Elizabeth was largely supportive of the SAP with the Unionist party, and later Labour, also gaining seats. The NP only had between 150 - 220 members and only 2 branches - Sidwell and North End - until 1929 when the PE Central branch was added.<sup>83</sup> As late as 1931, it had gained no seats in Port Elizabeth.<sup>84</sup> From 1934 until the 1950s the UP was strongest in Port Elizabeth. By 1936 the Afrikaans-speaking component of the white population had risen from 20% in 1918 to 36,4%.

The racial alignment of class was bolstered in 1931, when the national vote was given to all white women. Although women had been increasingly entering the job market and paying tax as indicated, most had had no municipal say due to low property qualifications, and none had the vote. However, it was professional women who lobbied for national enfranchisement.<sup>85</sup> Now a section of working class women were hived off and drawn securely into the 'white camp'. This was further racially divisive since firstly, male black voters were reduced from under 10% of the electorate to 4.5% and black females were not given the franchise; secondly, the new voters, especially in the white working class stronghold of North End, voted for the overtly segregationist NP. Here an Afrikaans-speaking culture prevailed, centred on the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>86</sup> These women in the NP had already been very active in the 1920s, playing a sizeable role in the development of Afrikaner consciousness.<sup>87</sup> According to Terblanche, this had great meaning for their role in the political alignment of the city and the growth of the NP Women's League gained momentum.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p. 481.

<sup>84</sup> *EPH*, 12 February 1931.

<sup>85</sup> C. Walker, 'The Woman's Suffrage Movement in South Africa', Centre for South African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1979; see also various NCW files prior to 1931.

<sup>86</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p. 488.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480.

<sup>88</sup> *Die Burger*, 13 and 15 September 1924; H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p.483.

Thirdly, it prevented the growth of inter-racial solidarity amongst working class women. At a time when the numbers of white women were dwarfing those of coloured women in industry, this legislation catapulted the political status of the former to new levels and deepened division between the groups. By 1936 when black males were taken off the voters roll in the Cape, this process was complete.

Despite strong SAP support in Port Elizabeth, there was considerable acceptance of the Pact government's white employment policy on account of local conditions. The PECC's interest in utilising and maintaining the welfare of its large white working populace also dovetailed well with the functions of the Pact government's new Department of Labour. These included giving attention to wages, working conditions and certain related social conditions, such as housing schemes and transport. The large contingent of white women in the formal labour force necessitated the appointment of Mrs. D. Tonkin as Inspectress for Factories. She was a prominent PE member of the NCW, holding office as convener of Trades and Professions for many years, as well as playing an active role in local public affairs. She was a founder member of the Athlone Girls Club for working girls in Port Elizabeth (see section 2.3.6). By 1929 she was on the Pearson High School Committee, in 1935, the NCW representative for the Slum Clearance Committee formed by the Town Planning Association and in 1936 Director of the newly appointed Housing Association of Port Elizabeth. Her government employment also secured her a place on the Government Advisory Board to the Department of Labour.<sup>89</sup> Her duties were to oversee the implementation of the Wages Act where wage determinations were in existence; administering Section 18 of the Factory Act in the Clothing, Sweetmaking and Tea and Coffee Packing industries; giving special attention to confinement allowances; and liaising between women workers and the central government and local bodies concerned with women's welfare such as the NCW.<sup>90</sup>

In the early 1930s, the 'civilised labour' concept of the Labour department was further consolidated by the Fusion government of 1934. Now attention was paid to the health, maternity leave, child care and recreation for white factory workers. However, Mrs. Tonkin's support of the middle class

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<sup>89</sup> *EPH*, December 1929; 17 December 1935.

<sup>90</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1, vol.1, Department of Labour, Annual Report, 1931, p.2; LIP 5/1, vol. 11, Annual Report, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1936, pp.1-2.



NCW, her close connection with local business and the PECC, for example, in establishing the Girls' Hostel and her "co-operating with the Manufacturer's Association" - during a period where truly representative unions were non-existent - clearly underlines her relationship with female labour.<sup>91</sup> In this she was an agent of control during nascent industrialisation in Port Elizabeth, through a close alliance between local state, capital and middle class interests.

Despite vast immigration from the rural areas, little was done by the PECC to alleviate the hardships of the urban poor. Although the Cape Provincial legislature passed 26 Ordinances during 1919 which dealt with, among other things, poor relief, charitable institutions, indigent children's industrial schools it was only Ordinance no. 4 of 1919 which directly affected the poor.<sup>92</sup> This stipulated that pauper rations were to be distributed by the Magistrate and that the Municipality had to undertake all further relief. Only a small provincial grant was given annually to the PECC, to boost an even smaller local government allocation. It was thus directed solely at the indigent and excluded the able-bodied and unemployed poor. The PECC continually fought the demands of both central government and its populace to supply sufficient aid to the ever-increasing numbers of poor.<sup>93</sup> The PECC felt that the government had no right to demand that it earmark any of its revenue for such a purpose. It was already contributing 4 000 pounds to local charities and could not afford more.<sup>94</sup> Certain key officials also seemed oblivious of the inadequacy of the city's provision. The official attitude at the beginning of the 1920s, then, had not changed from the turn of the century where Cape officials felt that help should only be given to the sick poor and the starving and that the unemployed should be encouraged to return to the country to avoid the danger of creating dependents and vagrants.<sup>95</sup> The greater burden fell onto the shoulders of local welfare

<sup>91</sup> These were the so-called 'sweetheart' unions, according to M.A. Finnemore; *EPH*, 20 March, 1922.

<sup>92</sup> Cape of Good Hope, Provincial Council Ordinances, 1911 - 1920, (Juta, Cape Town); TAD, JUS 1/307/19, vol. 190, Annual Report, Magistrate for PE, 1919.

<sup>93</sup> *EPH*, 20 and 28 January, 1928; 1 February 1928; PEB Minutes, 24 September 1934, p.294.

<sup>94</sup> *EPH*, 24 January 1928.

<sup>95</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community: The Survival of the Poor in Cape Town, 1880 - 1910", in *SAHJ*, 24, 1991, p. 132.

societies, particularly the PE Benevolent Society (PEB), the role of which is discussed in section 1.5 below.

#### 1.4 WOMEN AND HOUSING - SOCIAL CONTROL, SOCIAL NEGLECT

Perhaps a more fundamental problem which the PECC also did little to address, from about the turn of the century until 1929, was the pressing housing problem. In fact, in 1928, the provision of housing had actually deteriorated for all races.<sup>96</sup> While the Housing Act of 1920 did allow for government grants to the PECC these had to be voted in by the local populace and repaid by the PECC both of whom, as with the issue of the poor, were often reluctant to invest money in schemes which necessitated increased rates and rentals for working class housing schemes. Yet, with PE industry having absorbed a particularly large white labour force, the local council was, out of necessity, drawn into a partnership with central government via loans for both economic and sub-economic housing schemes.

The 1920s, however, saw a significant increase in residential segregation, although the population of the town of Port Elizabeth had initially settled in areas according to class and status. This was in line with colonial policy elsewhere, but in Port Elizabeth there was white concern about urban land values, the desire to expropriate land with commercial potential, but more especially, around the turn of the century, a belief that health reform in the city, could be solved by removal of (black) slums to the city limits. The latter was the so-called 'sanitation syndrome' which was used to justify removals of such slums.<sup>97</sup> This ultimately involved the differential removal of the coloured and black populations from the centre of town.<sup>98</sup>

The most decisive step in this regard was taken after the outbreak of plague in 1902, with the

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<sup>96</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid', p. 197.

<sup>97</sup> see M. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909," *Journal of African History*, 18, 1977, pp. 387-410.

<sup>98</sup> A.J. Christopher, "Formal Segregation and Population Distribution in Port Elizabeth", *Contree*, 24, 1988, p.7.

founding of New Brighton as a municipal location five kilometres to the North of the city. Administered first under central and then under municipal government, it was thus treated on a separate basis and according to separate standards. Here, blacks were severed from future land ownership, rendered politically powerless, yet kept on hand as a reservoir of labour.<sup>99</sup>

Coloureds were not targeted by the PECC to the same degree, particularly since no Cape Municipality had the power to compulsorily segregate its coloured population. However, government interest in segregation, the desire to secure cheaper industrial land and the racist biases of private property developers, gave rise to separate areas from the early 1920s. The coloured population was moved steadily westwards out of the centre of town, while a handful settled in the locations. Moreover, Coloureds who had always tended to drift into the poorer urban areas, continued to suffer social discrimination which militated further against their social mobility.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, by the beginning of the study period, Port Elizabeth was already one of the most highly segregated cities in SA, a process which was boosted again during the late 1930s.<sup>101</sup>

Yet, allocation of housing was also uneven. While 663 economic and 250 sub-economic houses were built for whites between 1920 and 1936, far outnumbering those of any other centre, only 162 economic and 226 sub-economic houses were built for coloureds and 310 sub-economic houses for blacks in the same period.<sup>102</sup> However, white housing was still insufficient. Until 1928 only 190 of the 663 economic houses and no sub-economic houses for the period had been built.<sup>103</sup> The

<sup>99</sup> B. Taylor, 'The Role of Urban Removals in Port Elizabeth's Development,' pp.3-5.

<sup>100</sup> J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People*, pp. 256-7.

<sup>101</sup> A.J. Christopher, "Formal Segregation and Population Distribution in Port Elizabeth", *Contree*, 24, 1988, p.12; B. Taylor, 'The Role of Urban Removals in Port Elizabeth's Development', p.2.

<sup>102</sup> G. Baines, "The Politics of Welfare: The Provision of Housing and Services in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, c.1920-1944", *Kronos*, 22, November 1995, Appendix A, p.113; H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Armblanke Vraagstuk in P.E., 1916-1934', Conference on Port Elizabeth's place in the History and Historiography of South Africa, Vista University, PE, 24-25 September, 1992, pp.17-18.

<sup>103</sup> G. Baines, "The Politics of Welfare", Appendix A.

rentals, ranging from four to six pounds per month for economic housing and four pounds for sub-economic housing in Holland Park, were also too high for average working class wage earners.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, throughout the duration of the study period surviving multiracial areas were located, most notably in the slums of South and North End, in Central in the Municipal area, and in the burgeoning slum of Korsten which was reputedly one of the worst in the country.<sup>105</sup> It was particularly the North and South End and Central however, which contained the bulk of the white female working class during the 1920s and 1930s and typified the physical conditions as well as the multicultural ethos in which they lived.

In the PEM, in 1921, population percentages paralleled the overall racial demography of the area, females accounting for over half (52.3%) of the population. This was the result of an average increase per year of 299 between 1911 and 1921; a 77% increase of 529 per year occurred between 1921 and 1926. Of this percentage, 65% was white, 28% coloured, 6% black, and a smattering, Indian and Chinese.<sup>106</sup>

The North and the South End also consisted of predominantly white, and large numbers of coloured, women. In fact, 53% of the city's white female population lived here, indicating that, just over half of all white women in Port Elizabeth belonged to the working class. Lack of adequate housing created intense overcrowding. Already by 1918, many young, unmarried white factory workers had left their families in the rural areas and lodged in overcrowded conditions with relatives, friends or others. Often young couples took recourse to communal living.<sup>107</sup> In the North End especially, where most of them lived, 82% of the houses in 1920, were rented, denoting little

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<sup>104</sup> 'Port Elizabeth, City of Industrial and Commercial Opportunity,' 22, South African Pamphlets, vol. 80, pp.63 - 64.'

<sup>105</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p.62; J. Robinson, 'The Politics of Urban Form: Differential Citizenship and Township Formation in Port Elizabeth, 1925 - 1945', Conference on Port Elizabeth's place in the History and Historiography of South Africa, Vista University, Port Elizabeth, 24-25 September, 1992, p.2.

<sup>106</sup> UG 23 - 1928, Census of the European Population, 1921 and 1926.

<sup>107</sup> Interview, Mrs. Hartman; PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1921, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, pp. 30 - 31.

disposable income and perhaps a potentially mobile population. 20% of these houses were rated as overcrowded and 17% sheltering more than one family.<sup>108</sup> In 1930, 69 white families occupied dwellings considered unfit for occupation in the North and South End. Even so, these figures were consistently superseded by those for coloured families, despite the fact that the latter comprised only half the number of white families in the Municipal area.<sup>109</sup> Families of all races also occupied wood and iron shacks, which proliferated in the South End. These had initially been erected for storage purposes or as kitchens and for which excessive rentals were charged.<sup>110</sup> As these dwellings were demolished, the lack of alternative housing led to migration to adjoining areas.<sup>111</sup> Thus, overcrowding, communal living, - and worse - occupation of derelict dwellings or slumyard shacks with the attendant sanitary and health problems, characterized living conditions in the Municipal area for the female working class in the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>112</sup>

In 1929, concerned organisations such as the NCW attended a meeting arranged by the PE Evangelical Church about the crying need for lower class housing.<sup>113</sup> In 1936, Mrs. Tonkin alerted the public to the relationship between poverty and unrealistically high rentals on the one hand and malnutrition and even the death rate on the other. She supported rentals of no more than 7/6d per month. She also criticized economic rentals imposed on what was really sub-economic areas and the PECC's "hush-hush" policy of avoiding the recognition and publicisation of poverty and housing problems which might detract from the city's appeal to would-be industrialists.<sup>114</sup> Such overcrowding alarmed local authorities, particularly the MOH, who cited many examples where acceptable standards of morality were threatened. However, official intervention came early. The Invendige Zendige Kommissie of April 1918 had already outlined the need for segregation by

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<sup>108</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1921, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, pp. 30-31.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1930, p.79.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 1935, p.73, 1936, p.76.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1928, p.79; 1933, p. 74.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1929, p. 55.

<sup>113</sup> TAD A 296 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 14 June 1929.

<sup>114</sup> *EPH*, 17 August 1936.

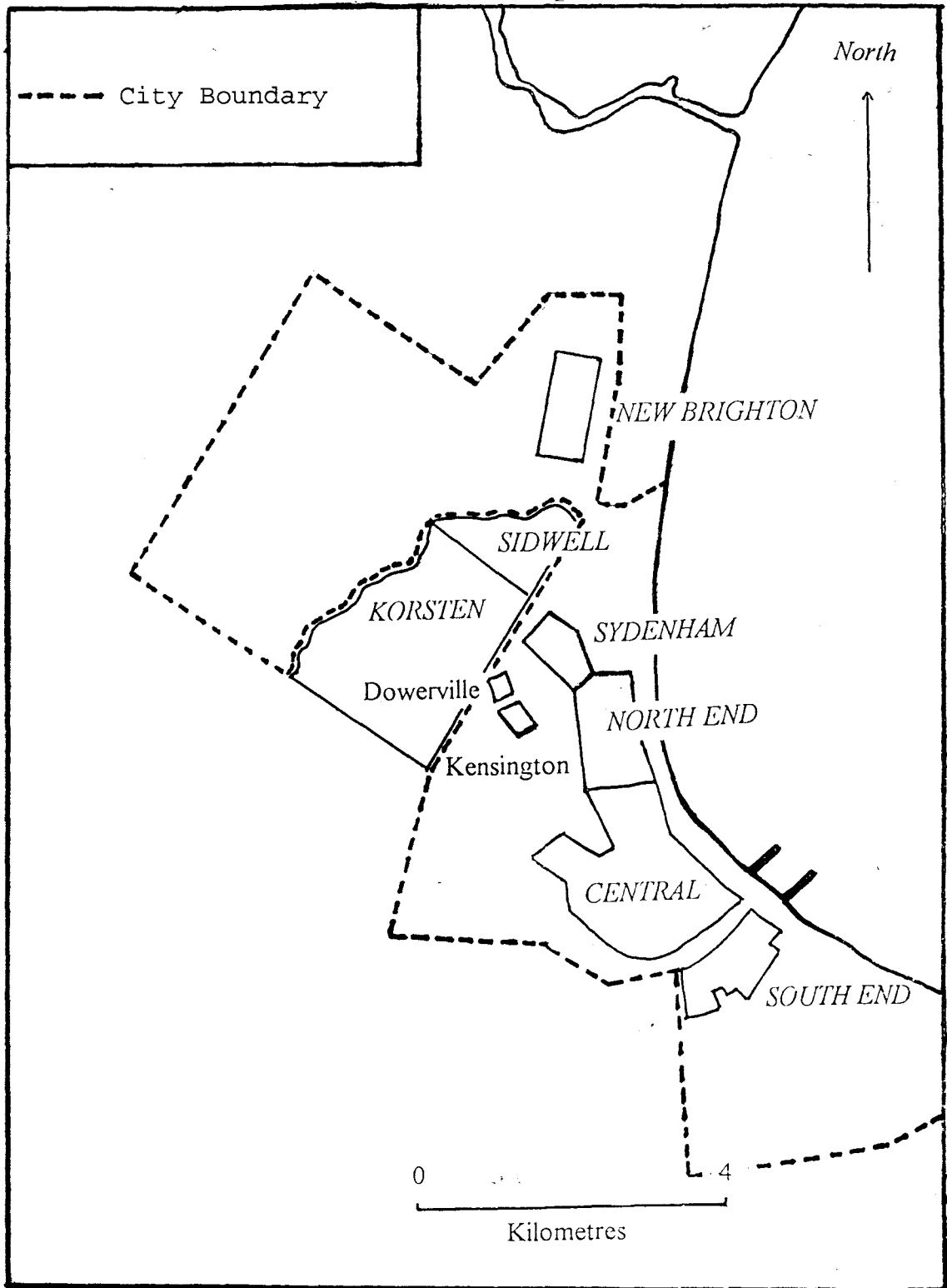


Figure 1.2. WORKING CLASS SUBURBS, PORT ELIZABETH, 1929  
 (Donaldson's Port Elizabeth and Suburban Directory, 1929)

suggesting hostels for young factory workers in Port Elizabeth.<sup>115</sup> Ten years later, local authorities in Port Elizabeth took action in this regard, establishing the Athlone Girls' Club in 1927 for young white female factory workers, in order to stem the decline in their standard of living and the drift to inter-racial socialisation.<sup>116</sup> Again the outcome of an agreement between local capital and the local and central state, the PECC provided the land. Prominent PECC members sat on its board. 'Clubs', providing temporary accommodation, were also set up at Sundays River for European female labour who worked in the Citrus Packing factory.<sup>117</sup> However, by the early 1930s, multiracial co-habitation persisted. Black families were still scattered throughout the North End, the Assistant MOH, Dr. Ferguson claiming that they "mix up with the Coloured, I do not think they differentiate."<sup>118</sup>

Overall then, in the PEM housing remained vastly inadequate, congestion rife and slums burgeoned. These factors as well as the desire to escape Municipal control led many people to escape to Korsten, which lay outside the municipal boundaries until 1931.<sup>119</sup> Here too, large numbers of blacks could continue to own land as well as take refuge from stringent location regulations. Therefore, while the 1921 census reported a population of 7190, 10% of which were European, 54% black and 35% coloured, the situation was somewhat different in 1926.<sup>120</sup> The Boundaries Commission of 1927 contended that there was a total of 12 500 people in Korsten, of which 30% were European and 70% 'non-European'.<sup>121</sup> By 1934, between 20% to 25% of Port Elizabeth's total population lived in the Korsten area.<sup>122</sup> While white women predominated in the PEM (65%)

<sup>115</sup> *Die Burger*, 18 May 1918.

<sup>116</sup> Union of SA, 'Social and Industrial Review', June 1926, vol.11, 6, p.414.

<sup>117</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Annual Report, Department of Labour, 1934, p.13.

<sup>118</sup> Jaggard Library, BC 630 Native Economic Commission, p.5769.

<sup>119</sup> J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape and Centre of Resistance', (B.A. Hons., University of Cape Town, 1988), p.34.

<sup>120</sup> Union of SA, Census, UG 33 - 1927.

<sup>121</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes 1927, Boundaries Commission, pp 12-13; J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape', p.34.

<sup>122</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes 1934, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, p.33.

in 1921, the vast majority of Korsten women were black (1723) followed by 1253 coloureds with only 10% white (336). Moreover whereas white women had increased in Korsten at the rate of only 11 per year between 1911 and 1921, there was a 900% increase of 110 per year between 1921 and 1926 (see Tables 1.4. and 1.5.). An increasing number of white women in Korsten lived, therefore, in a truly multicultural, working class environment. Cherry reports the Magistrate Van Renen's portrayal of the non-Black Korsten population in 1931:

"Coloured, Indians, Jews, Chinese and other Asiatics, and Europeans. These all live cheek by jowl without any attempt at demarcation - another most undesirable fact" and that the whites were the "vilest and lowest Europeans."<sup>123</sup>

**TABLE 1.4.**  
**Total Population of Residential Areas by Race<sup>124</sup>**

Year	Area	White	Coloured	Black
1911	PEM	18 190	10 854	1 644
	Korsten	507	1 671	2 344
1921	PEM	23 788	9 796	1 849
	Korsten	708	2 604	3 876
1926	PEM	29 418	11 470	8 772
	Korsten	3 800	8 700	

Here, the illicit sway of slumlords perpetuated overcrowding. Lack of municipal restrictions meant that 'slumlords' were able to operate relatively freely, hiring out small and subdivided plots and rooms to an uncontrolled number of people. A proliferation of wood and iron shacks and backyard dwellings, many fit for demolition, caused excessive overcrowding. Demolition was recommended for 4 183 backyard shacks in 1935 as opposed to 50 in the South End. Out of 2 424 houses only

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<sup>123</sup> J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape', p.35.

<sup>124</sup> Union of SA, UG 32 - 1912, Report of the 1911 Census; UG 40 - 1924, Report of the 1921 Census; UG 45 - 1927, Report of the 1926 Census; Union of SA, Census, UG 33-1927, UG 23 - 1928; CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, Census and Statistics, 6 March 1929 (the 'Coloured' category also included Asians)



297 were considered fit for habitation.<sup>125</sup> However, Cherry presents a differentiated picture:

"some of the houses, especially where people had bought their own land and lived on the premises, were substantial structures of brick. Some areas of Korsten were more densely built up with shacks than others, ..... there is also oral evidence that there was sufficient open ground for people to hold mass meetings, indicating that not all areas were overcrowded..<sup>126</sup>"

**TABLE 1.5.**  
**Female Population of Residential Areas by Race<sup>127</sup>**

Year	Area	White	Coloured	Black	Total
1911	PEM	9 096	5 318	647	15 061
	Korsten	223	864	1 107	2 194
1921	PEM	12 090	5 523	944	18 141
	Korsten	336	1 253	1 723	3 311
1926	PEM	14 739	6 022	855	21 616
	Korsten	886	--	--	--

However, there was an absence of even the most basic provisions. There was, for example, no " water supply, no ambulance or fire brigade service, no baths or washhouses, no street lighting and no footpaths."<sup>128</sup> Thus, all sorts of evils prevailed such as the contamination of water collected in open receptacles and wells and its sale at exorbitant prices.<sup>129</sup> There was also difficulty in regular washing and toilets regularly overflowed in tiny yards. Thus, during the study period, TB, enteritis

<sup>125</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes 1935, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, p.73.

<sup>126</sup> J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape', p.62.

<sup>127</sup> Union of SA, UG 32 - 1912, Report of the 1911 Census; UG 40 - 1924, Report of the 1921 Census; UG 45 - 1927, Report of the 1926 Census. Union of SA, Census, UG 33-1927, UG 23 - 1928; CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, Census and Statistics, 6 March 1929.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>129</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part 1*, p. 222.

and child mortality was rife in Korsten.

By 1935, Korsten had been earmarked as the main location for industry, since it had easy access to labour - Sidwell and North End on the one hand and the African township of New Brighton on the other.<sup>130</sup> This meant, according to Robinson, that

"... the subsidisation of industrial land sales and services diverted funds from other housing and social facilities, especially for the poor, thereby directly reproducing for a time the relatively "chaotic" or disorderly urban system which earlier processes had generated."<sup>131</sup>

Ultimately, however, the local authorities' fear of plague, illegal beer-brewing and associated crime, conveniently dovetailed with both their prioritization of Korsten as an industrial area and growing segregation in the town. This contributed to the state-subsidized clearance of blacks from Korsten in the late 1930s.

Thus the PECC was involved in the development of Port Elizabeth on a highly selective basis, determined by its priorities for its growing, largely white, labour force. Liberal actions such as the establishment of Port Elizabeth in the 1930s as the foremost provider of economic and sub-economic housing in SA cloaked the racism of successive and differential removals of coloureds and blacks. The largely white, Municipal area received more housing and industrial development than either Korsten or New Brighton. Living conditions of white women, specifically in Korsten and the PEM had raised the issues not only of stability and control amongst employers, the Department of Labour, and the PECC, but also xenophobic concerns among the public at large over racial separation. The former issues were partly resolved at factory level, in the 1930s, by improvement to working conditions and the establishment of health facilities. Yet this often merely highlighted the disjuncture between such progress and the continuing insanitary conditions of the "indifferent structures" in which many workers lived.<sup>132</sup> The latter concern was mainly dealt with by the segregationist strategy of providing housing for white factory workers, (see section 2.3.6.),

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<sup>130</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. 1, Annual Report, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1935, p.6.

<sup>131</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid', p.177.

<sup>132</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Annual Report, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1936, p.6.

used by the local authorities. The already mentioned Athlone Girls' Club was a solution specifically directed to the upliftment, segregation and moral protection of the white female labour force.

Meanwhile, the inadequate attention paid by both local and central state to slums and endemic poverty during the early development of PE's infrastructure, was partially addressed by the powerful political network of women's organisations.

### 1.5. WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL WELFARE

A formative element in the shaping of Port Elizabeth's political economy, especially as regards women's lives, was the network of social welfare societies that had mushroomed in Port Elizabeth after World War 1. These included the Municipal Social Welfare Committee, The Ministering League for Consumptives, Toc H, The Mayor's Relief Fund, Helpmakaar Vereeniging, Ladies Charity Society, the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul Society, St. Marks Mission, the Child Welfare Society, the Daughters of Zion Benevolent Society and the PE Jewish Ladies Association.<sup>133</sup> They had been nurtured, along with the developing political consciousness of women, in the changing post-war society and their importance heightened by the post-war recession. The problem of burgeoning poverty and the numerous slums generated by rapid urbanization, had become critical in the absence of state attention to the poor. Thus, these groups focussed on very wide social goals, including the legal and political rights of white women, their working conditions and disease and poverty, particularly as they affected women. Thus the records of the most prominent of these organisations, the PEB, continually reflect a large number of women, mainly widows and some deserted wives helped despite the added burden of their children.<sup>134</sup> I will outline the significance and structural position of the two most prominent organisations, the NCW and the PEB, the former being the most powerful and the latter providing a type of 'gender-bridge' between the working class and the local state.

Established in 1867, the PEB was the chief medium for poor relief to the extent that the Chief Sanitary Inspector described it as carrying

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<sup>133</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes 1926, pp.10-11.

<sup>134</sup> PEB, Annual Report, 1920-1.

"a great burden which is generally borne by the civic authorities in other parts of the world."<sup>135</sup>

The NCW, was particularly influential in that it was not only affiliated to some of these and numerous other societies but also to the International Council of Women.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, it included the middle class representatives of political parties, suffrage societies, welfare and religious organizations, as well as those representing trained nurses, civil servants and teachers. Affiliated organisations in 1918 were both the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young WCTU, the Congregational Women's Association, E.P. Children's Home, Jewish Ladies' Association, PEB, Presbyterian Women's Association, Red Cross Committee, Ministering League, Salvation Army, St. Columbus' Presbyterian Association, St. Mark's Mission, Vigilance Committee, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), St. John's Wesley Guild and Women's Enfranchisement League.<sup>137</sup> It is notable that these were mainly organisations with strong English speaking leanings. Afrikaans welfare organisations, such as the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACCV), were mainly rooted in the church and a "burgeoning nationalist movement".<sup>138</sup> The NCW's activities like those of the PEB, were strongly rooted in gender with a definite racial and class bias but, unlike the PEB, was more powerful and less involved on a day to day basis with the marginalized proletariat. They were associated with the fields of health, education, employment, local and national politics, child welfare and industrial employment. Specific activities relating to the working and social conditions of women manifested itself in attention to the cost of living, calls for equal pay for equal work and, between 1925 and 1932 and in putting pressure on the Wage Board to elevate the level of shop assistants' wages in Port

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<sup>135</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Report Chief Sanitary Inspector to Social Welfare Committee, 17 November 1926.

<sup>136</sup> An indication of the relative size of the PEB is that whereas they spent approximately 1 907 pounds in one year, the Ministering League spent 287 pounds; NCW, PE Branch, 'A Short History', p.1.

<sup>137</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 1912-1919; *EPH*, December 1918.

<sup>138</sup> M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap': The ACVV and the Management of Childbirth, 1925 - 1939', Conference for Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Durban, February 1991, p.1.

Elizabeth.<sup>139</sup> The NCW started lobbying for a Probation Officer in Port Elizabeth in 1929 which they finally secured in 1935 and who was to be known as the Child Welfare Officer.<sup>140</sup> They also lobbied for and achieved election to the School Board, the Juvenile Affairs Board, the PECC, the Hospital Board and the Board of the PE Technical College where they helped initiate domestic training courses for women. As representative of prestigious institutions they were thus able to pressure local and central government for the betterment of all, including working class women.

Other organisations like the PEB were almost wholly involved with the marginalized working class, ie. the unemployed and the unemployable. Focussing mainly on women, it dealt with food relief, employment and care for the aged and sick; distributed maternity and other grants and clothing from various societies and visited homes. Aid was administered in the Smilesian, Victorian belief in individual self-worth and that not only individuals but whole classes could be uplifted through the encouragement of hard work and thrift. Their work was, however, perhaps limited by the lack of an overall concept of social reorganization and ultimately doomed by the socio-economic hardships of the period.

But the general structural position of these societies was ambiguous. On the one hand, their attention to the welfare of working class women entailed support for the aims of the local state which were, as defined by Robinson:

"Local employment, local welfare and local prestige all represented special incentives for those involved in local government to attempt to attract industry to the town..."<sup>141</sup>

Thus, the crucial role of the NCW in founding the Athlone Girls' Club during a period of economic growth indicates the extent to which they were involved in the implementation of LED.

They also had financial links with government but these were decidedly tenuous in the form of small, arbitrary grants from both Provincial government and the PECC. However, if the organisation registered itself as a charitable society, it would receive a pound from the PECC and

<sup>139</sup> *EPH*, 18 March, 1922; NCW, 'A Short History', p.2. In 1926 the NCW secured the right of shop assistants to close shop at 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

<sup>140</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, September 1935.

<sup>141</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid', pp. 172-3.

the Provincial government for every pound it raised. The PEB, in particular, resisted this partly because it wished to retain donations and subscriptions, but also because it was too busy with visiting and home-care to carry out fund-raising as well.<sup>142</sup>

Also while the local state mainly concentrated on the housing and hostelling of its huge labour supply it was these informal organizations in the 1920s that served, almost as the de facto welfare arm of the local state, supporting the unemployed, the poor and the sick. On the other hand, their role as 'independent agent' is underlined by the fact that they often met the PECC head-on in attempts to secure funding.

Identification by members of the PEB with the goals of local state was particularly facilitated both by their class position and the age of individual members. This gave them time and financial freedom to run these societies unlike working class women who tended to be absorbed by individual bread and butter issues. In 1919, Mrs. Hannam, the Port Elizabeth's NCW National President, bemoaned the fact that:

"practically all the social and philanthropic work in this city is done by women of middle years..."<sup>143</sup>

In addition, their family connections, often through marriage to city councillors or key and/or prominent businessmen, reinforced these ties. At least five NCW members were married to city councillors, while Mrs. Caulfield's husband was Mayor from 1932 - 1934.<sup>144</sup> Such factors clearly defined their linkages with the official channels of local power and served to consolidate the influence of the women councillors. These networks were also endorsed by the variety and the overlap of organizations (see p. 25). Firstly, the NCW was an umbrella body providing, like the WMA, a significant political platform for many women from other organisations. As has been mentioned, it was the NCW who created the WMA and thus the lobby for the women's Municipal vote and subsequently all the women councillors. These were the two most influential local public

<sup>142</sup> PEB, 'The Work of the Ladies' Benevolent Society', November 1933; PEB Minutes, 24 September 1934, p. 294.

<sup>143</sup> TAD A 296, 6/2/1 I.163, Index no. 17.2, 'NCW News', May 1977.

<sup>144</sup> NCW, p.2; G. Baines, 'New Brighton, Port Elizabeth: 1903-1952', p.264.

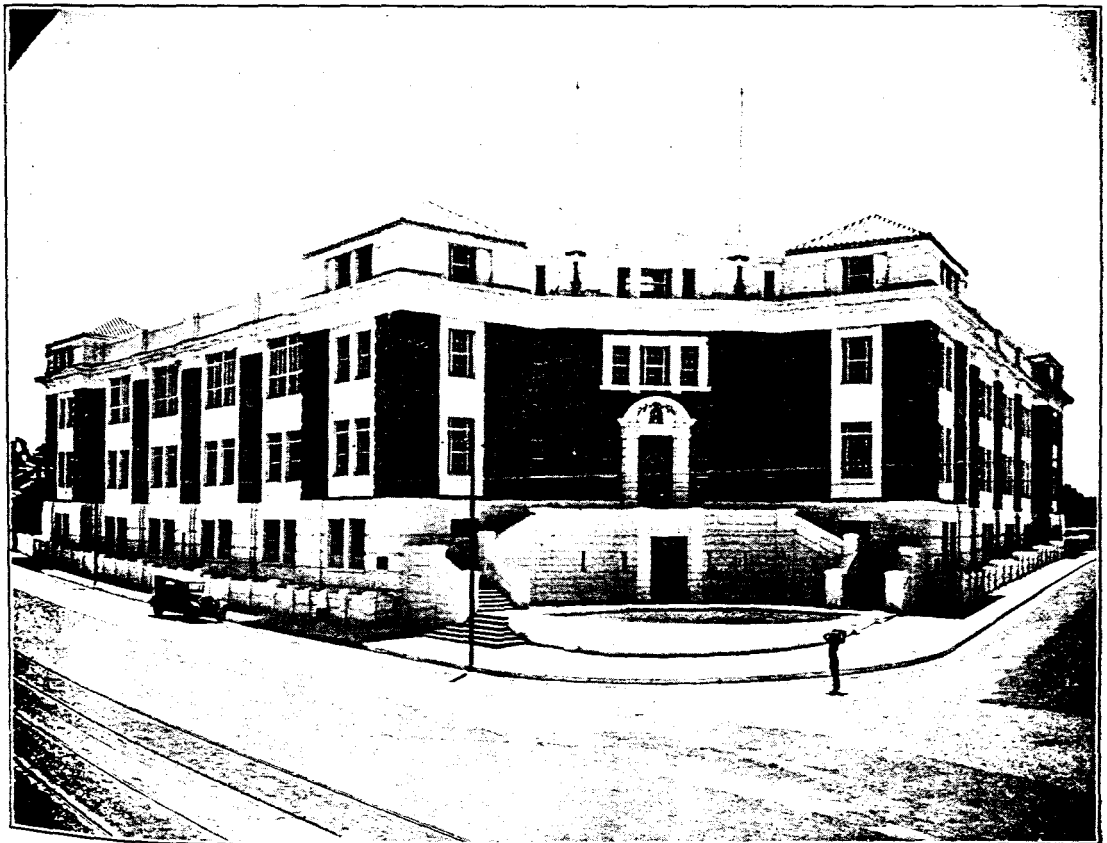


Illustration 1.1. THE PORT ELIZABETH TECHNICAL COLLEGE, 1930  
(The First Port Elizabeth Annual, 1930)

platforms for women aside from the PECC itself.

NCW women such as Mrs. A. Anderson, the first woman to sit on the PECC and founder member of the Child Welfare Society, Mrs. E. R. Mellwraith and Mrs. T. P. Oats also belonged to the Red Cross and St. John's Association. Mrs. R.P. Hannam, wife of the Chairman of the Native Welfare Society - a forerunner of the Joint Council - was both a member of the PEB, and National President of the NCW between 1920 and 1922. Oxford educated, she was also appointed to the School Board, the Technical College Council, the Child Welfare Society, the Juvenile Affairs Board, the Blind Society and to other committees. Mrs. Gipson, President of the NCW in 1923-4 and a member of the Women's Enfranchisement League, was likewise elected to the Hospital Board and from 1929 to 1931 became the second woman to sit on the PECC.<sup>145</sup> Mrs. Holland succeeded Mrs. Anderson on the PECC in 1935. There were thus strong connections between official and non-official channels of power. Ties with central government had already been cemented since the 1920s by Mrs. Tonkin's membership of the NCW. This was continued in 1937 by Mrs. Holland's appointment to the new Advisory Council of the Minister of Social Welfare, established for the purposes of discussing social questions in general and unemployment in particular.

Middle class women's close identification with the official structures of power meant that their humanitarian causes, were also inevitably infused with the gender, racial and class biases of the British colonial values prevailing in the local state. For example, mutual values were reinforced globally with other white, middle class women through the NCW's affiliation to the International Council for Women (ICW).<sup>146</sup> Consequently, the NCW, although suffragettes, suggested that the right type of participants in a Community Service consisted of the best informed women of a town enlisted for their 'sympathy, patience and tact', against that of "the strength, energy and ability of capable businessmen".<sup>147</sup> Yet, suffragist lobbying whether municipal or national, was purely for white women, as were militant concerns for equal pay voiced by Mrs. Gipson speaking about the

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<sup>145</sup> TAD, A 296 6/2/1, 'NCW News', May 1977; *EPH*, March 18, 1922.

<sup>146</sup> NCW, PE Branch, 'A Short History', p.2; Three Port Elizabeth committee members including Mrs. Tonkin, who held the portfolio for Trades and Professions, represented the NCW on the ICW.

<sup>147</sup> *PE Advertiser*, Cape of Good Hope, 16 June 1926.



Women's Enfranchisement League:

"After the franchise, battle not won. Still to work for equal pay, for equal work, equal moral standards."<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, the PEB's typically welfare ethos of Victorian paternalism became increasingly selective as regards industriousness, morality, temperance and race. The Chief Sanitary Inspector again reported:

"Most of the persons dealt with by this society have been hard working, self-respecting citizens."<sup>149</sup>

while the establishment of separate hostels for white girls and black native servants was initiated by the NCW. Their lobbying for Women Police Patrols which arose in 1916 was "particularly for the protection of children in the charge of non-European (sic) nannies." It seems to have been part of a xenophobic scare much like the Black Peril waves of fear in the late 1890s, and intermittently between 1906 and 1913.<sup>150</sup>

Yet if there was a degree of commonality between these organisations, cleavages nevertheless developed between the PECC and themselves, and even between and within the societies. Particularly in the absence of a clear state policy towards poverty, these took the form of bureaucratic/conservative splits. In struggling vainly with local conditions, the PEB expended much effort in challenging local and central government for an increase in grants, as well as for a greater provision of poor relief in general. The PEB strongly urged that the government should, in fact, assume total responsibility not only for the indigent but also for the unemployed. They queried large amounts readily designated to upgrading beach attractions but yet withheld from the payment of 'additional poor relief' sanctioned by legislation.<sup>151</sup> At the same time, while the erosion of poverty would have dovetailed with the PECC's interest in attracting more industry to Port Elizabeth, it seemed that employed labour was more important to them. Thus, parsimonious elements in local

<sup>148</sup> *EPH*, 18 March 1922.

<sup>149</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector to Social Welfare Committee, 17 November 1926.

<sup>150</sup> J. Coulter, 'The History of the PE Ladies' Benevolent Society, 1861- 1986', p.21; NCW 'Short History' p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> PEB Correspondence, 74, 9 December 1925.

government felt unable to commit to a permanent increase in the poor relief grant. What grants did exist were purely arbitrary and were even reduced during the Depression in the face of mounting poverty and TB. There were, however, a number of public works programmes which ran from 1931 to 1941 and were jointly funded by the local and central states during the Depression.<sup>152</sup>

However, a split also occurred within the PEB, during the 1920s, between those concerned with urgent poor relief funding and those who seemed to be more concerned with bureaucratic procedure and possibly their allegiance to parsimonious elements on the PECC. During the great economic hardship of the 1920s, when the PEB was increasingly hard pressed to continue poor relief work, it asked the PECC for the provision of a stable source of funds.<sup>153</sup> In 1926, it pleaded for a yearly grant of 500 pounds per month. However, at this point, Mrs. Hannam of both the PEB and the NCW, Mrs. Tonkin and members on the PECC, such as Councillors Anderson and Hay, Hannam's brother-in-law, felt one year should be spent researching and constructing the establishment of a central charity organisation body for the equitable distribution of funds. This would consist of the best informed women of the town, capable businessmen, students of social science and voluntary social workers in the field. A division occurred over this within the PEB and between the PEB and the NCW as to the need for the immediacy of poor relief as well as the exclusion of the NCW from a central co-ordinating body in order to avert outside domination of Poor Relief societies.<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile the PECC voted the PEB a mere 100 pounds per month for 1926.<sup>155</sup> The next year the PEB resigned in protest from the NCW. Nevertheless, a Municipal Welfare Committee was set up to investigate the establishment in 1933 of a Social Welfare Department of the Municipality, which functioned erratically for six months before dissolving. Finally, a Central Charity Organisation was

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<sup>152</sup> see E. Nel and C.M. Rogerson, "Incipient Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape", *Contree*, p.3.

<sup>153</sup> PEB, Miscellaneous, Circular issued to City Councillors, 10 September, 1925.

<sup>154</sup> Divisions also occurred along conservative/liberal lines. Cherry has pointed out the reactionary attitude of R.P. Hannam "the leading light of the New Brighton Benevolent Society and later the Joint Council of Europeans and Bantu" towards aspects of the Ballingers efforts in trade union organisation in the 1940s (Cherry, 'The Myth of Working Class Defeat: Port Elizabeth in the Post-War Years', *Kronos*, 20, November 1993, p.10).

<sup>155</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, 1926; PEB, Annual Report, 1933.

established in 1935.

Official confusion continued and during the Depression of 1929 - 1933 a mass meeting of 500 women and concerned societies underlined the appalling state of the poor and that Port Elizabeth was blighted by the second highest death rate in the country.<sup>156</sup> It attempted to force the PECC to commit itself to the extra funding of welfare organisations or take on the expense of the poor itself. During the Depression social welfare organisations accelerated the pace of their work with the Mayor's Emergency Fund, the NCW directed its efforts to the more affected blacks and coloureds, supplying a soup kitchen in New Brighton, oranges for school children at Korsten and the distribution of milk. At this time the NCW emphasized the importance of housing and set itself firmly in place as the watchdog over this and related conditions at Korsten. It was only in the 1930s that the central government, intent on eradicating 'poor whiteism', passed social welfare legislation, such as the Old Age Pensions Act in 1929. This relieved the PEB of old age care. In 1931, the Department of Labour was extended to include Social Welfare while the Factory Act of 1918 was simultaneously improved. Finally strapped by lack of cash, the PEB dissolved its poor relief programme in 1934.

## CONCLUSION

Nascent industrialization received a significant boost from the 1st World War, a fact which had enormous repercussions for the whites in the surrounding hinterland. An ongoing agrarian revolution was loosening their ties to the land so that large scale urbanisation of this non- migrant, settled type of labour presented itself early on to manufacturers as a marketable advantage. Then, within eight years of World War 1 having ended, both the Pact government and industry itself were driving a wedge between women in the formal workforce, by encouraging the employment of whites first. Large numbers of white women replaced coloured women, while black women were not considered as suitable employees for industry. So too, in the 1930s, the 'liberal' PECC perpetuated residential segregation by selectively clearing slums for industrial land, giving emphasis to the provision of white housing and creating labour pools of segregated residential areas near to

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<sup>156</sup> J. Coulter, 'The History of the PE Ladies' Benevolent Society, 1861 - 1986', p. 21.

the industrial areas. This will be discussed later in the next chapter. Meanwhile, the welfare of the unemployed working class and the indigent, often consisting mainly of women, became the responsibility of the limited means of private charitable bodies. Thus from the outset of Port Elizabeth's industrial 'take-off', the nature of the city's political economy was giving rise to cleavages within PE society along lines of race, class and gender.

## **PART 11 - THE WORK SITUATION**

### **Chapter 2 - FORMAL EMPLOYMENT**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

It is the intention of this chapter to demonstrate the importance of white women in the industrial growth of Port Elizabeth; their structural position in industry in terms of gender and race; the nature of their experience in this field; and in general, the special factors at work in the proletarianization of white women. Set against a background of state ideology, it will also be shown that job protection began a year before the Pact government came to power and two years before the Wage Act was passed into legislation.

The division of labour brought about by the Industrial Revolution generally eroded the gender equality found in the rural work ethic. Increasing job competition among men in the capitalist system succeeded in ousting women and relegating them, at least theoretically, to the now nuclear household. Since the working class family needed the wages of women, they too, were absorbed into formal employment. This was usually at a lower level than men and entailed work of a domestic nature, such as shop assisting, work in clothing, food or leather factories and domestic work, which tended to consolidate the patriarchal order.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in SA, and particularly locally, white replaced coloured women and, in certain industries, a large number of white men. This gendered work allocation was further fragmented by racial divisions.

#### **2.2. THE GENDER BAR AND THE HIERARCHY OF THE JOB MARKET**

Patterns of female employment in Port Elizabeth, can be set against the national stratification of employment, as defined by race, class and gender. In SA it has always been white men who have had access to the most prestigious and well paid positions - in the clergy, central or local government, as employers in commerce and industry, as managers and to the prime positions of

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden From History, 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, (Pluto Press, London, 1974), p.2.

teachers, and clerks. SA factories have also employed mainly men. In Port Elizabeth they dominated the skilled positions in industry, the unskilled positions in the motor industry after 1924 (unlike the Rand), as well as the unskilled and semi-skilled openings in the footwear industry. As Freund points out, Port Elizabeth lay in the heartland of 'poor whiteism' and there was a higher component of poor whites in industry than in any other centre (see Table 2.1.)<sup>2</sup>. Thus industry vigorously applied the 'civilised labour' policy, - providing jobs for unskilled whites, and to a certain extent, at 'civilised' wage levels.

TABLE 2.1.<sup>3</sup>

Percentage of 'Poor Whites' in Industries, 1932 - 1937

Year	Union	W.Cape	PE	Durban	S.Tvl
1932-3	45 %	48 %	61 %	40 %	46 %
1936-7	42 %	45 %	59 %	36 %	42 %

The position of Coloured males was less clear-cut. Since the days of slavery, coloured males had maintained a hold on artisanal skills and as such were employable in skilled and semi-skilled positions.<sup>4</sup> Freund maintains that they were entrenched in skilled positions in the coastal towns, while van Duin points out that although they still had to contend with employer preference for whites in certain industries they often solved this by accepting a slightly lower pay scale than their white counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Although they were favoured over blacks in these positions, they were too

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<sup>2</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry," in A. Mabin (ed.), *Organisation and Economic Change. Southern African Studies*, vol. 6, p. 111, n. 81.

<sup>3</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth, 1903 - 1937: 'n Kultuurhistoriese Ondersoek', (PhD, University of Port Elizabeth, 1993), p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1962), p.260.

<sup>5</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry, p. 86; P. Van Duin, "Artisans and Trade Unions in the Cape Town Building Industry, 1900 - 1924",

expensive in unskilled jobs.<sup>6</sup> They were therefore also able to maintain ascendancy over white women (and blacks) in many skilled positions based on artisanal ability. In Port Elizabeth, they were the third largest group in industry after white and black men until 1929, when they were superseded by white females.

The patriarchal ordering of SA society determined that both the employment preferences of white women and the dictates of state and capital directed them to the domestic industries in the lower echelons of the job hierarchy. These were, in roughly descending status: teaching, nursing, clerical work, shop assisting, waitressing, seamstressing, factory work, midwifery, domestic work and even prostitution - with only the last seven being regarded as working class positions. Taking the North End as a sample, approximately 27% of white females over twenty one years were formally employed, mostly in factory work.<sup>7</sup> Although it was black, and to a lesser extent, coloured males who stepped into the vacuum left in industry by white men who went to war, white women were already the largest female component in industry in Port Elizabeth during WW1. Then from 1919 at the outset of the post-war recession, cheaper white, as well as coloured women, began to swell the unskilled or semi-skilled levels of the industrial labour force thereby eroding the 'gender bar'. However, in Port Elizabeth in the inter-war years, it was white women in particular who formed a rapidly growing component in this sector of industry.<sup>8</sup> This also served as a refuge from domestic work to which all racial groups were resistant. All races of women initially participated in domestic work,<sup>9</sup> but, as the lowest paying and most arduous job, these women withdrew from it as and when

in W.G. James and M. Simons (eds.), *The Angry Divide, Social and Economic History of the Western Cape*, (David Philips, Cape Town, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of An African Working Class: Port Elizabeth 1925-1963', (MA, University of Cape Town, 1992), p.42.

<sup>7</sup> Union of SA, Cape Province, Voters' List, Electoral Division, Port Elizabeth, (North), 1931.

<sup>8</sup> Union of SA, Office of Census and Statistics, Pretoria. Statistics of Production, State of Factories and Productive Industries (excluding Mining and Quarrying) in the Union, 1917 - 1936.

<sup>9</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity, Women in South African Industry 1900-1980*, (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1992), p.35; this was unlike the Rand and Natal where black male 'houseboys' were the norm, see C. van Onselen, "The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand,

social mobility and race protection would allow.<sup>10</sup> Thus coloured women and, after WW1, black women, tended to predominate in this sphere of work.

Black males however, were employed mainly in tertiary industry (services), and in Port Elizabeth in the PEM, railways, stores and the unskilled positions in industry as machine minders and machine operators that white and coloured females could not fill.<sup>11</sup> Although they formed the second largest group in industry in the study period, Cherry maintains that considering their rate of urbanisation and the growth of industry between 1921 and 1936, they were, nevertheless, underemployed.<sup>12</sup> In terms of skills, they were roughly sandwiched between white and coloured men on the one hand, and black females on the other. Wages paid to white men in manufacturing in 1926, averaged 97s. 6d. per week, and 42s.1d for white women. 'Non-European' men received only 26s 1d. As this last figure includes higher coloured wages, black wages would therefore have been even lower.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, gender and race discrimination ensured that black women were relegated to the lowest rung of the employment ladder, having virtually no access to industrial employment, until the advent of WW2. Those few that were employed in PE factories in 1920 received only 10s per week as compared with white women in manufacturing who, only a few years later, received 43s. per week.<sup>14</sup> Remaining options for black women were domestic work and a variety of pursuits in the informal sector, such as beer brewing, laundressing, hawking, or even prostitution.

1890-1914" in C.van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, vol. 2, New Nineveh*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> C. van Onselen, 'The Witches of Suburbia', pp. 5, 13, 16.

<sup>11</sup> G. Baines, 'The Disturbances of October 1920', (MA, Rhodes University, 1988), p.19; it was only after the 1933 boom, that industrialists became more articulate about the growing necessity for African labour.

<sup>12</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of the African Working Class', p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1927, pp. 234, 238, 240; however, an average wage of 2/6 to 2/9 per day was quoted in 3/PEZ 4/2/1/1/423, Report of Inspector of Native Urban Locations, 20 October, 1936.

<sup>14</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1925, p.240.



Thus, the position of white women in employment has to be understood in terms of a patriarchal and racial ordering, entrenched by the state. Those who could not find employment - and perhaps some who valued their economic independence - resorted to work in the informal sector. Groups in both formal and informal work will be analysed in order to investigate the structural conditions under which women lived in Port Elizabeth. Within formal work, industry and domestic service, the predominant areas of white female working class employment will be examined.

### 2.3 WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

While the significant role of white women in industry has been emphasized by many histories - and it was certainly so in Port Elizabeth - the women nevertheless formed a relatively small percentage of the overall white female population here.<sup>15</sup> The growth of industrial employment in Port Elizabeth was most noticeable among males of all races in the study period, while only 4.5% of the white female population was engaged in industry in 1918, a figure which rose to 7.8% in 1926 and 13% in 1936 (see Table 2.2.).

**TABLE 2.2.**  
**Percentage of Port Elizabeth's White Female Population**  
**in the Industrial Workforce, 1918 - 1936<sup>16</sup>**

Year	PE	SA
1918	4.5%	4.5%
1926	7.8%	7.5%
1936	13.0%	9.1%

In the North End in particular, only 10% of the women in 1931 worked in factories, a sizeable but

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<sup>15</sup> Union of SA, Cape Province, Voters List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>16</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1918-1936.

seemingly not dominant occupation of their class.<sup>17</sup> Thus the majority of working class women were occupied outside the factories and claims of labour shortages in times of economic upswing become more understandable.<sup>18</sup> Yet, since more than 50% of the white female population were working class (see p. 39), and since marriage would have claimed many factory workers probably at a relatively young age, it seems certain that a greater proportion of women over a period of time would have worked in the factories.

**TABLE 2.3.**  
**Percentage of White Women in the Industrial Workforce, 1918 - 1936<sup>19</sup>**

Year	PE	SA	Tvl.
1918	10,4	4,5	--
1924	11,1	4,0	4,0
1926	14,1	5,2	--
1934	21,6	9,1	--
1935	20,7	8,6	8,0
1936	19,0	8,3	--

Nevertheless, they formed a greater percentage of the overall industrial labour force than that of any other major centre (see Table 2.3). In 1924, whereas the white female industrial workforce totalled 4% of the overall industrial workforce both in the Union and the Southern Transvaal, it comprised 10% in Port Elizabeth. By 1935/6, the figures had increased to 8.6%, 8% and a notable 21% respectively. This growth was at the cost of coloured female employment, a process which will be discussed in detail in sections 2.4. - 2.6. Combined coloured and white employment throughout the study period, but especially at the onset of industrialisation, helped to ensure that

<sup>17</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>18</sup> CeA, ARB 931 F10/3, Emergency Hostel for Girls in the Clothing Industry, PE, Letter Inspector of Factories to D. Tonkin, 8 December 1925; CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, Minutes of Evidence, PE, p. 2172.

<sup>19</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1918-1936.

Port Elizabeth had the highest female employment percentage in the Union.<sup>20</sup> The majority of these women were Afrikaans-speaking.

The three largest employers were, in order of importance, the leather and leatherware industries (especially the boot and shoe industry), clothing (mainly shirts and boyswear) and textiles and food and beverages, such as biscuits, confectionary, sweet making and fruit canning.<sup>21</sup> In 1919-20, there were 39 food and beverage, 26 clothing and textile and 25 leather and leatherware factories indicating that at that early date, nearly half of the total 202 factories in operation in Port Elizabeth employed women. Women comprised between a quarter to a fifth of the workforce in these industries which were important since they also absorbed between 34% and 28% of all industrial employment.<sup>22</sup> By 1935/6, the female labour force in textiles and footwear increased to 43%.<sup>23</sup>

The age profile of the women employed in these industries changed during the study period. Prior to the Factory Act, no. 28 of 1918, children under 14 years old worked in the factories, some after school closed at 1.30 until 6 p.m.<sup>24</sup> While this was prohibited by the Act, the youthful contingent may have been further reduced by the Free Education Ordinance passed in the following year in the

<sup>20</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1918-1936; Whereas in 1918, the female percentage of the SA industrial workforce was 10.4%, that figure was already surpassed in Port Elizabeth in 1916/17 at 15% so that by 1918 it had reached 19.6% (Official Year Book, No.2, 1918, p.535).

<sup>21</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1917 - 1936; Port Elizabeth City of Industrial and Commercial Opportunity, 22, SA Pamphlets, vol. 80. Port Elizabeth had one of the largest fruit canning jam and sweet factories in the Union, while the international company of Cadbury Fry was established in Port Elizabeth in 1936, (PEM, Port Elizabeth, City of Industrial and Commercial Opportunity, 22, South African Pamphlets, vol.80, p.46).

<sup>22</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1934-5; Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1921, p.651.

<sup>23</sup> J. Cherry, 'The Making of An African Working Class', p.15.

<sup>24</sup> CeA, K 35, vol. 3, Unemployment Commission, p. 2180; the Factory Act prohibited the employment of children under 14 years of age while also limiting people under 16 years regulating to certain types of jobs, a 45 hr. week and an 8 hour day; prohibited night work in factories and limited overtime (Union of SA, Report of the Secretary for Education, Part 11, Child Welfare, UG 61 - '20, pp. 28-29).

Cape which stipulated that children could not leave school before they passed standard six.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, in 1920, 20% of the white female industrial workforce was under 18 years of age. 71% of these worked in the Leather Industry. By 1923-4 the average age had risen, since only 14% were under 18.<sup>26</sup> Corrie Gerber, for example, started at Playdons at the age of 17 in 1929, while Susanna du Preez was 19 when she started at Mosenthals Clothing in 1929. While the amended Factory Act raised the age limit for employment to 16 years in 1931, the patriarchal belief that married women were provided for by husbands and so did not need to work kept the average age - and the wage bill - low. Thus, Susanna du Preez worked only for one year after her marriage at 25. Likewise, Margaret Henry had to relinquish her job as a bookbinder when she married in the mid to late 1930s due to an agreement that had been instituted by the employer controlled trade union.<sup>27</sup>

Absorption of white women into factory work was due to a number of reasons. Firstly, while families, as we have seen, saw factory employment for their daughters as the means by which to secure a niche in the economy, girls themselves also saw it as the mechanism for personal advancement in the more diversified milieu of the town. As the Carnegie Commission reported of the newly urbanised white woman:

"She snatches at the chance of employment ..... In Port Elizabeth in 43 visits to poor homes (37 of which were of families who had come from the country) I found only one child at home who might in my opinion have been out earning ..... the life and activities of the town make her want to join in. More than one factory-employer told me that girls give a false age in order to get work in the factory before the statutory age."<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the period, public perception was that women were the most suited to factory work. Employers tended to see them as submissive labour and their "nimble fingers" particularly suited

<sup>25</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, p. 2181.

<sup>26</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Books, 1918-1924.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews, S. du Preez, Mr. Kemsley.

<sup>28</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V(b)*, (Stellenbosch, 1932), p. 208.



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Illustration 2.1. THE UNION CHROME TANNING COMPANY, LEATHER MANUFACTURER, 1917 ('The Industrial Facilities and Advantages of Port Elizabeth and District, 1917')

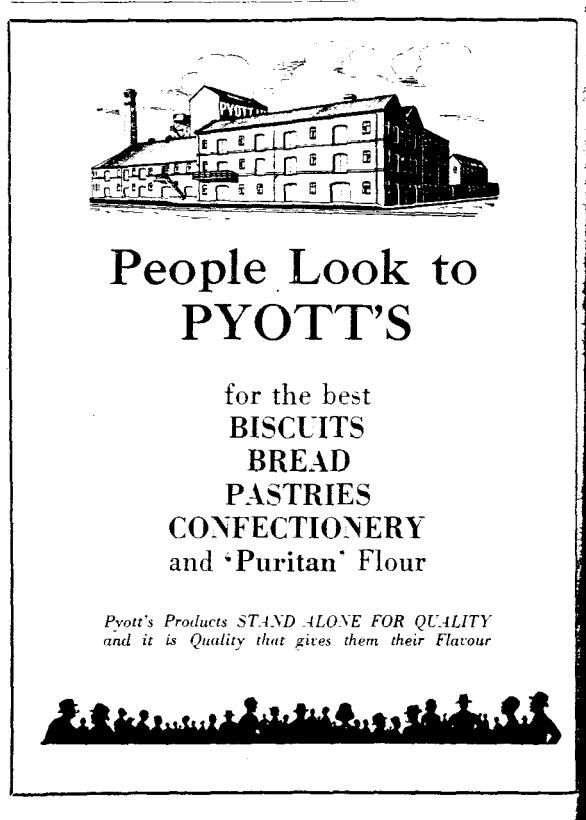
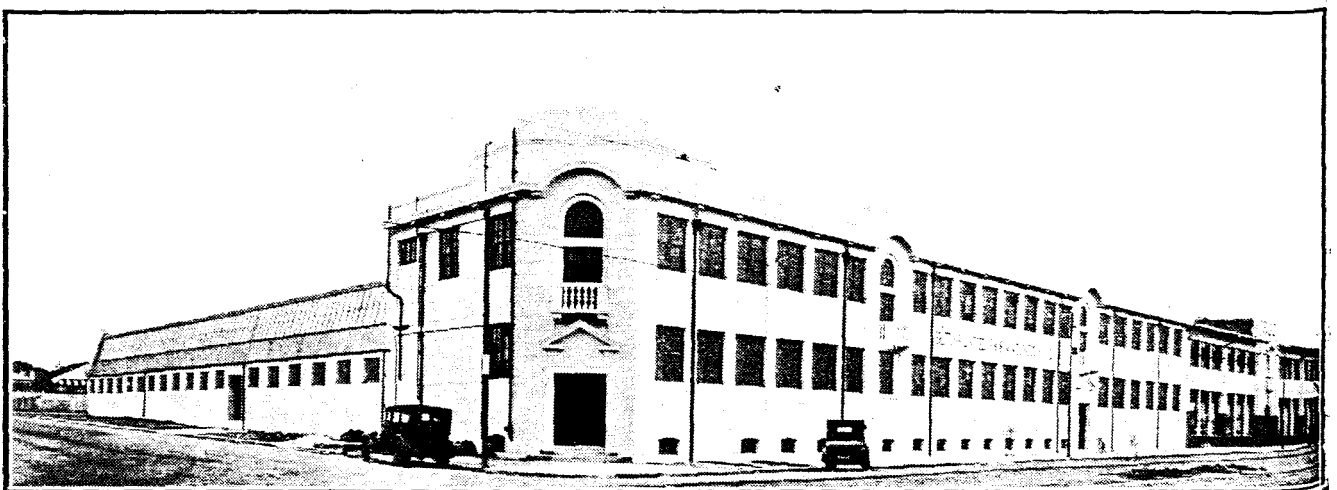


Illustration 2.2. ADVERTISEMENT FOR PYOTTS, 1930 (The First Port Elizabeth Annual, 1930)



A LEADING SHOE MACHINERY SUPPLY HOUSE

[Photo: Wodehouse]

Illustration 2.3. BRITISH UNITED SHOE MACHINERY, 1930 (The First Port Elizabeth Annual, 1930)

to factory work.<sup>29</sup> Again the Carnegie Commission reported:

"The poor children from the rural areas react well to factory discipline and are more co-operative and content with less."<sup>30</sup>

Exhibiting a similar class bias, Councillor Mrs. Holland remarked in 1935:

"Country boys and girls have a special aptitude for this work."<sup>31</sup>

The work contingent in Port Elizabeth seemed particularly suitable for factory work, the Carnegie Commission reporting their "docile and tractable disposition - far more so than the majority of those on the Witwatersrand, for instance," and that the challenge of adjusting to a somewhat hostile British society had been ultimately beneficial to their character.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps more to the point was that employers saw women as being subsidized by male relatives and unaffected by apprenticeship regulations. When they reached the age where better wages had to be paid according to the Factory Act, the Carnegie Commission noted for Port Elizabeth, that they were often dismissed in favour of younger, cheaper labour.<sup>33</sup> However, the state also demonstrated a very definite interest in their absorption into industry.

### 2.3.1. STATE AND REGIONAL IMPERATIVES

The great extent to which white women played a role in the industrialization of Port Elizabeth was largely facilitated by the Pact government's civilised labour policy widely implemented after 1926, in terms of both job creation and a 'civilised wage'. In fact industry was a crucial area where white women were elevated and separated from both black competition in the rural areas for domestic or

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<sup>29</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*. p. 29; E. Brink, 'The Afrikaner Women of the Garment Workers' Union, 1918 - 1939', (MA Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1986), p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> J.R. Albertyn, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *EPH*, 14 August 1935.

<sup>32</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus. The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, (Pro - Ecclesia Drukkery, Stellenbosch, 1932), p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, p. 210.

A PORT ELIZABETH FACTORY EMPLOYS OVER 200  
WHITE PEOPLE IN MAKING—

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## "GOLD REEF" JAM

Illustration 2.4. WHITE WOMEN IN THE AFRICAN CANNING AND PACKING CORPORATION, 1934 (EPH)



farm help and in the town from inter-racial mixing. Prior to that, the economy was relatively free from state intervention in both the development of secondary industry and in the racial division of labour. As Freund notes, the early SA industrialists, facilitated by the paucity of welfare and labour legislation, did not see the composition of the labour force as a priority issue:

"The central issue for them .... was the creation of a guaranteed national market through the erection of high tariff barriers ..."<sup>34</sup>

Although a precedent for the protection of white labour had been established by the 1918 Factory Act, including the stipulation of minimum wages in certain jobs, according to Solly Sachs:

"the Act was badly drafted and little attention was given to enforcing it. Exploitation continued unchecked for many years...."<sup>35</sup>

However, the Pact government attempted to address the development of both industry, which was struggling during the post-war recession, and the elevation of white, unskilled labour in particular. The interests of the latter were to be attended to firstly by job creation through the implementation of the Customs and Tariff Excise Amendment Act. Berger points out that state protectionism also stimulated the rapid expansion of industry:

"by means of increased mechanization, job fragmentation and deskilling, undermining the position of many established employees.....".<sup>36</sup>

Protection of whites was also implemented by wage hikes through the Wage Act's 'rate for the job', both of which were established in 1925. These racial imperatives were to be facilitated by labour bureaux and complemented by the assumption of governmental responsibility for housing or accommodation.

However a partnership could not and did not always exist between state, white labour and capital in all regions, so that government labour policy was implemented in Port Elizabeth in terms of job creation rather than higher wages. Although the Wage Board usually directed its attention to marginal industries, in the Eastern Cape and Port Elizabeth it was fairly sensitive to regional needs where it often kept wages lower than on the Rand, in order to encourage development. This was

<sup>34</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry," p.93.

<sup>35</sup> E.S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, (MacGibbon and Kee, 1957), p.26.

<sup>36</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.48.

the case in the clothing industry. The Wage Board also took cognizance of the particularly large white component in Port Elizabeth's industrial workforce and thus the disadvantage to industry of a heavier wage bill. Regional conditions such as the centrality of the town in 'poor white territory' (of the Cape Midlands) had led to the availability and placement of a large supply of white labour. Therefore, whilst white wages in Port Elizabeth industry were three times higher than those for blacks, the wage differential was made lower than that for the Union, which was five times higher.<sup>37</sup> This had an important influence on local business and state who were able to incorporate this factor into their industrial policy or, as Robinson has defined it, 'place entrepreneurialism'.<sup>38</sup> As a Report of the Department of Labour was later to note:

"Factory occupiers prefer to employ one class of Labour rather than go to the expense of providing separate conveniences on a racial basis ..... (and due to) the policy of tactfully reminding industry of the measures of protection they enjoy ..... (the) subsidising of industry where civilised labour is employed ... (and) the regular inspection of works where the tenderers have been successful in gaining government contracts."<sup>39</sup>

This not only facilitated the inclusion of great numbers of women but also the reorganization of the labour process. Freund supplies the following statistics for the period 1924/5 to 1929/30:

"the national white workforce in industry rose from 42 898 to 58 402, a rise of 36%..... more than a 1/3 of this increase was accounted for by women workers."<sup>40</sup>

Port Elizabeth showed a more dramatic rise in that while the white workforce in industry increased by 43%, white women formed 41% of this increase.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> In 1922 - 23, the average Port Elizabeth wage for whites was 100 pounds as compared to the Union average of 248 pounds, while that for 'non - Europeans' was 60 pounds as compared to the Union average of 48 pounds (Official Year Book, 1924, pp. 550 - 1).

<sup>38</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality and State Power in South African Cities - Port Elizabeth 1923-1972, (Ph.D., Cambridge University, 1990), p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> CAD LIP 5/1, vol.11, Annual Report Department of Labour, 1937, pp.2-3.

<sup>40</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry," p.89.

<sup>41</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1924 - 1932.

### 2.3.2. GENDER AND THE COLOUR BAR - "...DEFINITELY A WHITE LABOUR CENTRE."

Although Berger indicates that the greatest impact of mechanization was felt by white and coloured women, especially in the Transvaal, the Western and Eastern Cape, in Port Elizabeth coloured women increasingly bore the brunt of the state's racial policies in industry after 1923.<sup>42</sup> While, in Port Elizabeth industry in general, coloured women numbered only 91 as against 516 white women in 1916-17, by 1918 they had risen substantially to 315 while their white counterparts had virtually remained static at 549. Hereafter, both groups increased at virtually the same rate, coloured women reaching a peak of 504 in 1923. However, it is after this year that their employment began a downward slide. As early as 1924, only two 'non-white' women were employed in the Leather Industry and in 1927 the clothing companies of Griqua and Mosenthals had no coloured female employees at all.<sup>43</sup>

During the Depression, according to Berger, only white women increased as a proportion of the total industrial workforce. The numbers subsequently declined in the recovery period when women started moving to less arduous, more prestigious jobs in for example, offices, shops or cafes.<sup>44</sup> Aided in this by the 'whites first' policy of the Fusion government, their numbers in industry were reduced by half. However, the latter was not true for Port Elizabeth where, after coloured women's numbers in industrial employ had plummeted to an all-time low of 153 in 1932, the numbers of white women employed in the same sector continued to increase rapidly during the 1930s so that by 1936, they were almost exactly double the 1928-29 figure. Put another way, until 1924, white women were only a third to a half more numerous in industry than 'non-European' females, but by

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<sup>42</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.49; Union of SA, Census and Statistics, Production, 1917 - 1936; CeA, ARB 211, LC 1054/283, R. Rogers to Secretary for Labour, 21 February 1927.

<sup>43</sup> CeA, ARB 211, LC 1054/283, United Garment Workers Union of the Eastern Province, 21 February 1927.

<sup>44</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 59; Goldin says it increased in the Depression because of deskilling, *Making Race. The Politics of Coloured Identity in South Africa*, (Maskew Miller Longman), pp.45-6.

1934 were an astounding fifteen and a half times more numerous.<sup>45</sup> The Inspector of Labour complacently reported:

"The replacement of coloured workers by European women continues and it can be said as regards the women factory workers, Port Elizabeth is definitely a white labour centre."<sup>46</sup>

At this point some factories had all white workers.<sup>47</sup>

This can be illustrated more graphically with reference to specific industries. The leather Industry was the biggest employer of white women at the beginning of the study period, and the clothing and textile industry had a predominance of white females, the food and beverage employed mostly coloured women. Whatever their racial composition in 1918, each of the three industries was, by 1936, dominantly white. The Pact government's intervention is especially clear in the food and beverage industry where coloured women exceeded white (227:133) until 1926. Thereafter followed a dramatic reversal and a clear exhibition of the collusion between state policy and the needs of this industry. The very next year, only 140 coloured women remained in its employ as against 227 white women.<sup>48</sup> Since the food and beverage industry was the largest employer of coloured women, this discrimination was particularly harsh and was part of a wider attack on the status of Port Elizabeth's coloured population.

A relatively narrow racial wage gap was undoubtedly also partially created by the ready availability of cheap exploitable white female labour. During the post war recession in 1922 the Wage Board actually dropped the wages of unindentured young women in the wholesale tailoring industry from 17/6d to 10/- per week and those of women from 27/- to 10/- per week in order to assist employers.<sup>49</sup> In manufacturing in general, in the mid 1920s, the average weekly wage of the white

<sup>45</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1917 -1938.

<sup>46</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Report of the Department of Labour, 1931, p.6.

<sup>47</sup> Touleier, The Poor White Problem in South Africa, 1, SA Pamphlets, vol.80, n.d., p.29; Port Elizabeth, City of Industrial and Commercial Opportunity, 22, SA Pamphlets, vol.80, p.42.

<sup>48</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1917 - 1936.

<sup>49</sup> *PE Advertiser*, 16 December 1922; A 296 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 27 June 1922.

female labour force was the lowest out of all the large industrial centres, and nearly a third lower than on the Rand and Bloemfontein.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, women's wages, in effect, subsidized industry in Port Elizabeth.

By the late 1920s when mechanization and an economic upswing were under way, the Wage Board did set determinations, especially at higher levels.<sup>51</sup> However, often when wage determinations were raised for Port Elizabeth, they were quite simply ignored. Determinations for the sweet, clothing and baking industries, for instance, were described by the EPH as having "all gone west."<sup>52</sup> Clearly local industrialists in the less competitive region of the East Cape were keen to exploit both the large availability of labour and an apparently sympathetic Wage Board. By the end of the study period, the most lucrative employment for women in PE industry was skilled retail tailoring, followed equally by leatherwork, sweetmaking, and wholesale clothing manufacture, while the cleaning and dyeing industry was the most poorly paid.<sup>53</sup>

Thus demographic factors, Pact's white labour programme and lack of national integration in industry, permitted a local structuring of the workforce in Port Elizabeth employing a larger percentage of white women than for the rest of the Union and a clear division on the grounds of colour and gender. Large scale replacement of coloured women in many industries and of white men in the clothing industry occurred. It also meant that regional patterns of capitalist development entrenched low, gender-determined wages, and that white women in PE industry were not able to benefit from the civilised labour policy to the extent that their sisters on the Rand did. Thus white women in Port Elizabeth played a major role in industry in terms of numbers and their wages in the subsidisation of its development.

Aside from regional differences, differential labour practices characterized local industries as will be seen in two case studies of the biggest white female employers - the clothing and textile and the

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<sup>50</sup> Official Year Book, 1924, no.7, Table C, p.258.

<sup>51</sup> CeA, ARB 1069/22/3/5, Clothing Prosecutions, PE, 11 February 1931.

<sup>52</sup> *EPH*, 13 February 1928; It was only in 1938 that the Garment Workers Union agitated for and attained a determination in Port Elizabeth.

<sup>53</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1937, pp. 315, 316.

leather industries.

### 2.3.3. PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT IN TWO CASE STUDIES

#### 2.3.3.1. THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY - ".....FROM THEIR CRADLE DAYS, ACCUSTOMED TO USING NEEDLE AND THREAD."

The labour force of the clothing industry, particularly in SA has been very exploitable. There are two major reasons for this: unlike certain other industries, the garment industry was reliant on local capital, and therefore very vulnerable to the pressure of international trade.<sup>54</sup> For example, the wholesale clothing industry in Port Elizabeth got off to a tentative start when two small trouser factories, begun in 1915, closed down a year or two later because of overseas competition.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, being labour intensive, wages were the most obvious area in which to cut costs, particularly during times of economic recession. This largely affected women who have universally made up the bulk of the clothing trade's labour force. According to a contemporary writer on the poor white problem, women were most suited to this work being, "...almost from their cradle days, accustomed to using needle and thread...".<sup>56</sup>

Such vulnerability existed at the inception of SA's clothing industry in the 19th century. As in the case of both the USA and Britain, the industry was then centred on the craft of individual tailors and seamstresses, or Master Tailors who oversaw the labour of a sweatshop. Here, either female family members or female employees (usually asiatic or coloured women) performed special tasks such as machining, pressing, felling, buttonholing, and worked extremely long hours for little pay. The level of exploitation clearly seemed to be associated

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<sup>54</sup> By comparison, engineering which used foreign and mining capital, steel and railways, which used state capital.

<sup>55</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry of South Africa, 1907-1957*, (Pallas Publications, Johannesburg, 1962), p.14.

<sup>56</sup> Touleier, (pseud.), *The Poor White Problem in South Africa*, 1, SA Pamphlets, vol.80, n.d. p. 29.

with specific social conditions. Barker has made the point that 'sweated labour' which prevailed in much of the clothing industry in Britain and the USA with the sanction of legislation and public opinion, was symptomatic "of much more widespread social and industrial evils".<sup>57</sup> Often middlemen also had a hand in the process, by way of the 'cut, make and trim' method, whereby they merely supplied orders and material to the sweatshops without the cost of overheads. In Port Elizabeth it was a "couple" of these 'cut-make-and-trim' establishments which replaced the failed factories of 1915.<sup>58</sup>

The end of the 1st World War also saw the spread of small, wholesale, bespoke clothing factories. By 1919-20 there were 26 Clothing and Textile factories in Port Elizabeth, such as Mosenthals, Griqua and Victory, while in 1922, Teikamdas Brothers saw fit to move their wholesale section from Kimberley to Port Elizabeth.<sup>59</sup> Here, it was mainly white females who increasingly dominated employment, occupying a roughly intermediate position between skilled white males on the one hand and coloured women and black men who worked as pressers doing the heavier work.<sup>60</sup> They entered factory production in either unskilled jobs, such as "cleaning, i.e. cutting off ends, folding, affixing labels or tickets etc." or in semi-skilled positions which included "machining, hand tailoring, pressing, machine cutting..".<sup>61</sup> This last category of employment became more readily available with the expansion of machine production and therefore deskilling in the late 1920's. For example, in 1928 in Port Elizabeth, Susanna du Preez became a machinist of men's suits as soon as she entered employment, while her sister was a pattern cutter at fifteen years old.<sup>62</sup>

Displacement of coloured women in the 1920s and 1930s by whites underlined the increasing

<sup>57</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p.8.

<sup>58</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p.14.

<sup>59</sup> *EPH*, 13 January 1922.

<sup>60</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", pp. 87-88.

<sup>61</sup> E.S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, p.108.

<sup>62</sup> Interview, S. du Preez.

grip they had on the job market - acquired mainly in times of economic growth. By the end of WW1, the daughters of poor whites formed two thirds of the work force, outnumbering coloured women. Then in 1923, the post-war economic recession briefly took hold of the clothing industry when three times as many (cheaper) coloured women replaced white women. By 1926, however, perhaps buoyed by the economic upswing, the state had successfully intervened to reverse the process. In this year the male workforce was also drastically reduced and white women in this sector increased fourfold (see Table 2.4). Coloured women were reduced by approximately one third of their original number. Thereafter white women's numbers continued to grow (from 3:1 in 1926 to 7.8:1 in 1933-4) until 1936 when coloured women again started to increase as a proportion of the workforce.

All these forms of the industry were fuelled by the unchecked exploitation of female labour. In the small-scale, localized sweatshops, women were to remain unskilled, unorganised and underpaid.<sup>63</sup>

**TABLE 2.4.**

**Women and Race in the Clothing Industry in Port Elizabeth, 1918 - 1936<sup>64</sup>**

Year	White Women	'Non-White'	Coloured	Asian
1918	76	24	--	--
1921	107	5	--	--
1923	51	152	--	--
1926	242	80	--	--
1933	435	--	256	14
1936	615	--	212	14

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<sup>63</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p.4.

<sup>64</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, *State of Factories, 1918 - 1936*.



Thus, women in industrial manufacture were caught up by the competition between tailors and the emerging wholesale industry. John Warren, General Secretary to the Federation of Trades, and Secretary to the Tailoring Union highlighted the resulting wage discrepancies:

"tailors do piecework - between 80 and 90 per cent are coloured - they get 22s. 6d. for a coat, 4s.6d. for a waistcoat and 9s.6d. for trousers. People have to work hard to earn 4 pounds a week - mostly Malays. We have established a Workers' Board for Tailors on account of the wholesale manufacturer, where the girls get only 7d. for a pair of trousers, 6d. for shirts and they work from 8 to 6 for 14s.6d. a week. They earn 14s. 6d. a week, which is the pay for 29 shirts - the work is mostly done by girls and women. A tailor gets 8s.6d. or 9s.6d. for making trousers, whereas the girls only get 7d. for doing the same work."<sup>65</sup>

Wage discrepancies also reflected racial divisions. In 1926, the racial wage gap was far higher in Port Elizabeth than that of the Cape Peninsula, Durban or Kingwilliamstown (see table 2.5.). While the Wage Board had allowed employers a low white wage in the coastal areas - unlike the Rand - it had forced a relatively higher one on the PE clothing industry.<sup>66</sup> This measure was perhaps sufficiently compensated for by the reduction of the more expensive, white and coloured male workforce since the clothing industry in Port Elizabeth showed a relatively high profit margin along with the lowest capital input out of four large manufacturing centres.<sup>67</sup> Thus, unlike the food and beverage industry, clothing in Port Elizabeth had shown a continuing preference for white female labour facilitated by lower wages than on the Rand. Although wholesale firms initially operated on a bespoke basis, with the expansion of the industry there was an increasing shift towards the wholesale manufacture of 'ready-to-wear' garments. The Depression affected the clothing industry and its employment of women, in that one knitwear factory closed while another reduced its

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<sup>65</sup> Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Causes of and Occurrences at the Native Disturbances at Port Elizabeth on 23rd October 1920, and the general economic conditions as they affect the Coloured and Native Population, UG 7-'21.

<sup>66</sup> E. S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, pp. 26 - 27.

<sup>67</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p. 23.

complement from 400 - 220 between 1929 and 1931.<sup>68</sup>

**TABLE 2.5.**

**Average Weekly Wage for Female Employees  
in the Clothing Industry, February 1926<sup>69</sup>**

Area	Juveniles u.21		Adults	
	Whites	Coloureds	Whites	Coloureds
W.Cape	13s 10d	12s 4d	1 3s 10d	19s 11d
PE	19s 8d	12s 11d	1 3s 4d	15s 8d
Durban	17s 6d	19s 4d	1 3s 11d	1 3s 10d
Kingwmtn.	13s 4d	--	13s 6d	--

However, in the long term the Depression dislodged 'handicraft tailors' releasing more business to the wholesale industry and stimulated efficiency, productivity and greater (white) employment in the wholesale industry.<sup>70</sup> By 1931, Port Elizabeth was the third biggest producer of clothing in SA, supporting one knitwear factory and three producing men's and boys' outerwear, one of which, Mosenthal's, was situated in Rufane Vale and employed 300 hands.<sup>71</sup>

Expansion, however, meant a floor space problem. Employers were not legally compelled to

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<sup>68</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p.17.

<sup>69</sup> E.S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

provide workrooms so that by 1934 nearly all outwork was done in private homes. The Carnegie Commission reported "a very simple old widow" working from a rented room in Port Elizabeth, making shirts with a hand sewing machine for a Jewish shopkeeper. Her rate of pay was only nine shillings per dozen for both cutting out and sewing - barely a progression on the 1921 rates cited by Warren.<sup>72</sup> Outworking was still also an exploitative feature of bespoke - tailoring and common in an era of pre - mechanisation. However, an overall racial division within the industry at this time showed a distribution of mainly coloured and asiatic, but only about 20% white women in outworking and tailoring, white women predominating in the wholesale industry. Towards the end of the study period, according to the Board of Trades report, the industry

"represents a unique picture of old and new forms of organisation existing side by side. On the one hand there is the handicraft tailor, on the other hand is large-scale factory production, and in between are forms of organisation which bear a close resemblance to the "putting-out" or domestic system. These different organisational forms are the inevitable result of the gradual transition from handwork to machine processing, from contract work to factory organisation, and from production to a highly individualised demand to mass production."<sup>73</sup>

## UNIONISM IN THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

The trade unionism that developed in this industry occurred in two phases - in the late 1920s and again in the late 1930s. The first period was characterized by governmental control and the passive role of women. With the culmination of growing labour unrest in the 1922 Rand strike, the government had been keen to implement negotiating strategies. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, as a mechanism of control, therefore provided for the registration of craft unions and their membership of an Industrial Council. In Port Elizabeth in 1927, the Department of Labour itself initiated such action. The proposed union consisted of three companies, Mosenthal's, Griqua and Victory and 245 employees of which 207 were white females (see Table 2.6.). Despite the preponderance of females in the Union, only 84 appeared

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<sup>72</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part 1*, p. 218.

<sup>73</sup> Union of SA, Board of Trades and Industries, Report No. 303, The Clothing Industry, 1936, p. 14.

at the first meeting, only two were ultimately on the eight person committee and only one was an office bearer. The role of negotiators and leadership were therefore retained largely by men.<sup>74</sup>

**TABLE 2.6.**  
**Employees in Proposed Union for Port Elizabeth Clothing Industry**  
**in 1927<sup>75</sup>**

Company	Whites		Coloureds		Total
	M	F	M	F	
Mosenthals	4	191	3	-	198
Griqua	2	13	1	-	16
Victory	2	3	-	26	31
					---
					245
					---

Establishment of the union was delayed by two contentious issues. The Union wanted representation for the whole Eastern Cape since this would prevent undercutting of wages by a variety of competing unions and strengthen its bargaining power over wages. It would thus counter the government's obvious interest in a 'divide and rule' policy towards unions. The other issue, complementary to the first, was the exclusion by whites of coloured workers who were expected to establish their own union. In a region where state and capital had recognized

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<sup>74</sup> This despite the fact that the wages were relatively low and the work seemingly impermanent either due to recessions or retrenchment when promotion was due, as suggested by a newspaper advertisement which assured girls permanent work in the 'skiving' and 'folding' departments (*EPH*, 10 January 1922).

<sup>75</sup> CeA, United Garment Workers' Union of the Eastern Province, LC 1054/283, 21 February 1927.

the need to keep costs down, a smaller union would have greater leverage over wage increases. The most beneficial method involved a cleavage along lines of colour indicating an early date for the racial divisions among women in the clothing industry which was to be consolidated by racial segregation in the city. Little wonder then that the Employers Association attempted to expose this segregationist strategy to central government. The government, for its part, steadily resisted the establishment of a single union for the Eastern Cape from January 1927 until May 1927, when it finally succumbed to legal pressure. However, the Union was to be shortlived for the Depression followed in the next year disrupting the payment of union dues.<sup>76</sup>

The trade unionism that developed in the clothing industry in Port Elizabeth in the late 1930s was more militant than that of the 1920s and part of a national movement. It will only be sketched briefly, as this lies outside the study period and heralds the beginning of a new era of women's history in Port Elizabeth, and one which remains to be written. Weinbren and Solly Sachs, Communist leaders of the Garment Workers' Union (GWU) on the Rand since the 1920s, had tried unsuccessfully in 1930 and 1935 to get the Cape Union in the western Cape to join the national Union since lower wages there threatened to erode the higher Rand wages.<sup>77</sup> He also maintained that the working conditions in Port Elizabeth were poor and the low wages created structural insecurity among labour. The ineffectiveness and ambivalence of the Wage Board towards this imbalance has already been noted. It recommended that adjustments should proceed gradually so that the new determinations it provided in 1928, 1932 and 1939 merely served to entrench the lower wages at the coast. The Board of Trades Report of 1941 also supported the concern for regional development. In 1938, Katie Viljoen went to Port Elizabeth to organise union activity setting up a branch in the following year. It was only then that women themselves began to mobilize and an Industrial Conciliation Board was established for Port Elizabeth.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the demographic changes in this industry, saw the emergence of contradictory trends:

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<sup>76</sup> CeA, ARB 211, LC. 1054/283, United Garment Workers' Union of the Eastern Province, 1927-32

<sup>77</sup> E.S. Sachs, *Rebels' Daughters*, p.48.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

firstly, there was the implementation of the state's racially discriminatory civilised labour policy. Employers could implement this at least numerically because of the large supply of white labour. This was to the detriment of a sizeable coloured female industrial workforce; so much so that by 1934 there was a distinct racial polarization of white women in manufacturing industry and coloured and Asian in outworking. However, the imperatives of the Wage Act were not implemented fully in Port Elizabeth due to the regional imbalance in the industry. Growing exploitation in an absence of state welfare was not confronted by women in the study period and only addressed with outside help a few years later.<sup>79</sup>

#### 2.3.3.2. THE LEATHER INDUSTRY

The leather industry demonstrated different employment practices to the clothing industry. Being particularly large in Port Elizabeth, it overshadowed that of any other SA centre in terms of investment, output and employment. In 1917 it employed 47% of the country's shoe factory employees and by 1937, it produced 50% of the Union's production.<sup>80</sup> The Leather industry was particularly labour intensive. Its wholly white female component represented over half of the total white, industrial, female labour force in Port Elizabeth and was thus throughout the study period, the biggest employer of white women. It was also the biggest employer of girls under 18 years of age.<sup>81</sup> With these statistics in mind, Schauder may be right in maintaining that the Boot and Shoe Industry had helped cause the drift to the towns, and thus, indirectly, the problem of poor relief.<sup>82</sup> The Carnegie Commission referred to a PE shoe factory in 1929, where 55% of the 121 white female employees were 'Dutch' speaking and, although most had been living in Port Elizabeth for six years, 76% of the total number had

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<sup>79</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", p. 87.

<sup>80</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', p.17.

<sup>81</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1921, p. 657.

<sup>82</sup> H. Schauder, "An Economic History of the Boot and Shoe Industry in South Africa", *South African Journal of Economics*, 3, no.4, 1935, p. 545.

been born outside of the city.<sup>83</sup>

Like clothing, the South African footwear industry had started out in Port Elizabeth in small enterprises in the form of small tanneries, which by the beginning of WW1 were producing rough footwear and veldschoens. Mrs. I.D. van Soelen worked in such a small backyard 'shoe factory' in the North End about 1918, from about the age of 15. It was operated by a Mr. Morris and consisted of nine workers, including five coloured male lastists all of whom worked together in one large room. There were no racial divisions of labour as in the later big companies.<sup>84</sup>

The war itself gave all industry, but particularly the shoe industry, a large boost, so that by 1917, there were already 13 boot and shoe companies in existence (see Illustration 2.5).<sup>85</sup> The Union headquarters for the British makers of shoe machinery, British Machinery United (BMU), was located in Port Elizabeth.<sup>86</sup> By 1918, there were 25 Leather and Leatherwork industries, 19 of which were shoe factories, employing 350 white women.<sup>87</sup> Once the war was over, imports resumed and a swamped industry meant low prices and a threat to local manufacture.<sup>88</sup> This together with the post-war recession, caused disastrous results for the shoe industry. The Edworks factory in Adderley St. in the North End, which in previous years produced 4 000 pairs of boots and shoes a week only produced 2 000 in 1921.<sup>89</sup> The slump

<sup>83</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, p. 216.

<sup>84</sup> Interview, Van Soelen.

<sup>85</sup> These included namely Mobbs, Edworks, Cuthberts, Sergeants and Bagshaw Gibaud.

<sup>86</sup> 'The Industrial Facilities and Advantages of Port Elizabeth and District, 1917', (Electricity and Industries Department, City Council, 1917), pp. 65-7.

<sup>87</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'The Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', pp 35-7.

<sup>88</sup> H. Schauder, "An Economic History of the Boot and Shoe Industry in South Africa", p.518.

<sup>89</sup> *P.E. Advertiser*, 22 January 1921. Most of the Leatherware factories were situated in the North End, (Union of SA, Report of the Central



Illustration 2.5. CLOSING DEPARTMENT, CUTHBERTS FACTORY, 1917  
(*'The Industrial Facilities and Advantages of Port Elizabeth and District, 1917'*)



affected employment, causing the retrenchment of about 45% of all employees in the boot and shoe industry.<sup>90</sup> This fuelled the protectionist debate and newspapers urged the public to buy local, supporting the view that the lack of tariff protection was pushing the infant industry on the path of ruin.<sup>91</sup> When tariff protection finally won out in 1925, the shoe industry's output soared to a figure of four and a half million pairs by 1932, employment increased from four thousand in 1922 to six and a half thousand in 1932 and Port Elizabeth became known as 'the Northampton of SA'.<sup>92</sup> Since white women continued to comprise the largest group of female employees right from the beginning of the study period, this is a clear indication of the reciprocity between the Pact government's policy of protecting industry and white labour. Not only did import tariffs allow the industry to respond to government incentives to employ more white, rather than coloured women, but protection also led to mass production, increased employment and deskilling.

Deskilling and the subsequent erosion of the gender bar enabled white women to become machinists (as in the clothing industry) thus replacing males in semi-skilled positions, but at lower wages.<sup>93</sup> Women were thus involved in pattern cutting in the 'closing' department (sizing, folding and examining shoes) but especially in machining ie. perforating and fitting linings and stitching (see Illustration 2.6).<sup>94</sup> This development occurred earlier in the leather industry possibly because of the existence of BMU in Port Elizabeth. While men were often supervisors, some employers were shrewd enough - given the large numbers of females in the workforce - to employ female supervisors. Edworks, for instance, employed Violet Bartle and

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Housing Board, 1924, UG.'31-1925, p.18).

<sup>90</sup> Report of the Special Committee appointed by the Advisory Board of Industry and Science at the request of the Rt. Hon. P.M. to enquire into the position of the Union's Boot and Shoe Industry, A.1-'21, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1922; *EPH*, 5 January 1922.

<sup>92</sup> S.G. Shuttleworth, *From Riempies to Fashion Shoes*, (J.Eggers, Port Elizabeth, 1983), p.15.

<sup>93</sup> M. Finnemore, and R.van der Merwe, *Introduction to Industrial Relations in South Africa*, (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Johannesburg, 1986), p.5.

<sup>94</sup> Interviews, Mr. Kemsley, Miss Boucher.

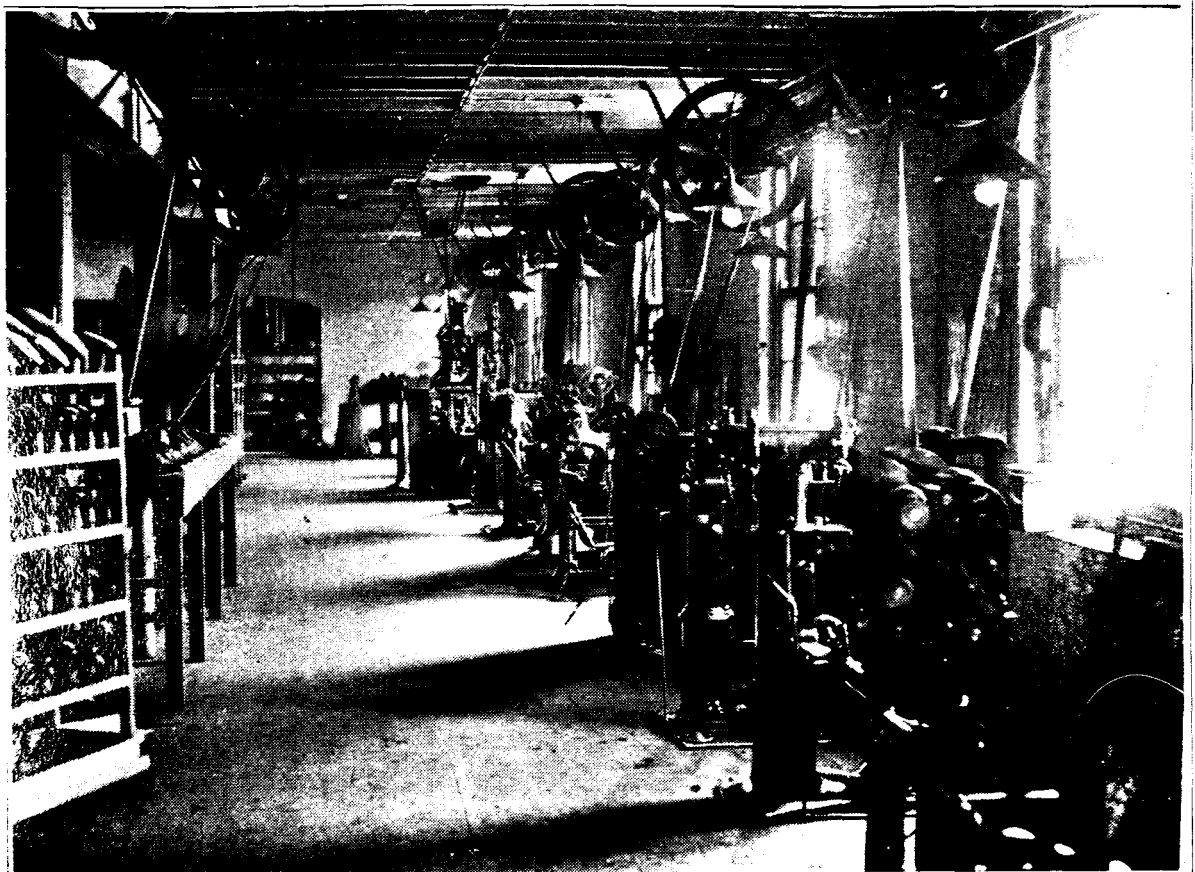


Illustration 2.6. FINISHING DEPARTMENT, CUTHBERTS FACTORY, 1917  
(*'The Industrial Facilities and Advantages of Port Elizabeth and District, 1917'*)

Annie van Loggerenberg as supervisors in their shoe factory. <sup>95</sup>

Unlike the clothing Industry, there was no regional discrepancy in wages: all levels for female workers generating virtually the same remuneration nationwide. <sup>96</sup> This was perhaps due to the strength of the industry in Port Elizabeth. Neil Boss of Mobbs informed the Unemployment Commission that machinists' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years and earned usually about two pounds ten shillings per week. While the minimum wage was seventeen shillings and sixpence there was nevertheless no maximum. <sup>97</sup> Nor were the rates of pay for coloured and white women any different. <sup>98</sup> These wages were nearly double the average wage in the clothing industry although Schauder maintained that "wages in the footwear industry are good, and the relationship between employers and employees are satisfactory ".<sup>99</sup> In fact, by the 1930s wages were not life - sustaining for single mothers. Margaret Ludwig, for example, who worked at Mosenthals Boot and Shoe factory was unable to maintain herself and her three children without applying to the PEB for assistance. <sup>100</sup> Piece work, conducted after working hours was also carried out in the shoe trade in order to make ends meet. By 1935, an Industrial Council agreement had laid down a proviso for the industry for extra payment when output exceeded a specified "quantum". <sup>101</sup>

Employers' opinions about the quality of their white labour force were seemingly high, if we are to rely on their public pronouncements. Neil Boss, informed the Unemployment

<sup>95</sup> Interview, Mrs. Hartman.

<sup>96</sup> Union of SA, Official Year Book, 1937, p.316.

<sup>97</sup> CeA K35, Unemployment Commission, p. 2192.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2202

<sup>99</sup> H. Schauder, "An Economic History of the Boot and Shoe Industry in South Africa", p. 542.

<sup>100</sup> PEB minutes, October 26, 1934, p.306.

<sup>101</sup> H. Schauder, "An Economic History of the Boot and Shoe Industry in South Africa", p.542.

Commission that "the girls we have are equal to girls in any part of the world...".<sup>102</sup> Fourteen years later he expressed similar sentiments to the EPH:

"...the majority of boys and girls seeking employment have readily shown a capacity to rise to considerable position in the shoe industry. I have known cases where exceptional merit has been displayed and been rewarded."

He felt the name 'poor whites' had a bad psychological effect on them, giving employers the impression they were undesirable and unemployable.<sup>103</sup> However, given the relatively low wages paid in some cases and the fact that Port Elizabeth was marketed to investors as utilising mainly if not all in some cases, cheap white labour, such pronouncements may have been merely another public relations exercise.

The Depression took its toll on levels of employment. Two large firms had to shut down, but generally workers were put on short time. However, a tough managerial policy adopted by one of the most successful managers in the leather industry at that time, George Garton of Edworks, seems to have steered both the company and the labour force through the difficult Depression years. He was "a strict disciplinarian", whose role in Edworks "was to lift the quality of the product, while maintaining high productivity."<sup>104</sup> His factory had the reputation, during the Depression, of securing a stable labour situation and it was said that his employees preferred to accept a stable low income to no income at all as in the motor industry with its system of putting off workers when the demand for cars slackened.<sup>105</sup> The leather industry in the south western districts producing veldschoens and miners' boots was, however, particularly hard hit by the recession and may have increased urbanisation to and unemployment in Port Elizabeth.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the PE leather and clothing industries alike weathered the Depression to the advantage of women.

<sup>102</sup> CeA K35, Unemployment Commission, p. 2188.

<sup>103</sup> *EPH*, 13 October, 1934, "Sidelights on Poor Whiteism."

<sup>104</sup> S.G. Shuttleworth, *From Riempies to Fashion Shoes*, p.128.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>106</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1, vol.1, Department of Labour, Midlands Inspectorate, Annual Report, 1931, p.5.

While there are no industrial censuses for the Depression years of 1930 and 1931, the statistics for 1932 show a dramatic increase in the white workforce, probably due also in part to the economic boom of the post-depression era and in part to the new Fusion government's extension of the 'civilised labour' policy (see Illustration 2.7). By the beginning of the second World War the workforce was still largely European, but gradually both the Western and Eastern Cape changed to coloured employment.<sup>107</sup>

The location of the leather industry in Port Elizabeth, a drainage point for large numbers of poor whites from the Midlands, intensified the drift of poor white women to the city. This was particularly so when the industry received large boosts during WW 1 and after the erection of tariffs leading to womens' large-scale replacement of men. As in the clothing industry, there began large-scale replacement of coloured by white women after 1923. Encouraged by state policies, discrimination against coloured workers became commonplace and the chance of establishing a wider working class solidarity, remote. Thus, the leather industry came to represent the most secure niche in the economy in terms of job protection for white females and also ensured relatively high wages. The experience of women in industry, generally, remains to be explored in the next two sections.

#### 2.3.4. FACTORY CONDITIONS AND "THE GROWING CONSCIENCE OF THE CITY"

It has been shown how the first two decades of industrialisation in Port Elizabeth was a period of relative freedom for employers who were able to ignore wage determinations, set up 'sweetheart' unions and retrench married women in preference for single younger women. Up to the passing of the Factory Act in 1918, they were also able to employ school children under 14 years of age, who worked a full day in the school holidays and half a day during the school term.<sup>108</sup> The patriarchal assumptions underlying such practices have already been discussed. These went unchallenged until the advent of the Garment Workers Union.

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<sup>107</sup> S.G. Shuttleworth, *From Riempies to Fashion Shoes*, pp.213.

<sup>108</sup> Child Welfare Society, 1st Annual Report, 1918.



Illustration 2.7. CLOSING ROOM, BOOT FACTORY, 1930 (The First Port Elizabeth Annual, 1930)

Meanwhile, harsh working conditions permitted by minimal state intervention was another aspect of factory employment which women also silently endured until some improvement occurred in the 1930s. While the Act had attempted to address poor conditions, it lacked the power to enforce compliance with the legislation. Thus when van Soelen inadvertently rubbed leather dye in her eyes and Morris refused to compensate her, she had no recourse to the law. In the early small tanneries, facilities were particularly rudimentary. According to van Soelen, "you ate at the machine or outside." This factory was however finally closed down by the Inspector with the implementation of better standards.<sup>109</sup> Until the 1930s, some women spent long days, five days a week, standing at machines on an overcrowded factory floor. However, in the leather industry machinists generally sat at their work while packers found it easier to stand. Hours could also be arduous. Corrie Gerber was a machinist at Playdon's for 20 years. Her hours were from eight to five pm., sometimes with overtime. When this factory closed down, she moved to Milana where the hours were longer - from 6.45 am. to 6.00 pm., with only half an hour break for lunch and ten minutes for tea. Paid overtime was worked from 6.30 to 7.00pm.<sup>110</sup> Du Preez, a machinist at Mosenthal's clothing factory and Hartmann, whose job it was to coat sweets in tins of syrup at the Algoa Sweet Factory, also had to stand. Hartman had the added disadvantage of operating a dangerous machine that nobody else liked to work on.<sup>111</sup>

Yet, such hardships are (perhaps confusingly to the modern view) generally remembered with equanimity and even fondness by the interviewees. Du Preez maintained she had been used to hard work on the farms cutting wood, and that her time in the factories were "good days". Hartman recalls an irritable foreman indulgently: if she forgot which tins she put sweets in Mr. Williams would "scream like a bugger". Van Soelen remembers Bagshaws, where she went after leaving Morris' employ, as "very nice", while Gerber described Milana, Sydenham Shoe Company and Playdons as all very good employers. Although shop assisting jobs were available to her, she maintained, and the factories were hard work, she never wanted to leave

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<sup>109</sup> Interview van Soelen.

<sup>110</sup> Interview, Corrie Gerber.

<sup>111</sup> Interviews, du Preez, Hartman.

their employ.<sup>112</sup> Thus despite the tendency of factory workers to aspire to easier, better paying jobs, many workers may well have preferred to remain within the congenial environment of the factory floor, an option facilitated by hard work on the farm and youthful vigour.

With the coming of the Pact government, existing departments of Labour were made functional for the first time. It was their task to both enforce labour legislation and report on the needs of labour and industry. In 1926, Mrs. Tonkin, NCW member and Inspectress of Factories, demonstrated the role that Social Insurance could play in the alleviation of Port Elizabeth's rocketing poverty. Already in 1919 a primitive form of insurance, the National Thrift Movement had taken root in Port Elizabeth whereby thrift clubs were begun in schools and factories earning 5% compound interest.<sup>113</sup> However, the value of individual thrift was a mistaken conception, Tonkin noted, given the vulnerability of the working class to the vagaries of misfortune. State insurance would be far more effective and certainly more so than poor relief which only dealt with the effects of poverty. At that point there was no provision for sickness, unemployment, old age, invalidity, widowed motherhood and maternity, while workmen's compensation only paid out on the basis of wages earned instead of workers' specific needs.<sup>114</sup> With the passage, in 1928, of the Old Age Pensions Act, no. 22, provision was made for a sector of the poor thereby alleviating some of the burden of charity organisations.<sup>115</sup> In 1931, during the Depression, the Pact government paid greater attention to specific industrial reform. That year more tangible changes were introduced by the Amendment to the Factory Act, which was mainly directed at the reduction of the working week from 50 to 48 hours and the control of overtime. Working hours for juveniles was limited which tended to militate against their employment.<sup>116</sup> Section 29 also stated that where

<sup>112</sup> Interviews, Van Soelen, Gerber, Kemsley, Hartman, Du Preez.

<sup>113</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth, A Social Chronicle to the end of 1945*, (E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997) p.149.

<sup>114</sup> CeA, VWN vol.3973, PG 652/62/127, Evidence, D. Tonkin, NCW, PE, 1926.

<sup>115</sup> Union of South Africa, Statutes, (Juta), 1927 - 8.

<sup>116</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.11, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Annual Report, 1936, p.11.



women were employed, special facilities had to be provided such as overalls, change rooms, washing facilities and seats for workers in certain industries where female workers had been standing at their work. <sup>117</sup>

However, greater concerns overwhelmed factory workers during the Depression. The Factory Inspector reported:

"The question of overcrowding of factory premises has vanished during the year and it is indeed rather pitiful to see some premises only half full and men and women without work and walking the streets looking for it." <sup>118</sup>

The working class in general suffered from a variety of pressures such as a reduced working week, reduced pay, or even retrenchment. Some firms kept more people on by reducing wages: one of the motor car factories, for example, arranged that no white man earned less than 12 pounds per month - the minimum that was needed to keep a man and his wife in Port Elizabeth "and remain properly fed and respectably clothed". <sup>119</sup> In others, such as clothing, sweets and bootmaking, short time rather than wage cuts were implemented. <sup>120</sup> Two large firms in the leather industry and a knitting factory went into liquidation, costing many women their jobs. <sup>121</sup> By 1931, only one knitting factory, which had had to reduce its contingent from 400 to 220 over the preceding two years, remained. <sup>122</sup>

Yet, just as industrialization brought both opportunity and hardship to working class women, the Depression, had a similarly ambiguous effect on women factory workers. Brink characterizes the Depression generally as a time when an inverse relationship occurred between

<sup>117</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1934, p.12; UG 11 - '36, p.37.

<sup>118</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1, vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, p.3.

<sup>119</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, p.5.

<sup>120</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, p. 6.

<sup>121</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> H.A.F. Barker, *The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry*, p. 17.

men and women's patterns of employment. Whereas men were readily absorbed by the economy during times of prosperity, women were absorbed during times of depression.<sup>123</sup> This is explained by the fact that industries employing women were actually expanding operations even in the worst periods of disaster (see 2.3.3.1. and 2.3.3.2.). Further, male unemployment encouraged women themselves to remain in or return to the factory after marriage both on the Rand and in Port Elizabeth and "in many cases married women have become the principal bread winners of the family."<sup>124</sup> Thus by 1932, male employees had dropped by 200, while females had increased by 500.<sup>125</sup> Ironically, it was the cheapness of women's wages that led to their growing importance in the economy. Similarly, while there was an increased interest in claiming maternity grants during the Depression, hard-pressed women were often not qualified.<sup>126</sup> The desperation of applicants is underlined by the fact that, at least until June 1936 they had to have a family income of less than three pounds per week to qualify for the grant. This figure was fixed without taking into consideration the particular circumstances of the applicant, so that in cases where a mother of three or four children was the principal breadwinner earning, for example, two pounds two shillings and six pence per week, but was married to a labourer earning only thirty shillings per week, she could not claim a maternity benefit.<sup>127</sup> Thus, women with the burden of large families were faced with greater economic hardship than those without. Nevertheless, general developments signified some reversal of the traditional status of female dependency and the important role, familial and economic, that women played in this period of Port Elizabeth's history.

<sup>123</sup> E. Brink, "'Maar 'n klomp "factory" meide': Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s", in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987), p.182.

<sup>124</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, p.6.

<sup>125</sup> Union of SA, Census and Statistics, State of Factories, 1928-1932.

<sup>126</sup> The 1918 Factory Act provided for four weeks off prior to the birth and eight weeks after. Women were paid up to 25s per week for a period not exceeding 12 weeks as long as the father was unable to pay (Union of SA, Report of the Secretary for Education, UG. 61 - '20, p. 29).

<sup>127</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.11, Annual Report of 1936, p.1; LIP 5/1 vol.1, Annual Report Department of Labour, 1931, pp. 18 - 19.

When SA left the gold standard, the Depression ended and a boom ensued. The huge increase in the number of white women employed in industry thereafter was given a major impetus by the new companies which opened in Port Elizabeth from 1934. A rubber sole factory employing 40 female and 20 male Europeans and a medium size clothing factory employing about 150 hands were established.<sup>128</sup> By 1935, the boot factories were filled to capacity and by 1936, a tyre factory employing about 15 women was established.<sup>129</sup> There was also increased activity in the output of citrus farms in the Sundays River Valley and a concomitant growth in the canning industry. A new club was built at Sundays River to cope with the local packing factory's increased European female labour force which had been drawn from the surrounding rural areas. This was probably as much to alleviate the women's hardship of travelling from their homes by train at 5.30 in the morning and getting back at 9.00 p.m. as to ensure a constant, controlled and more efficient labour force.<sup>130</sup>

In 1935, the Labour Department's new title, 'The Department of Labour and Social Welfare', denoted a wider awareness of white workers' needs. Social Welfare Committees replaced the Armesorg committees, a combination of church and state representatives, underscoring the poor white focus of institutionalized social welfare.<sup>131</sup> Nor was central government unaware of the interests of local capital since upliftment of the labour force necessarily led to increased productivity. Health Clinics were established in one or two factories for the general maintenance of health among the workforce and signalled a forthcoming trend in industry. Throughout 1935 the Department notified the midwifery section of the Provincial Hospital about expectant mothers and advised applicants to seek their advice. The Inspector of Factories also asked for Medical Officers to be appointed to the Factories Division of Labour

<sup>128</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol., Annual Report of the Midlands Inspectorate, 1934, pp. 2,4.

<sup>129</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. 11, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1935, p.10; LIP 5/1 vol.11, 1936, p.11.

<sup>130</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. Department of Labour, Midlands Inspectorate, 1934, p.13; Department of Labour, 1934, p.13.

<sup>131</sup> UG. 4 - 1937, Report of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, December 1935.

so that they could be called upon to investigate the health of any employee, "particularly in the poorer paid industries where the earnings of the worker preclude the calling in of the Doctor."

<sup>132</sup> In this way the Department could avoid remaining in ignorance of the conditions and risks in factories. He added,

"industrial workers, in my opinion, actually require more medical attention than school children. Schools have admittedly healthy buildings and work in healthy conditions, but the same cannot always be said for industry."

According to him the two biggest health problems that workers faced and which impacted on their work were poor eyesight and bad teeth which affected their digestive system. These in turn were caused by poverty and ignorance. However, the Department also reflected interest in the establishment by 1936, of various welfare agencies in the town to assist factory women and their children, exemplified by the establishment of a children's clinic and two Ante-Natal clinics at the North and South Ends for all races had been set up. Both of the latter offered free services for those indigent families and working class mothers who, after paying rent and having 15/- per week per head of family, still had less than two pounds ten shillings income per week. A creche for the children of working mothers started by the Child Welfare Society in the early 1930s was however too expensive at 1/- per day and the Department considered its own establishment of nursery schools in the industrial area. <sup>133</sup> Similarly, the MOH's suggestion that 2 000 new sub-economic houses were needed for the working population was endorsed by the Inspector of Factories who emphasised the particular need of factory workers in this regard. Employers, for their part, were well aware that housing and transport were integral parts of the needs of their workforce. In general, the Inspector of factories felt that "all the facilities noted above...speak well for the growing civic conscience of the city." <sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, despite developments, conditions in the factories were still not desirable. Corrie Gerber reports that Milana had contracts to produce 1 000 pairs of miners boots per day. In the leather industry, gloves were not issued and for Gerber who had to piece and stitch the

<sup>132</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. 11, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1935, p. 14; *Ibid.*, 1936, pp. 13-14.

<sup>133</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.11, Department of Labour, 1936, pp.2-3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 1936, p.3.

very rough leather together, this work was very hard on the hands. She once damaged her finger by punching an eyelet through it while black leather dye consistently stained her hands.<sup>135</sup> When such protection was considered it seemed mainly geared towards white women. Some employers at jam and fruit canning factories may have been merely shrewdly economical or the victims of pervasive racism when they debated whether their (mainly female) workers who handled figs and pineapples needed to wear India rubber gloves. They maintained that Dermatitis was more serious amongst European than coloured employees directly because of the lighter skin pigmentation. One 'occupier' of factory premises drew no such colour distinction, remaining firmly focussed on issues of profit: he was concerned to know whether the wearing of gloves was necessary at all since he thought it might slow down the work to an appreciable extent. What compounded the problem was that employers did not have to notify the Department of Labour about instances of this disease.<sup>136</sup> By 1936, it is noted, however, that employers were taking greater care of employees so that Dermatitis was three times less prevalent than it used to be.<sup>137</sup>

A more serious problem was the contraction of industrial diseases. Ventilation was unsatisfactory in some of the older factories, especially when they had full contingents leading to the inhalation of, for example, Benzol Solvents widely used in the Leather Industry.<sup>138</sup> Thus some workers such as Gerber at Milana and van Soelen at Bagshaws, contracted asthma. Although van Soelen was attended to by 'Dr. Anne', the Jewish factory doctor, the medical costs were deducted from her wages, probably via a medical insurance. The same applied to Gerber who eventually had to retire because of the disease.<sup>139</sup>

In 1936 the Inspector of Labour still noted the inadequate implementation of the amended Factory Act. The five day working week had not been adopted by many factories outside the

<sup>135</sup> Interview, Corrie Gerber.

<sup>136</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1931, pp.15-17.

<sup>137</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. 11, Department of Labour, 1936, p.17.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 1935, p.6; 1934, p.11.

<sup>139</sup> Interviews, Gerber, van Soelen.

boot and shoe industry while in the smaller bakeries, working conditions were still not adequate; the hours were much longer than in the larger, more modern bakeries where mechanization had taken place.<sup>140</sup> He also castigated the Act for not enforcing the provision of seating suitable for both the worker and the job, and that the use of "a rickety packing case" was often all that was available.<sup>141</sup>

The Act also exempted employers from paying workers overtime if the industry, particularly the sweet and canning factories, needed to work on Sundays. Thus the working week of many women was extended. In 1933, 2 495 women in the food industry were involved in Sunday work - almost double the number of men.<sup>142</sup> Once a factory owner had been permitted to conduct Sunday work, the provision applied indefinitely. Similarly seasonal exemptions from restricted working hours also impacted mainly on women. For example, while 450 females in the fruit canning and jam making and 2 450 females in the fruit drying and packing industries were affected, this applied to only 350 and 710 males respectively.<sup>143</sup> The wide scope of seasonal exemptions, usually relating to fruit processing work in the environs of Port Elizabeth, allowed intensive seasonal work with long hours and no overtime. Moreover, when the work was finished, a term of unemployment lay ahead of the workers. For example, Johanna Viviers who had a job at the African Canning Factory at only five pence per hour had no income when the fruit season was over. Since her unemployed husband lived with another woman and she had to buy food by sub-letting two of her rented rooms, she was forced to appeal to the PEB.<sup>144</sup>

While factory conditions were unsatisfactory during the inter-war years, particularly prior to the implementation of the 1931 Factory Act, consciousness among the women themselves complicates representation of the entire factory experience.

<sup>140</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.11, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, 1936, p.9, 10.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, 1931, p.14.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933, Table 6.

<sup>143</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1933, Table 6.

<sup>144</sup> PEB Minutes, 24 February 1934, p.238.

### 2.3.5. WORKER IDENTITY

So far, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate how state intervention, differing patterns of accumulation as well as of relationships to the regional economy led to differential employment practices and thus experiences among the labour force. These, in turn, created a particular ethos in the workplace and a sense of worker identity, which changed from industry to industry as well as over time. Women found themselves largely segregated in the workplace since many industries prided themselves in employing only whites. Men of other races were separated from white women through job stratification, physical separation on the factory floor and attentive monitoring by those in authority. Factory workers internalized this segregation, many interviewees exhibiting satisfaction about their racial separation in the workplace. Correspondingly, Neil Boss reported to the Unemployment Commission in 1920:

"On the factory floor the whites mainly work in the machinist and clicking departments and try to avoid working with the coloureds in the finishing room and the last department although there are some whites there." <sup>145</sup>

Access to skill levels along racial and gender lines strongly determined this ethos. As whites moved out of domestic service and into upper echelons, blacks moved in. As Freund notes:

"In the absence of mass production industry, communities, even while inter-relating, retained distinctive identities and formed ethnic groups often more sharply defined than they had been in rural areas" <sup>146</sup>.

In the Depression the Carnegie Commission reported that in the various factories visited in the major towns,

"each factory attracts a certain type of worker; each has its characteristic spirit which does not seem to be determined by the nature of the work."

Girls in one factory were characterized as lively to rowdy, another as more serious and yet another as more educated

"this grouping of types.....(is) brought about by the workers themselves. As soon as a certain type preponderated, new workers not in agreement with them did not stay too long. After having seen so much inertia in the homes of the poor in the country this "trade-union" spirit, if I may call it so, interested me

<sup>145</sup> CeA, K35, Unemployment Commission, Minutes of Evidence, Port Elizabeth, 25 November 1920, p.2201.

<sup>146</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", p.87.

very much." <sup>147</sup>

In the shoe industry, I. van Soelen remembers that people associated with the groups in which they worked. There were for example 'table people', machinists and the office crowd who each had a sense of camaraderie. <sup>148</sup> Thus, in the all-white leather and sweet industries, there was a strong racial identity. In the Algoa Sweet Factory, where there were more women than men - doing mainly skilled work boiling and making sweets - a strong gender identity emerged, heightened by the employment of women supervisors in most cases. <sup>149</sup> An extension of this camaraderie was to be found in the environment of the Girls' Friendly Society established in 1918 in a cottage in Hill Street, Central, to provide working girls with a place to rest during the day and somewhere to eat their lunch. Within a year it was affiliated to the NCW which actively oversaw their interests. <sup>150</sup> Linkages also existed in the form of networking between the employees of different companies. Miss Boucher heard about available jobs through her sisters who worked at Teikamadas Clothing and a canning factory. <sup>151</sup> Similarly, Hartman's daughters, Anne and Vera, both followed her into the Algoa Sweet Factory as starch dippers, while du Preez' sister also joined Mosenthals Clothing Factory. <sup>152</sup> However, the existence of ethnic identity between English and Afrikaans speaking factory women is harder to locate, although van Soelen remembers that they all worked together - "a friendly crowd" with no tension.

By the 1930s, the generational character of the female labour force had changed in accordance with the particular industry. The Carnegie Commission reported that legislation had brought about a change in working conditions especially at the bigger factories which in turn had led

<sup>147</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>148</sup> Interview, I. van Soelen.

<sup>149</sup> Interviews, Hartman, van Soelen, Gerber, Boucher.

<sup>150</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 June 1918; 14 February 1919.

<sup>151</sup> Interview, Boucher.

<sup>152</sup> Interview, Hartman, du Preez.



to a demand for more competent workers.<sup>153</sup> Pollak, in her study of Rand factory workers, assessed that during the Depression a new type of female industrial worker had tended to emerge. She was usually not as young as the early waves of urbanizing immigrants, but older, more educated and more literate who, years previously, would not have dreamed of taking a factory job.<sup>154</sup> Rural immigrants were forced into the lower ranks of domestic service and sweatshops.<sup>155</sup> This trend may have initially been because of the Depression. But also the industrial and social upliftment of whites, a tendency among families to have fewer children and a decreased need to send juveniles out to work to help support the family began to reduce the youthful component in factory work. Anxious about labour supplies in boomtime, the Inspector of Factories disparagingly linked this to the "local worship of scholastic attainment".<sup>156</sup> Certainly, social mobility was significant: Mrs. Hartman's husband progressed from soling shoes in the backyard to working on the railway from 5/6 to 7/6 per day in about 1929, where he stayed until 1960 - undoubtedly a product of the 'civilised labour policy'. Similarly, their descendants experienced further social improvement: whereas her two sons worked on the railway, one as a mechanic, her two grandsons became a minister and a teacher, respectively.

Worker identity along racial and ethnic lines was heightened by the provision of separate housing in separate residential areas setting the stage for the creation of identifiable communities which coalesced around their own churches, sports clubs, language and community activities.<sup>157</sup> This sense of community was consolidated among factory workers such as in PE North in that the areas in which they they lived centred around the industrial hub of the North End Lake. In 1931, the majority lived in the North End, followed by Sydenham, then Sidwell and then Kensington. In 1931, eleven lived in the Athlone Girls' Club about one

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<sup>153</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V*, p. 214.

<sup>154</sup> H. Pollak, "Women Workers in Witwatersrand Industries", *South African Journal of Economics*, 1, no.1, March 1933, 65.

<sup>155</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 76.

<sup>156</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1934, p. 8.

<sup>157</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.49.

kilometre from the hub. <sup>158</sup> The exclusively white hostel for working women established its own ethos of religious and moral values providing a centrifugal point for the intensification of women's self identity and consolidated a sense of community within white residential areas. This nurtured a sense of cultural identity, fortifying networks of contact and support. <sup>159</sup> Yet, many led very sheltered lives with the church having a distinctly restrictive influence, while those who lived in the less community - oriented area of Central seem to have felt more marginalized. Corrie Gerber who lived in Central reports of her peers that "we didn't easily associate with each other." <sup>160</sup> Although there was 'a very friendly' atmosphere in multiracial areas such as Korsten, associations across the colour line did not generally prevail. According to the perspective of Violet Bayi, a resident of Korsten in the 1930s, happy coexistence, if not integration, was taking place in Sydenham and Korsten. Traders, although housed in town, included Indian, Chinese and Jewish shopkeepers, the latter being especially friendly, usually helping people when they were short of money. Generally, however, spatial segregation reinforced separate identities forged in the workplace. <sup>161</sup> No institution was more clearly earmarked for this purpose than the Athlone Girls' Club.

### 2.3.6. Hostel Living - The Athlone Girls' Club

Initiated by Dorothy Tonkin, Inspectress for Factories, and the NCW, the club was founded in Adderley Street as the North End Girls Club on 10 August 1923. <sup>162</sup> It had grown out of a small recreational centre in Roberts Street established in February 1918 near the factories between Central and the North End. <sup>163</sup> As early as June 1917, the Vigilance Committee, the moral arm of the NCW, had reported the "long felt want" for an undenominational Social Club

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<sup>158</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>159</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", pp. 86 - 7.

<sup>160</sup> Interview, Corrie Gerber.

<sup>161</sup> B. Freund, "The Social Character of Secondary Industry", p.86.

<sup>162</sup> TAD, A296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 25 April, 25 July, 11 August 1922.

<sup>163</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p.173.

for factory girls where they could rest and eat their lunch.<sup>164</sup> The next year the Girls' Friendly Society had therefore been established in Hill Street and by 1924, they too were considering the idea of starting a hostel.<sup>165</sup> The new club initially served primarily as a recreational centre for unskilled white female factory workers employed in the printing, clothing, sweet and shoe making industries. Generally as young as 16 to 18 years of age, they usually only earned learner wages between approximately nine shillings and fifteen shillings and six pence per week.<sup>166</sup> But by 1932, residents also included a dental nurse, a dressmaker, an 'examiner', a saleswoman, a typist and a shorthand typist.<sup>167</sup> Low cost midday meals drawing a daily average of 50 girls, recreational facilities and welfare work were provided.<sup>168</sup> By August 1924, eight girls could be accommodated and, by 1926, largely because of the great demand for accommodation from the girls themselves, the North End Girls' Club had again moved premises to the corner of Fettes Road and Prince Alfred Street in the heart of the new industrial area. It now expanded into a hostel able to cater for 100 girls.<sup>169</sup> Land was donated by the Municipality and a building loan made by the State, while running costs were contributed by local - mainly boot and shoe - manufacturers. For women who came to the city often suffering from malnutrition and related dental problems, the hostel now filled a number of critical needs. Known as the Athlone Girls' Club from 1929 it now could offer meals, a sick fund providing free medical facilities and recreational activities such as sewing classes and cultural activities. Ballroom and country dancing, as well as drama classes, were also

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<sup>164</sup> TAD A296, 3/22/1/1, 8 June, 14 December 1917, 14 June 1918.

<sup>165</sup> TAD, A296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 8 August 1924; M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p. 149.

<sup>166</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928; 'NCW History', p.5; Union of SA, Social and Industrial Review, June 1926 vol. 11, p.416, 1927; Union of SA, Report of the Central Housing Board, UG.31-'25, p.18.

<sup>167</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>168</sup> TAD, A296 3/22/1/1, NCW AGM, 10 August 1923; A296 3/22/1/1, Minutes, 8 August 1924; Similarly, a Boys Recreation Club was established in 1928, (*EPH*, 1 February 1928).

<sup>169</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1927, p.23; *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

offered.<sup>170</sup> Well-sited and enthusiastically endorsed by manufacturers, it became a highly successful club with between 50% to 80% occupation rate. The North End Girls' Club was the first completed industrial hostel of its kind in the country, providing a progressive model for the rest of the country by demonstrating how economic interests and social welfare could merge with mutual benefits. Although there were still 80 girls in residence in 1933, by the late 1930s the number had dropped by approximately 50 per cent, possibly because of marriage and being accommodated elsewhere.<sup>171</sup>

The creation of such an institution occurred against a background of changing economic, social and ideological circumstances. At a time of urbanisation and heightened interest in social reconstruction in SA, strong significance was attached to both the control and racial channelling of labour for nascent industry. These ideas had been prevalent since 1908 when mission churches on the Rand had attempted to establish hostels for black female urban workers. Bodies of white Christian women continued these attempts well into the 1930s. In Port Elizabeth a hostel for indigent coloured women, though mooted in 1917, apparently failed to materialise although Cape Town established a YWCA in 1918 as well as the Marion Institute in the early 1920s for coloured women.<sup>172</sup> This is possibly indicative of their demographic and industrial prominence in the Western Cape and contrasts with the drastic reduction of the number of coloured women in PE industry. Although a hostel for black women was mooted in the deliberations of the City Council's Native Affairs Committee in 1931, the subject was continually shelved until it, like the hostel suggested for indigent

<sup>170</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*. p. 85.

<sup>171</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1,11, Department of Labour, Annual Reports, 1933-5; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.86.

<sup>172</sup> CeA, ARB 931, F10/3 Chief Inspector of Factories to Mrs. Walsh, Municipal Council of Cape Town, 17 December 1925; G. Cuthbertson, and D. Whitelaw, *God Youth and Women. The YWCAs of Southern Africa, 1886 - 1986*, (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 23; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 86; Although a YWCA was also founded in Port Elizabeth in 1899, it housed only white working class women. Having followed the spread of British Imperialism, it was therefore not an instrument of specifically local and national economic interests like the Athlone Girls' Club.

coloured women in 1917, dropped out of sight.<sup>173</sup> However, it was conditions under which many of the newly urbanized whites in Port Elizabeth lived that caused the authorities concern. This was partly for reasons of health but also because of the possibility of racial integration among the labouring classes. This occurred against a backdrop of a continuing obsession among colonials in Africa with the sexual role of white women, the reproducers of the race, and thus the agents of white supremacy. In the mouthpiece of the new Department of Labour, the *Social and Industrial Review*, female labour in Port Elizabeth was openly stated to be the "missing link" in the elevation of the white lower classes; the provision of housing, the protection of sexual and racial identities were imperatives in the establishment of a hostel for white females.<sup>174</sup> Thus, although the Department of Labour congratulated itself on the creation of a Group Welfare Scheme that departed from the usual European implementation of welfare in individual factories, the Club was set firmly in a developing historical tradition.<sup>175</sup>

The club was an important representation of the amalgamation of different and overlapping interests, both local and national. Thus, the Club's Committee consisted of representatives from the state, local manufacturing and the church - the latter in 1935 comprising nearly half of the committee and thus serving as a significant moral pressure group.<sup>176</sup> The central state, represented by Miss Dorothy Tonkin, also a committee member of the prominent, middle-class NCW, saw the role of the hostel as elevating and protecting white female workers in line with the state's implementation of the 'civilised labour' policy. While creating safe, cheap accommodation, it would also justify the low wages paid to female trainees and thus foster the development of regional business. But the central state was clear in its policy on local development: despite its commitment to a building loan for the hostel, the Department of Labour refused an appeal by PE manufacturers during the economic boom beginning in 1925, to provide emergency hostelling and female labour from the Hartebeestpoort area. Citing

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<sup>173</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/5, Memo from Town Clerk, 16 Sept 1931.

<sup>174</sup> CeA, VWN, vol. 3973, PG 652/62/127, D. Tonkin, "Welfare of Girl Workers", '*Social and Industrial Review*', June 1926.

<sup>175</sup> Union of SA, '*Social and Industrial Review*', June 1926, vol. 11 (6), p.415.

<sup>176</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol. 1, Athlone Club, 1933, p. 14.

regional equity as justification for the refusal, it suggested East London, Grahamstown and forestry settlements as local sources of labour and local manufacturers as the source of funding for accommodation.<sup>177</sup>

Certainly, the local state and business were well represented, providing much of the support during a period where the central state was only just beginning to incorporate social welfare programmes into its departments.<sup>178</sup> Mrs. Ann Anderson of the NCW, the founding organisation of the Athlone Club, was also a councillor for 1925 - 34. Another NCW member and committee member was Mrs. Caulfield, the Mayoress in 1934.<sup>179</sup> The club was thus a definitive example of the politics of social welfare operational in Port Elizabeth during the inter-war years. Also the largest industrial employers of women, for example, the boot and shoe and the food and beverage manufacturers, had the most extensive control in this project: Pyott, head of the well-known, biscuit company, and H.J. Millard, head of British United Shoe Machinery, sat on the club's committee in 1933. Conversely, their interests were bolstered either through their status on the City Council or business. Millard, for example, was Mayor from 1931-32. The direct economic value of the hostel to industrialists is clear: it has already been shown how the hostel aided the expansion of industry during economic booms (see p.61) and reclaimed a large proportion of the girls wages- 10s per week (see p. 113). In addition, the project preserved the girls' physical welfare and ensured a captive workforce, which could presumably be checked for attendance at work.<sup>180</sup> The influence of business men on the committee was often extended through private grants of money and reinforced by the middle class condescension of their wives who paid visits to the Club, donated money and

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<sup>177</sup> CeA, ARB 931 F10/3, Letter D. Tonkin to Department of Labour, 8 December, 16 December 1925, Letter Fowler to D. Tonkin, 24 December 1925.

<sup>178</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

<sup>179</sup> *PE - City of Industry, 1934*, (PE, 1934); PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1925-36.

<sup>180</sup> Union of SA, Report of the Central Housing Board, 1924, UG31-'25, p.18; A hostel at Sundays River, occupied during the packing season in 1935 was a temporary manifestation of this tendency, CAD, LIP 5/1, vol.11, Department of Labour, 1935, p.13.

bestowed trophies.<sup>181</sup> In these ways, then, those who most desired a stable, well-accommodated, but lowly paid, female workforce, contributed not only political but also financial support to the project.

Was the Club totally self-serving for industrialists? Dorothe Tonkin thought not, emphasizing the girls' needs and the difficulty of obtaining accommodation "which complies with minimum civilised standards, at a rate which they can afford to pay." Once housed, they were usually expected to also accommodate their aged and invalided relatives - a consequence that the hostel blocked.<sup>182</sup> Implying the humanitarianism of local manufacturers, she reported:

"The manufacturers would obtain their female labour whether the club existed or not, because the economic necessity of the girls and their families is so great and because the wage prospects, particularly in the boot industry, are very attractive.." <sup>183</sup>

A patronising altruism coated the public expression of the Club's custodians as they sought the acceptance of PE society. In her exuberant report of July, 1927, Mrs. Tonkin made much of the poor physical condition of the girls upon their first arrival at the club, and how within four to five months their "beauty" improved. Even the proximity of the hostel to the factories was cited as a philanthropic endeavour to prevent girls in poor condition having to walk far to their place of work - this in spite of the fact that their primary function was to spend all day, often standing, at factory work.<sup>184</sup> More directly, however, she acknowledged that the word 'institution' may stigmatise the project and therefore should be avoided. Perhaps she was unaware of the less flattering name, 'kooiekraal' often given to the hostel by male passersby

<sup>181</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.1, Department of Labour, 1934, p.13; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.84; However, donations were withheld during the Depression.

<sup>182</sup> CeA, VWN, vol. 3973, PG 652/62/127, Letter, D. Tonkin to Inspector of Labour, 1926.

<sup>183</sup> Union of SA, D. Tonkin, "Welfare of Girl Workers", 'Social and Industrial Review', June 1926, p. 416.

<sup>184</sup> Union of SA, 'Social and Industrial Review', July 1927, vol. 4, p. 415.

possibly expressing their resentment at restrictions on the inmates.<sup>185</sup> Mrs. Tonkin's sentiments found an echo in the Eastern Province Herald's enthusiastic commendations of the project and its creation of "happy workers".<sup>186</sup> However, the precepts of social reconstruction underlying the creation of the Athlone Girls' Club ran deeper than the physical preservation and regeneration of the white female workforce. It also extended to their moral 'civilization', perceived to be grounded in racial purity, which is discussed in section 7.3.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the hostel were not passive recipients in this process. Fearing the degree of control that would surely be exerted over their lives, only guarded interest was displayed by girls at the opening of the Club. Tonkin reported:

"The experience of the opening day at the club was a memorable one and illustrates the difficulties of this type of social work. Individual invitations had been sent to every girl working in the Port Elizabeth factories - boot factories, sweet factories, biscuit factories, tobacco factories, clothing factories, and so forth. These invitations were for the midday and the evening meal on certain dates, and preparations were made for entertaining on a large scale. Pathetic disappointment was the lot of the ladies' committee. Only two girls appeared for the first lunch and they were obviously acting as scouts come to spy out the land. Later the girls came in ever-increasing numbers, but the lesson had been learned of what tactful handling was required and how carefully one had to deal with the girls' fear of either patronage or charity."<sup>187</sup>

These actions suggest a more differentiated picture of the residents than the Department of Labour wished to project.

Women experienced very different lifestyles due to the type of housing that was provided for them. Thus, while the central state in particular, worked hard at accentuating a white, urban identity through political, residential and job segregation, the local administrators of the Athlone Club reinforced this social environment. By drawing together women from the same class and race, they hoped to entrench specific cultural and even religious norms. Other sectors of the proletariat such as coloured and black women were not so fortunate, remaining

<sup>185</sup> Interview, Miss Boucher.

<sup>186</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

<sup>187</sup> CeA, VWN vol. 3973, PG 652/62/127, D.Tonkin, "Welfare of Girl Workers", p. 415.



untouched by the altruism of either Port Elizabeth's elite or the civilised labour policy. By providing white female labour with a common point of entry into their urban environment, a sense of solidarity was established among the girls, many of whom probably worked in the same factories. In these ways, friendship and information networks could be established and common interests consolidated in the environment of the Club.<sup>188</sup>

A structured life at the Athlone Girls' Hostel was therefore a profoundly different community experience from one in a shack in Korsten or an overpriced sub-economic house in Holland Park. Increasing separation in work, schools and social amenities, enhanced this trend, especially in the post-Depression years, as pointed out by Iris Berger:

"This repressive and racist climate combined with economic growth to deepen the rift between poor urban women of different races."<sup>189</sup>

Thus, at a time when women's lives in Port Elizabeth were conditioned by both the historical mix of multiracial housing and new racially devised housing schemes, the Athlone Club was a significant example of the local and central states' attempts at social engineering specifically for women.

#### 2.4. DOMESTIC SERVICE

Domestic service, either in hotels, boarding houses or private houses, was the only formal work situation in early industrial Port Elizabeth where women of all colours converged. Yet, as with other low-level occupations, it was to become a microcosm of the country's looming urban segregation. As in Victorian England, domestic service in SA functioned at the lowest level of the class structure and as such was a point of entry into the formal labour market for the poor. Whereas in Britain, however, domestic service tended to disappear with the emancipation of the working class, in SA, it was entrenched by the superimposition of British class divisions on to racial separation. As time went by, white women became increasingly reluctant to participate in this work so that domestic service became predominantly the preserve of coloured women and the only significant field of formal employment that was open

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<sup>188</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.87.

<sup>189</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 49.

to 'non-white' women in the Cape. It thus became an instance of a widening breach between the formal and informal economy and between white elitism and racial integration.<sup>190</sup> Domestic labour was finally cleared of white women in the 1940s when the large scale proletarianization of black women occurred.<sup>191</sup> In this way it was an occupation that highlighted both the growing racial construction of gender and the gender specificity of this type of work.

The inclusion of white women in domestic service was historically contingent on three factors: economic recessions, consistent shortages of indigenous labour and, sometimes, a xenophobic mistrust of other races. Firstly, during economic recessions there would be some increase of white women in domestic service due to retrenchments in factories and shops. However, this would largely be offset by a simultaneous increase in cheaper servants of other races. Secondly, whereas labour shortages in general had always been exacerbated in SA by the relative independence of black farmers, the retention of white domestic labour was similarly facilitated by the stability of a black rural female population. This lasted until the early decades of this century when increasing land dispossession finally pushed them into the lower levels of the urban job market. Finally, white employers did not always trust black women in domestic duties. Although coloured and black domestics had very obvious advantages, racial fears erupted periodically over health and disease, specifically venereal disease, and morality. The NCW spent approximately 10 years unsuccessfully attempting to get the PECC to sanction the employment of women Police (see section 7.2) to patrol parks, especially St. Georges. This was partly connected to an alleged incident in about 1916, involving black maids tending European children.<sup>192</sup> Such fears were exacerbated by the employment of black males which harboured the inherent dangers of sexual contact or assault by black men

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<sup>190</sup> J. Cock, 'Black and White Women: A Socio- Historical Study of Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Eastern Cape', (PhD, Rhodes University, 1980), p. 208; C. van Onselen, 'The Witches of Suburbia:', p.5; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p.18; see also H. Bradlow, 'Women in the Cape and its Frontier Zones, c1800-1870: A Critical Essay on Androcentric Historiography', Biennial Conference of the SA Historical Society, Rhodes University, July 1995.

<sup>191</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 52.

<sup>192</sup> For a fuller discussion see Chapter 5.

on white female employers. As on the Rand and Natal, the huge shortage of domestic labour in Port Elizabeth had also led to their employment, there being "a large number of native men.....engaged in domestic service." <sup>193</sup> But as Van Onselen has pointed out, these fears tended to peak during times of economic stress, when white incomes were falling. In such periods - 1893, 1906 - 8, 1911 - 13 - accusations by both white maids (whose employment became threatened) and white female employers of sexual assault had either consciously or unconsciously increased. <sup>194</sup> Similarly, the post - war economic unrest that occurred country - wide and erupted in the shooting of Africans at a protest meeting in the city centre in October 1920, seems also to have coincided yet again with domestic racial tension between the sexes. C.E. Stidolph, the Acting Magistrate, alleged that:

"some weeks prior to the 23rd October the natives at Port Elizabeth had been causing very considerable unrest and anxiety amongst the European population of the City, and that.....the nerves of the Europeans, especially the ladies, were on edge as a result of the truculent attitude generally of the natives...."

He asserted that domestic servants and other employees had been responsible for open defiance and threats against their employers because they had been intimidated by militant union members. <sup>195</sup> Often, British women (see section 1.2) keen to escape the unemployment and overpopulation in Britain and poor whites - were, if affordable, often seen as a safer option so that a constant demand existed for them throughout the period. Nonetheless, a 'houseboy' acted as a general factotum, and slotting into the domestic hierarchy above black and coloured women, signified status. Black men were thus generally retained - even in the lower middle class and even some working class households - due to their greater affordability for some years to come. <sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the causes of, and occurrences at, the Native Disturbance at Port Elizabeth on the 23rd October, 1920, and the general economic conditions as they affect the Native and Coloured population, 1921, p.2.

<sup>194</sup> C. Van Onselen, "The Witches of Suburbia", p. 51.

<sup>195</sup> Union of SA, Annexures to the Votes and Proceedings, An. 582 1921, p. 22.

<sup>196</sup> C. van Onselen, "The Witches of Suburbia", pp.3, 10, 13, 56; J. Cock, 'Black and White Women', p. 218.

There was an established hierarchy within domestic service, one that was fashioned along the class sensitive divisions of Victorian England: governess, housekeeper, chamber maid, head nurse, cook, housemaid, nursemaid, laundry maid, kitchen maid and scullery maid.<sup>197</sup> English women tended to channel into the upper echelons. Poor white Afrikaans women entered the lower levels of domestic service such as housemaid and nursemaid. In 1931, there were one hundred and thirty seven white domestic workers over 21 years of age in PE North alone. Usually single, they lived primarily in Korsten, followed by Sydenham and Sidwell and then the North End.<sup>198</sup>

Whereas these patterns of employment were prevalent in the more affluent milieu of the Witwatersrand until the end of WW 1, there were also traces of them in Port Elizabeth during the 1920s. The homes that supported this were those of local merchants, industrialists and professional people, centred in the upper class areas of Mill Park, Cape Road and Park Drive. Here, there was a particular need and capacity for housekeepers, governesses, cook-generals and nurses.<sup>199</sup> The Jackson family who lived at 'Hanover House', Bird Street (now the Moth Club), even had a French governess and maids in 1918.<sup>200</sup> Many adverts also appealed for nursemaids: "An English woman to look after 2 children and assist with house. Native servants kept."<sup>201</sup>; "European nurse girl for two children.....".<sup>202</sup> Unlike in Britain, however, the typical 'nurse' (maid) was more of a mother's help in SA since the wages were now too low for a trained woman.<sup>203</sup> Near the bottom of the social ladder were working class white

<sup>197</sup> J. Cock, 'Black and White Women', p.219; C. van Onselen, "The Witches of Suburbia", p. 11.

<sup>198</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>199</sup> *EPH*, 30 March 1922.

<sup>200</sup> R. Trehaven, "More Memories of the 'Spanish Flu' Epidemic", *Looking Back*, vol. 28, no.1, March 1928, p. 38.

<sup>201</sup> *EPH*, 5 January 1926.

<sup>202</sup> *EPH*, 14 January 1922.

<sup>203</sup> C. Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land, The Emigration of Single Women from Britain to Southern Africa, 1820-1939*, (Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1993),p. 106.

families who even employed domestics themselves - usually a black or coloured char at least to do the laundry.

However, Cock notes the demand for ordinary white domestics had largely tailed off in the Eastern Cape by about the 1870s, while Swaisland maintains there was a changeover from white to black and coloured after 1910 and an end to the demand after WW 1.<sup>204</sup> Certainly during times of economic recession, the hierarchical divisions became increasingly difficult for the city to support. This was particularly so in the post-war recession. At the same time, growing black urbanisation also brought with it the opportunity for white homes to employ less skilled but cheaper domestics. Thus, the white servants, especially the cooks-general were the first to go as they did less of the essential rough work around the house.<sup>205</sup> Already in 1916, a list of 56 applications for the position of female municipal lavatory attendant reveals that 15 of the women had had some sort of domestic service background indicating the drop off in domestic employment.<sup>206</sup> More often than not, homes, even in the more affluent areas now often seemed to support no more than two categories of domestics, sometimes involving a combination of duties and open mainly to coloureds. For example, Mrs. Hobart Kay of Mill Park, wife of the District Surgeon, advertised for a coloured cook and a nurse-housemaid, while another advertisement only appealed for a housekeeper (albeit it for "very light duties") and one servant.<sup>207</sup> Many specifically called for combination roles, for example, housekeeper-companion, nurse-housekeeper or nurse-housemaid.<sup>208</sup> The employment exchange in Port Elizabeth reported that although several demands for domestic servants were received, it experienced a general reluctance to employ nurses and housemaids.<sup>209</sup> It seems therefore, that it is Swaisland's analysis rather than that of Cock's, which is more accurate

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<sup>204</sup> J. Cock, 'Black and White Women', p.226; C.Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>205</sup> C. van Onselen, "Witches of Suburbia", p. 15.

<sup>206</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/327, 22, Lavatory Attendant Applications, 1916.

<sup>207</sup> *EPH*, 5 January 1922.

<sup>208</sup> *EPH*, 30 March 1922; *EPH*, 5 January 1922.

<sup>209</sup> *EPH*, 11 January 1922.

for Port Elizabeth.

But it was also the government's harsh civilised labour policy that accelerated the decline in numbers of white women employed in domestic service. After 1926, when many more coloured women had been retrenched in industry in Port Elizabeth, they filtered down into the varying levels of domestic work usually only up to and including the position of cook-general.

<sup>210</sup> Moreover, the Master and Servants laws which had originated to control the supply of farm labour, criminalised black domestics if they deserted their job, thus making them easier to manipulate than white workers. Consequently, by the late 1920s, domestic service was mainly seen as 'kaffir work' with white girls exhibiting great resistance to it. <sup>211</sup>

Declining prospects for domestics generated a strong connection between domestic service, factory work, poverty and prostitution, coordinates that characterized the lives of many local white domestic workers. Firstly, the social ties between domestic workers were very strong - Nancy Francatelli, for example, worked as a nursemaid for Mrs. Eliason in Buckingham Road, her mother was a live-in chambermaid at the Palmerston Hotel and her sister-in-law also did domestic chores. <sup>212</sup> Furthermore, the number of factory workers in the North End in 1931, for example, were closely rivalled by those of domestic workers indicating the popularity of both these jobs among working class women. Many moved from one sector to the other. Fourteen year old Gertina van der Mescht entered domestic work when she first arrived in Port Elizabeth, while her fifteen year old sister, Magrita, started work at a canning factory. <sup>213</sup> In many cases, families sharing a house incorporated both these types of workers with housewives and older 'retired' men (presumably fathers) dependent on their wages. The majority of male relatives of domestic workers usually worked in shoe factories. <sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> *EPH*, 4, 5, 9, 14 Jan 1922; *EPH*, Jan and Feb 1928.

<sup>211</sup> J.Cock, 'Black and White Women', p. 28

<sup>212</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/304, Rex vs Gouws, 424/35, 1935.

<sup>213</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/200, Rex vs Florence Scheepers, 8 March 1927.

<sup>214</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931; see also GSC 1/2/1/304, Rex vs Gouws, 424/35, 1935, and GSC 1/2/1/200, Rex vs Florence Scheepers, 8 March 1927.

Poverty, the threat of starvation and the lure of prostitution was never very far from those employed in domestic work. Wages paid in Port Elizabeth in the early 1920s, ranged between thirty shillings to two pounds per month with keep. They were considerably lower than those paid on the Rand, where by the late 1890s "white nurses and housemaids commanded cash wages ranging between four and five pounds per month plus meals and a room in the house....".<sup>215</sup> Moreover, in Port Elizabeth in 1925, the cost of living for the lowest income group (under twenty pounds per month) was the highest of all the major centres in SA.<sup>216</sup> Between 1932-4 the usual rate for a housekeeper was still as low as two pounds ten shillings per month although by 1936, according to an employment agency, domestics' wages had increased by 75% since the Depression and an overall 50% from 1914.<sup>217</sup> Thus, many women drifted easily into prostitution.<sup>218</sup>

Van Onselen has indicated how lack of status also very often exposed domestic workers to sexual exploitation either by their employers or others: the only reference of a sexual nature in the PECC records was a complaint against the Beach Manager's behaviour with respect to certain servant girls at Humewood.<sup>219</sup> The youthfulness of many domestic workers may have compounded this tendency (see Chapter 7). Perhaps the problem in general was why labour bureaux and registry offices for whites, which had long been a feature of the large coastal towns by the turn of the century, placing employers and local or overseas work seekers in touch with one another, took on a new importance in 1918.<sup>220</sup> Throughout the

<sup>215</sup> C. van Onselen, "The Witches of Suburbia", p.4; black domestics' salaries tended to be around the lower end of the wage scale, approximately 30s per month (CAD, 1/PEZ, 1/1/1/75, Records of Proceedings, 1922).

<sup>216</sup> Union of SA, Report of the Cost of Living Committee, UG 47- '25, p.10.

<sup>217</sup> PEB Minutes, 5 March 1934, p.240; PEB, 1932, p.113; CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, Letter E. Howard to T.C., 9 January 1936.

<sup>218</sup> E. Brink, "'Maar 'n klomp "factory" meide'", pp. 186-7.

<sup>219</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/27, Public Recreation and Attractions Committee, 3 October 1922; C. van Onselen, "Witches of Suburbia", p. 48

<sup>220</sup> C. van Onselen, "Witches of Suburbia", p. 4.

year, the NCW pressured the PECC to establish an employment bureau for all servants "in view of the spread of contagious diseases and their attendant evils." indicating the fear of direct transmission of venereal disease between maids and families.<sup>221</sup>

Despite these circumstances, an increasing resistance on the part of poor white females to this work tended to raise the ire of the public. It was with some irritation that a letter to the EPH in 1928 recommended that the two destitute women who had recently come under public scrutiny (see section 5.3.) should respond to the numerous domestic advertisements in the paper, rather than relying on public charity.<sup>222</sup> A writer for the column 'Threads and Patches' in the EPH suggested, rather lamely, that a solution to filling the empty ranks of domestic workers, may be to avoid calling them 'servants' and to raise their status to that of office girls or typist.<sup>223</sup> However, the dire social conditions in Port Elizabeth during the 1920s and 1930s, often meant that potential domestic workers were so overburdened at home that any sort of job was impossible. 'Eve', a women's columnist in the EPH wrote:

"We are so often asked why the girls and women do not go out into domestic service. There are several answers to that question. You cannot ask a woman to leave a sick husband, and a brood of children for many hours on end. And who would be willing to engage her? You cannot suggest sending laundry to these pitiful hovels. Nor in very many instances are the women employable. There are always children; almost always, there is the inevitable baby expected. The older girls find work, but many of them are only suitable for casual labour...Grinding poverty undermines the poor from the start in this regard."<sup>224</sup>

Yet these trends highlighted a conundrum that dominated the role of white women in domestic service during the inter-war years. In searching for a solution to the poor white problem and ultimately the upward social mobility of white women, the government, contrary to these trends, promoted prevailing patriarchal ideas of female domesticity and the maintenance of the virtues of motherhood and housewifely duties. Thus, during much of the 1920s it

<sup>221</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 14 June 1918.

<sup>222</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

<sup>223</sup> *EPH*, 18 January 1922.

<sup>224</sup> *PEB*, Minutes, 11 December 1933, pp. 217 - 218.



supported calls for domestic training for white girls.<sup>225</sup> Ironically, this was consolidated by the government's interference with the normal dynamics of supply and demand. The Juvenile Affairs Board, established to place poor white adolescents in jobs, found that often their school leavers were too inexperienced and unskilled to qualify for the higher wages established in, for example, shop assisting, and that in fact, domestic service was a more realistic alternative. Thus, a sub-committee of the Juvenile Affairs Board, together with members of the Athlone Girls' Club, organised domestic service training of European girls.<sup>226</sup> By elevating women's wages, therefore, central government had both forced employers to be especially selective and girls to resort to the lower status of domestic service anyway - this, despite white girls' growing aversion to the work and the growth of coloured women in this sector due to the civilised labour policy.

Nevertheless, ideas about the virtue of domesticity flourished and in this ethos the Carnegie Commission noted that there should even be training in home-making for indigent girls in hostels, before they return home or find employment.<sup>227</sup> The head of a commercial school promoted a three month business training course to prepare women for marriage.<sup>228</sup> Technical colleges such as that in Port Elizabeth, offered courses as household assistants - something supported by the NCW who supplied a bursary for this purpose.<sup>229</sup> The Department of Labour decided to subsidize the training of 12 girls per year from the Athlone Girls' Club to the extent of two shillings and four pence per trainee per day for a six day week. Housecraft schools were established under the Vocational Education and Special Schools Act,

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<sup>225</sup> D. Gaitskill, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-1939", *Journal of African History*, 24, 1983, pp. 241-242.

<sup>226</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW AGM, 28 November 1930; 10 November 1933.

<sup>227</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Report of the Carnegie Commission*, p. 207.

<sup>228</sup> *EPH*, 7 February 1928.

<sup>229</sup> Union of SA, *Social and Industrial Review*, 1926, vol.11, p.655; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, pp. 51-54; TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 December 1928.

No. 29 of 1928.<sup>230</sup> Overall, the study period saw a lot done by the Pact and Fusion governments to uplift white women. However, resistance to domestic work and thus poor rates of admission to all these courses led to their abandonment by 1934.<sup>231</sup>

Meanwhile, employment of white domestics continued during the Great Depression, the 1931 Voters' List for North End indicating that domestic service, after factory workers, was the second highest employer of adult white girls in this area (5.7% and 7.11%, respectively). They registered themselves here under 'housekeepers', 'companions', 'domestic duties' and 'housemaids'.<sup>232</sup> After the Depression, the Carnegie Commission reported:

"There is a strong demand for their services. It is being realised more and more that they are far more competent than coloured servants .... (however) .. the majority of girls fit for it have a distaste for it."<sup>233</sup>

The post-Depression upswing also saw a turning point in white domestic employment. On the one hand it led to a renewed demand for full-time domestics.<sup>234</sup> On the other hand, more white women were able to escape domestic service. An employment agency reported:

"....farm girls have abandoned the idea of coming to town, factories are actively engaging many of the girls who prefer that class of work."<sup>235</sup>

Those whites who remained were trained and retained the better jobs, while the lower echelons of the work were increasingly occupied by coloured and black women. Black servants were not in demand as they were perceived as "untrained, lazy and slow" so that their wages only increased by 25% from 1932 to 1936.<sup>236</sup> As late as 1936, the demand for trained domestics

<sup>230</sup> CAD, SWP vol.3, Housecraft Schools, ref. 16/3, 1935.

<sup>231</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1, Department of Labour, 1934, p.61.

<sup>232</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>233</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report; Report of the Carnegie Commission*, vol.i, p.vii; M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter in the Poor Family, Report of the Carnegie Commission V(b)*, p.209.

<sup>234</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, p. 66.

<sup>235</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, R. Maitland to T.C, 3 January 1934.

<sup>236</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, E. Howard to TC, 9 January 1936.

in private service continued, so much so that the shortfall was rated by an employment agency as becoming a serious disadvantage to householders. He reported however, that girls working in hotels remained poorly paid and generally dissatisfied with their wages.<sup>237</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Factory work and domestic service both underwent significant change regarding white working class women. The former presented an attractive lure for large numbers of whites from the rural areas and was the main site of the Smuts and Hertzog governments' white job protection. Industrial growth was more rapid in Port Elizabeth than that of the Rand or of the Union on average and, together with the large labour supply, deskilling and the state's 'civilised labour' policy, resulted in a higher average of women in the industrial workforce than any other centre. This occurred at some cost to white men in the clothing industry, but especially coloured women in the leather and food and beverage industries. Thus, the numbers of white women employees soared even during and, unlike elsewhere in the Union, after the Depression of 1929. Employer preference was for young workers whose lower wages could be justified on the grounds of inexperience and the support of a family wage. From the Depression onwards, however, the age of women tended to be older partly due to factory legislation, social mobility and the recession itself, but also because of the demands of bigger factories for more skilled women. Despite exploitation and arduous working conditions, the study period saw improvement for white female factory workers in terms of factory legislation, the appointment of a female Inspectress and the establishment of a Social Welfare Department. Camaraderie and identity engendered on the factory floor were contextualized by the authorities' residential and sexual segregation of the races, especially in the form of the North End Girls' Hostel. Such attitudes, control and the absence of militant unions characterized the period as one of stability and dependency for factory workers.

Domestic service, however, represented a very different racial dynamic. At the commencement of the study period, domestic work was an occupation of mixed gender and race, but later saw substantial change partly because of the state's racial reorientation of class and partly by the

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<sup>237</sup>

CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, 29 December 1934.

noted inability of the city to support an expensive, racially divided hierarchy of domestics, the upper echelons of which were usually white. These factors paved the way for resistance to domestic service by white girls further contributing to the job's racial transformation. Therefore, as a microcosm of early integration at its inception, domestic work highlights more acutely than any other formal work, the growing divide between white women on the one hand, and coloured and black on the other. Together with factory work it encapsulates the major part of the white girl's work experience.

The urban growth and development of this period saw the phasing out of white women, not only from domestic work, but also from some of the lower echelons of informal work, such as laundressing and hawking. Self-employed midwives were also to come under pressure with the institutionalisation of midwifery. Although formal work increasingly became the preserve of white women many, especially in domestic service and industry, were forced to find alternative sources of work in order to supplement their low wages. Others, who were unemployed either because they were too old or married or because of economic recession, also found informal types of work more easily accessible. Thus, informal work is a fluid category incorporating class differentiation ranging from outworkers and hawkers to boarding house mistresses. For this reason Tomaselli's definition is appropriate where informal workers have been described as those who:

"have been excluded from the ownership of the means of production and whose choice of livelihood has either been as an employee/labourer or in an "informal" occupation".<sup>1</sup>

Many women, such as the mothers of single daughters who were pressed into wage work, focussed on a home-based economy.<sup>2</sup> In 1931, a large section of the adult white female population in PE North (1 847 or 77%) listed themselves on the Voters' List as housewives. Such a large percentage in what was essentially a working class area, and the fact that most of the men here were employed in the semi-skilled or unskilled categories (see chapter 5.2), indicates that many of these women must have relied on informal means of making money such as letting rooms, making and selling food or clothing, taking in laundry, hawking vegetables and other produce.<sup>3</sup> Forty four (or just under 2%) listed themselves as 'seamstress', 'costumier', 'dressmaker', 'milliner', 'upholsterer', 'clothmaker', 'cottonweaver' and 'knitter', many of whom were probably self-employed. Another

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<sup>1</sup> R. Tomaselli, "Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg: A History of People on the Street", in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal. Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*, (Johannesburg, 1983), pp. 215 -239.

<sup>2</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity. Women in South African Industry, 1900 - 1980*, (Indiana University Press, Indiannapolis, 1992), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> I have taken sub-letting to be a form of informal work since it generates income without formal employment or necessarily owning the means of production - that is, property - since many of the working class occupied rented dwellings.

four women (0,2%) described themselves as midwives and two (0,1%) as laundrywomen.<sup>4</sup> The flexibility of possessing personal, home-related skills for hire meant that private seamstresses and outworkers, particularly, could centre their activities on the home. Mrs. Robinson, a "certain skilled embroideress" even attempted 'distance work'. She appealed to the PEB who wrote to Mrs. van der Riet of the Blue Cockatoo a needlework establishment in Grahamstown, asking about the possibility of outworking.<sup>5</sup> Others however, such as hawkers and midwives, had to work away from home. A third class, consisting of laundrywomen and prostitutes, could ply their trade wherever convenient.

The activities of those who worked from home would necessarily have also strengthened the substantial sense of community already experienced by, for example, factory workers, who tended to live and work in the same area. Not only would jobs be found for each other, but seamstresses, for example, would have made clothes for neighbours, friends, relatives or needy people in the community. Corrie Gerber reports, "We heard through the working people about people who made clothes."<sup>6</sup> As Bozzoli notes:

"... in some situations we find developing a household - informal sector complex which acts as a powerful binding agent to an evolving community."<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite these bonds and the homogeneity of a largely white, working class community of women, the diversity within informal work created class stratification. For example, there was a great difference in the status between those who ran boarding houses on the one hand, and hawkers and prostitutes on the other, due to income and social acceptability. Many Jewish families took in fee - paying boarders to supplement their incomes. In the late 1920s, Mrs. Porter, a Jewish widow, who needed to bolster her income, ran a boarding house near the Edward Hotel in Central. This was primarily for young Jewish male immigrants based in the countryside. Mrs. Bernstein did the same

<sup>4</sup> Union of SA, Voters' list, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>5</sup> *EPH*, 23 March 1922; PEB Correspondence, 74, PEB to Mrs. van der Riet, 24 October 1923.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, Corrie Gerber.

<sup>7</sup> B. Bozzoli, "Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society", in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987), p.29.

in Cape Road.<sup>8</sup> Whereas women slipping into the poorer levels of the informal sector were always a concern to local bodies, the protective socio-economic network in which Jewish immigrants, particularly widows, were enveloped, often ensured the success of their entrepreneurialism.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the paucity of women in the more menial occupations such as laundressing and midwifery reflect the beginning of a general decline in their participation in informal work that began in the 1920s and the 1930s, respectively.

### 3.1. MIDWIVES

Midwifery was extensively practised in the rural areas during the inter-war period, but also to a large extent in the urban areas. In 1919 only 4.6% of all births in the Union took place in institutions.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1930s, midwifery in Port Elizabeth was undergoing a transition from an informal, individualized and female controlled practice to an increasingly institutionalized one controlled by male doctors in the urban areas.<sup>11</sup> By 1936, the number of births in institutions had therefore increased to 23.1%.<sup>12</sup> Du Toit explains the context as:

".... transformation in the late nineteenth century, the support of a more interventionist state, and rapid developments in medical science ...."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, a municipal by-law, no. 32 of 1931, implemented by the PECC in terms of regulations made

<sup>8</sup> Interview, E. Schauder.

<sup>9</sup> PEJLA, Annual Report and Balance Sheets, 30 June 1926, 19 September 1928; PEJLA, Minute Books, 1924 - 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Union of SA, UG 18 - 1938, Report on the Vital Statistics of the Union of SA, Births in Maternity Homes and other Institutions.

<sup>11</sup> H. Bradford, 'Herbs, Knives and Plastic: 150 Years of Abortion in South Africa', (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, African Seminar Programme, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Union of SA, UG 18 - 1938, Report on the Vital Statistics of the Union of SA, Births in Maternity Homes and other Institutions.

<sup>13</sup> M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap': The ACVV and the Management of Childbirth, 1925 - 1939', Conference for Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Durban, February 1991, p. 13.

under Section 18(b) of the Public Health Amendment Act of 1928 was an attempt to control and provide for the health and safety of pregnant women. This provided for the compulsory registration of midwives, qualified or otherwise, if they attended women for gain.<sup>14</sup> Criteria were based on possession of suitable equipment, cleanliness and knowledge. While the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Act of 1928, provided for the compulsory registration of only qualified midwives, the MOH emphatically stated that the number of midwives was too few to support this course of action in Port Elizabeth, although this was the eventual aim.<sup>15</sup> In 1931, therefore, there was a rush of women to get onto the new register. 65% of the applicants were white, 84% of these being accepted for registration as opposed to only 75% among the 'non-white' groups, due probably to the greater health hazards generated by the impoverished and disadvantaged conditions among which they worked.

Yet, during the study period there was a great need for self-employed midwives especially in the working class areas. Most qualified women lived in Central and were employed by official maternity homes such as the Salvation Army Maternity Home in Shepherd Street, or in the more middle-class establishments such as the Stoneham Nursing Home in Park Drive, "Glamis" in a house in Western Road and another in Pearson Street.<sup>16</sup> In the 1920s, of these maternity homes, only the first was free and therefore accessible to working class women. In October 1934, the Provincial Hospital finally established a maternity wing. Thus, whereas the 1931 Voters' List shows only four North End women as midwives, the Municipal registration list for midwives reveals

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<sup>14</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Registration of Midwives, 6 March 1931.

<sup>15</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Registration of Midwives, 27 July 1932.

<sup>16</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth, North End, 1931; CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Registration of Midwives, 1931; On February 8, 1900 the first Rescue home had been established in Shepherd St. near Prince Alfred Park in the North end, although the Salvation Safari indicates, probably inaccurately, that the Shepherd St. Rescue home was opened in November 1890, (M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth, A Social Chronicle to the end of 1945*, E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997, p. 107; 'A Brief History of the Origins of the Salvation Army in Southern Africa, 1883 - 1993. Salvation Safari', (2nd. ed.), October 1993, p. 50). A home established in 1940 at the corner of Hunter Avenue, became known as the Stoneham Maternity Home from 1946 (M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p. 135).



approximately twelve from this area, demonstrating the prevalent need.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of white midwives lived in Central but particularly the North End. These included Anna Halgreen from Rugby Street, Sydenham, Johanna Caine from Sidwell Avenue, Sidwell; Eugenaasiena Clulow, who lived with her pensioner husband and son; also Hannie Nel of Dolton Road, Sidwell, "the well-known midwife .... whose services were in great demand and great faith was held in her ability"<sup>18</sup> As stated, many of those in the poorer area of North End were without qualifications, indicating their informal role in the community. The importance of these individuals continued to be recognised by the PECC as evidenced in the case of Mrs. F. Weidman who lived in Rintoul Street, Korsten, an area where midwives were known affectionately as 'voet vroue' (foot women).<sup>19</sup> The MOH stated that she was registered despite being uncertificated because she was living in an area where no midwife was likely to be qualified.<sup>20</sup> Only a month later, however, she was removed from the register ostensibly because she had six children to cope with but probably for other unstated reasons.

While feminist historians cite registration as an concerted attempt by male doctors to impose state control on an otherwise effective practice, the picture is not so clear cut. Documentation reveals cases of alarming negligence. Mrs. A. de Lange of Robert Lane was exposed as having no knowledge of asepsis while Mrs. K. J. Black of 72 Valley Road, South End, had only attended four cases in fourteen years.<sup>21</sup> In 1935, Hester Jacobs was refused registration because she had attended confinements with unclean equipment and according to the MOH was "ignorant and not at all suitable". Louisa Coleman was removed from the register after she had ignored numerous warnings about her contravention of the regulations.<sup>22</sup> Thus, many middle class women and, in the Afrikaans

<sup>17</sup> This possibly indicates that some viewed the work as informal or part-time.

<sup>18</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Registration of Midwives, 1931; Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth, (North), 1931; M. Nel's Interview of J. Nel.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Mrs. Jantjies.

<sup>20</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Listing of Persons Practising Midwifery, 18 September 1933.

<sup>21</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Listing of Persons, 8 August, 6 November 1931.

<sup>22</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Listing of Persons, 9 November 1935; 14 March 1936.

community, the Arikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV) welcomed the scientific developments in medicine and midwifery and actively promoted their acceptance. The idea that pregnant women should let "things run their course" was seen by the organisation as a specific threat to the future of the Afrikaner nation in terms of birth rate, health development and the 'science of motherhood'.<sup>23</sup> However, the ACVV did not advocate male control but attempted to mould developments around the training of women. An educated, preferably middle-class midwife would teach pregnant mothers the importance of motherhood in a wider social context.<sup>24</sup>

By October 1934, when the new maternity block in the Provincial Hospital was opened and the training of midwives began, the MOH was no longer interested in registering untrained, uncertificated midwives. Consequently, at the beginning of 1935, twenty-one white women were taken off the list. This was a particularly difficult time for women such as Maria Henegan who had been practising for years as an untrained midwife and needed the money because her husband was unemployed.<sup>25</sup> The following year, she was desperate enough to throw down a challenge to the PECC to take responsibility for her situation.

Nevertheless, midwifery schools were expensive and salaries remained low, the situation only changing after WW2 with the infusion of large government sums to subsidize nurses' salaries.<sup>26</sup> Thus, by the end of the study period, informal midwifery, especially in the urban, white community was on the wane. Conditions in laundressing and hawking were far less conducive to white employment.

### 3.2. LAUNDRESSES

A study of white women in laundry work is interesting in that not only does it reveal a part of the development of the town's sanitary infrastructure, but it also raises the possibility that regulation

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<sup>23</sup> M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap', pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>24</sup> M. du Toit, 'Gevaarlike Moederskap', p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Listing of Persons, 9 November 1935.

<sup>26</sup> M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap', pp. 32 - 33.

in the industry was closely tied to gender issues within the larger question of the 'sanitation syndrome'.<sup>27</sup> This was the term Swanson had given to the justification of successive removals of blacks from the municipal area on the basis of health. As van Heyningen has pointed out, Indian, Chinese and Malay communities tended to dominate laundrywork.<sup>28</sup> In Port Elizabeth it was specifically monopolized by Malay washerwomen and Indian and Chinese family businesses.<sup>29</sup> In 1920 there were estimated to be about one hundred and fifty coloured / 'Malay' women who carried out family washing, and who competed with the thirty two established laundries run mainly by Indian and Chinese people in the Municipal area. Of these, all but two were worked by hand, one was European run, six Indian owned and twenty five owned by Chinese, probably all involving a considerable element of female family labour.<sup>30</sup> Laundry work, unlike domestic service, was an area where families of 'colour' were well enough established to employ white women. In 1928, the EPH reported that there was "a great deal of white labour in the first class laundries."<sup>31</sup> However, white women sometimes found themselves employed on a part-time and therefore informal basis since, as the Wage Board suspected, at least one employer evaded Wage Board determinations by employing his female labour force for only four days per week.<sup>32</sup> Yet even amongst white washerwomen there was class differentiation: details on the few individual white washerwomen on the 1931 Voters' List<sup>33</sup> - one in New Brighton and at least two in the North End alone - indicates that they were either widowed or deserted and obviously struggling to make ends meet.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900 - 1909", *Journal of African History*, 18, 3, 1977, pp. 387 - 410.

<sup>28</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community: The Survival of the Poor in Cape Town, 1880-1910", *South African Historical Journal*, 24, (1991), 128-143.

<sup>29</sup> M. Yap, and D. Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions. The History of the Chinese in South Africa*, (Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1996), p.219.

<sup>30</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes 1920, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> *EPH*, 28 January 1928.

<sup>32</sup> CeA, ARB, 1069/92/3/5, Divisional Inspector to Secretary for Labour, November 1933.

<sup>33</sup> Again, as with all informal work, there were probably many on the list who did washing without specifying so.

<sup>34</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

Both washerwomen and laundries operated in (and in fact contributed to) widespread insanitary conditions in Port Elizabeth during the 1920s, particularly in Central and the North and South End. In 1919 the MOH reported that laundries were generally run in the most unhygienic conditions, usually from a room in a building with other vermin - afflicted rooms used as sleeping quarters. Sewerage was not in use so that waste water soaked away into the streets.<sup>35</sup> Drying areas consisted of congested back yards.<sup>36</sup> Of the seventeen laundries in operation in 1921, as many as fourteen operated from dwelling places.<sup>37</sup>

Municipal control emerged in June 1926, and in a move which would not only remedy the evils of the existing system, but would also divert a percentage of laundry income into the coffers of the local state. Towards this end, the PECC decided to regulate the industry by establishing two fully equipped public laundries, one each at the North and South End.<sup>38</sup> As with the 'sanitation syndrome, attempts to draw the family laundries under municipal control most likely indicated underlying concern over the working conditions and the proximity to other races of their white female employees. Nevertheless, individual washerwomen resisted the cost of this intervention in their trade despite the facilities on offer such as ironing tables, lockers, various appliances and a female supervisor to explain their usage. The wash houses finally closed by 1931.<sup>39</sup> During the 1930s, determined attempts to elevate the position of whites in all spheres of social life explain the reduction of white women in this sector.

### 3.3. HAWKERS

Hawking, however, was an area where white women, although relatively few, seem to have been more active. Appel points out that hawking was not a feature of the last quarter of the nineteenth

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<sup>35</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the MOH 1919, p.28.

<sup>36</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector 1920, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, 1921, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, 1927, p.17; 1930, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, 1931, p. 4.

century but had become more popular by 1914.<sup>40</sup> This indicates that as industrial capitalism gave rise to social stratification, hawking provided an independent and flexible source of income for people who had drifted out of the bottom rungs of the economy, particularly in the less regulated society of that time. The vast majority of hawkers were men, with women usually forming somewhere between ten and twenty per cent of all hawkers granted licences by the PEM. Both groups demonstrated the same racial profile, that is, predominantly Indian and coloured with whites and blacks forming the smaller groups.<sup>41</sup> In 1928, whites and blacks each formed approximately 50% of either the coloured or Indian applicants. This may have probably been due to the fact that Indians, at least in Johannesburg, dominated the wholesale fruit market and gave Indian hawkers preferential access to the produce.<sup>42</sup> Not surprisingly, the most successful applicants in that year were Indians, with coloureds forming two thirds of their number and whites and blacks one third, suggesting an absence of racial discrimination in this regard by the authorities. Licences were refused if storage was unhealthy or lacking. Two hundred and ninety six applicants applied for this in 1929, while forty nine applied to sell fish, eight for sweets and cakes, seven for monkey nuts, six for ice - cream one for snuff and one for offal.<sup>43</sup> Mainly fruit, vegetables and eggs were sold.

For most of the study period, there were never more than about five or six new licences granted per month to white female hawkers, indicating the low incidence of their numbers. They usually operated in Central, the North and South End and Korsten, selling foodstuffs, mainly fruit and vegetables.<sup>44</sup> Dorothea Nellemann, however, applied to operate a 'Travelling Luncheon Wagon'

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<sup>40</sup> A. Appel, Exploring Some Aspects of Labour and Labourers in Port Elizabeth, 1870 - 1914", *South African Journal of Economic History*, 6, (2), September 1991, pp 1- 17.

<sup>41</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/25, Health and Licence Committee, January - December 1920; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/27, Health and Licence Committee, January - December 1922; 3/PEZ, 4/1/1/1776, Hawking, 1928; 3/PEZ, 4/1/1/1781, Hawking, 1936.

<sup>42</sup> R. Tomaselli, "Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg", p. 317.

<sup>43</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1776, Chief Sanitary Inspector to TC, 20 April 1929. Indian fruit and vegetable hawkers were probably mainly from the Tamil community who are thought to have originated either directly from India or from Mauritius. About the turn of the century, they were already converted to Roman Catholicism (M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, (E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997), p.113.

<sup>44</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/28, Report of Health, Licence and Markets Committee, 12 January 1923, 9 February 1923; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/29, Minutes: Standing and Special

at various race courses to sell food in cardboard boxes, very much like modern take-aways.<sup>45</sup> Almost all of the women were married indicating that either because of their marital status or their lack of skills, they were blocked from most occupations, or that their husbands' incomes were particularly low. Consequently, many used their homes either for storage or preparation facilities. During the Depression, Susan Keytel of Strang Street, Sidwell, unsuccessfully applied to hawk ladies' clothing which she stored in a bedroom. Her husband had been unemployed for five months and she was finding it increasingly hard to maintain her children.<sup>46</sup>

The transitory nature of the occupation is evident in the new names that continually appear on the application lists. However, such women as Elizabeth Russell and Martha Brower each continued to ply their trade at Newmarket Square for at least three years. Alice Cherry was more stoic, retaining her work in Valley Road, Rufane Vale for ten years from 1920 to 1929.<sup>47</sup> The stigma that must have been attached to this type of work in the British, class - conscious, segregationist ethos of Port Elizabeth was probably a strong factor in keeping down the numbers of white women in this activity. It was probably also the reason that some women took to using black men to sell their products. In August 1928, Winifred Parkes, a widow with four children, applied for a black man named Winston, to hawk packed sandwiches in a basket, while Mrs. Germany used Wilton Mpoza to sell cakes in the environs of Parliament Street, Central.<sup>48</sup>

Although there were the inevitable complaints about hawkers in general, having the unfair advantage of not paying rentals, white hawkers apparently experienced none of the group - specific criticism directed at Indian hawkers and no attempt at control as did their black counterparts. The

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Committee, 1924.

<sup>45</sup> CAD, 4/PEZ 1/1/1/7, Divisional Council Minutes, 10 June 1921.

<sup>46</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1776, Hawkers' Licences, 1928 - 9.

<sup>47</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1776, Hawkers' Licences, 1928 - 1929; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/27, Health and Licence Committee, 27 January 1922; 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1781, Hawkers' Licences, 1935 - 1936.

<sup>48</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1776, Hawkers' Licences, Report of the MOH, 11 February 1929.

predominance of Indians in this occupation had caused racial friction throughout the 1920s.<sup>49</sup> This is reflected both in complaints to the Council about the issuing of licences to them, complaints about the 'Asiatic menace' as well as in urgent telegrams sent by national Indian associations and interchanges with the Indian Deputation touring the country in 1926.<sup>50</sup> The latter were reassured by the PECC that Indian hawkers were steadily overtaking whites, as proved above.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in 1927, there were fifteen black women from such areas as New Brighton, Korsten and Vlei Post, who regularly took up a stand with their carts at the north side of the Baakens River Bridge in South End, serving mainly meat, beans, mealies and ash cakes to hundreds of workers. They transported the food by donkey carts in receptacles such as open paraffin tins. The scale of this enterprise must have been quite large not only because customers came from as far as "the North End along and off the main thoroughfares up to the Baakens River Bridge", but also because, in 1932, the authorities saw fit to house and control the operation in a municipal structure in Horton Street. The facilities included a pantry, wash up areas, stalls and fireplaces for cooking. This act was ostensibly for reasons of hygiene and appearance, but it also enabled the Council to extract some of the profits, by installing a lessee, a Mr. Tshangana, who was responsible for the collection of a fee. Some women resisted this control, mainly because they found the charges too expensive for the cramped and inadequate cooking facilities allotted them. Setting up stalls on street corners in the vicinity, they thus caused tension between themselves and those women making use of the council 'eating house'.<sup>52</sup> But women who chose to evade the council's plan faced removal from this most lucrative locale of trade. Once again the council intervened with the aim of abolishing opposition

<sup>49</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 1/2/1/25, Minutes, Town Attractions, Publicity and Beach Committee, 9 March 1920, p.91; 13 July 1920; see also CAD 4/1/1/1776, J. Wallace to TC, 11 December 1929; TC to SAP District Commandant, 23 January 1929.

<sup>50</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 1/2/1/23, Report of the Health and Licence Committee, 23 May 1918; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/26, Health and Licence Committee, 2 December 1921; 3/PEZ 1/2/1/28, Health and Licence Committee, pp. 319, 526; 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1776, Hawkers' Licences, 1928 - 9.

<sup>51</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/31, Report of the Meeting between the Mayor, Parliamentary Members for the Division of Port Elizabeth and the Indian Deputation touring the Union of SA, 21 January 1926, pp. 75 - 77.

<sup>52</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/2, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, January 1927; *EPH*, 7 February 1928; 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/6, Report of the Superintendent, 19 May, 21 July 1932; PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, 1933, p.10.

to the eating house by selectively invoking a 1928 by - law which revoked hawking certificates, but only against those women selling in the environs of the municipal eating house. In further proposed manipulation of the by-laws, certificates were to be re-issued so the women could start selling again but only at controlled points.<sup>53</sup> No such grouping of white female hawkers, necessitating a concerted municipal reaction, is documented.

However, if certain black women were receptive to linking their business to the white council, they drew the line at closer involvement with whites. When the Superintendent of New Brighton asked them their views about having a white woman running the eating house at Horton Street, they were unanimously opposed. Their reasons were that;

"there would always be friction and that their many grievances and complaints, when brought to the notice of the European in charge, would be brushed aside as not worth consideration."<sup>54</sup>

Thus, already by the late 1920s, female hawkers were selling a variety of 'culturally - specific' foods. They also tended to operate in separate racial groups, experiencing different governmental and public responses.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the study of informal work, similarly to domestic work, reveals a fascinating yet brief time when white women were active in this sector. Since greater independence and mobility existed here than in the formal sector, a certain amount of racial interface occurred. For example, midwifery was mixed within the practice but also within transactions, although Malays, Indians and Chinese dominated laundry work, while hawkers were mainly Indian. However, regulation and control, driven by gender, class and race issues, permeated all three sectors so that white women tended to abandon informal work more rapidly than that of domestic service. The study period therefore provides an interesting glimpse of what was once a more fluid society.

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<sup>53</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/6, Letter Messrs. Lawson Brown and Brown, 24 August 1932.

<sup>54</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/7, Report of the Superintendent, New Brighton, 10 March 1933.



## PART 111. THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL - SELF AND FAMILY

### Chapter 4 - THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF WOMEN

#### 4.1. SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND HEALTH

If, as Bradford has pointed out, women's history is a crucial tool for providing a balanced perspective of the past, so equally, the study of social conditions and health also provides a penetrating insight both into the lives of a society and its women.<sup>1</sup> Social conditions, housing, poverty and ignorance consistently undermined the health of the working class. The female workers discussed in the preceding two chapters were often employed at low wages which meant occupying overcrowded, usually insanitary housing and slum dwellings, in the most ill-kept areas. Women's lives therefore, were conditioned, at the most basic level, by social and health conditions, and at the beginning of the study period, Port Elizabeth was beset by poor social conditions and serious health problems.

Responsibility for these factors fell mainly on the shoulders of the local authorities. As previously mentioned, central government provided only for a limited amount of poor relief and loans for housing. Inevitably, the provision of infrastructure had not kept pace with urbanization. Critical issues were housing shortages, overcrowded housing and slums, dirty factories, bad drainage (work on this had only started in 1916), overflowing sluits and backyard latrines, filthy 'tea shops' and laundries, and the absence of a healthy milk supply. Generally throughout the 1920s, the reports of both the Chief Sanitary Inspector and the MOH reflect their struggle to upgrade the city. However not all PECC departments had the same priorities. The Union government noted a general interest in catering for the tourist trade rather than improving sanitary conditions, which would have been of greater benefit to the local residents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Bradford, 'Women in the Cape and its Frontier Zones, c 1800 -1870: A Critical Essay on Androcentric Historiography', Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, Rhodes, July 1995.

<sup>2</sup> J. Robinson, 'The Politics of Urban Form: Differential Citizenship and Township Formation in Port Elizabeth 1925-1945', Conference on Port Elizabeth's place in the History and Historiography of South Africa, Vista University, Port Elizabeth, 24-25

Local bodies also attempted to accelerate development. In 1928, the Women's Municipal Association (WMA) undertook a comprehensive survey of the slum areas, concluding that some were in a worse condition than during the 1918 influenza epidemic. The Association gave an example of a typical house on South End hill where a bad TB case lodged in a room in a yard with his family. There was one sanitary convenience for 16 people, which was emptied once weekly and open rubbish receptacles. Here, "the smell and flies (were) indescribable". Such home conditions were reproduced in various pockets all over the city, but especially in the working class areas. In the South End, they radiated outwards from "that bed of disease", the festering artery of the South End slums, the Baakens River. The WMA reported graphically:

"I have watched Chinamen carrying buckets of water from the pools where dead cats lay and rotting vegetables covered the surface, and with this water they washed lettuces, cress, celery and other vegetables."<sup>3</sup>

Rubbish removal, even in the more prosperous area of Humewood, was carried out by dilapidated baths and baskets with a "deplorable result" on windy days. In the North End, too, slops were thrown into the streets, especially in the neighbourhood of Vleipost, Zwartkops Street.<sup>4</sup> The Chief Sanitary Inspector reported in 1920, that after inspecting all the 'tea shops' and restaurants, notices were served on almost every one.<sup>5</sup> Removal of night soil in the PEM was only by request, and at a charge of one shilling per tub, so the poorer classes often did not request it.<sup>6</sup> Considering that they usually inhabited the more overcrowded areas they were therefore most exposed to serious health hazards. This was a prime cause of enteric fever and a main cause of infant mortality. The Women's Municipal Association thus called for a more adequate and efficient Sanitary Inspector and, preempting the appointment of Octavia Hill Women Housing Managers of the 1940s, frequent inspection of homes, by women because:

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September, 1992 p.3; see also section 4.4.4. p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *EPH*, 28 January 1928.

<sup>4</sup> *EPH*, 28 January 1928.

<sup>5</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1920, Chief Sanitary Inspector's Report, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1923, Report of the MOH, p.20.

"one feels that a woman would be more fitted to undertake this work than a man."<sup>7</sup>

In Korsten, however, there was an absence of even the most basic provisions, such as no "water supply, no ambulance or fire brigade service, no baths or washhouses, no street lighting and no footpaths."<sup>8</sup> All sorts of evils prevailed such as the exposure of uncovered receptacles for the collection of water and open wells to dirt, dust and flies. Excreta buried in shallow pits led to the contamination of food and milk. Water was also sold at exorbitant prices. Since it was piped only up to the Korsten boundary, local entrepreneurs would collect water here in donkey drawn carts and then sell it in Korsten at much higher prices than Municipal inhabitants paid.<sup>9</sup> In order to avoid these costs, mainly black women would queue up to collect water at the open wells or, for example at a small spring in the quarry, where they would ladle out the water into receptacles. A shortage of rain would therefore affect Korsten women with "peculiar intensity".<sup>10</sup> There was also difficulty in regular washing and overflowing toilets in tiny yards. Since donkey drawn transport was the basis of many Korsten dwellers' income, stables, whose floors were often covered in manure and drenched in urine, usually existed alongside dwellings on the tiny plots. Thus, during the study period, dirt and disease was rife in Korsten.

In an urban centre where overcrowding was endemic and health education in its infancy, much of the working class fell victim to poor health, further undermining their ability to secure or hold jobs and break out of the cycle of poverty. In 1918, a world-wide influenza epidemic, resulting in approximately 20 million deaths, caused devastating mortality in Port Elizabeth and the rest of the country.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *EPH*, 28 January, 1928; Octavia Inspectors were established in 1938 to inspect the homes of the poor (see J. Robinson, 'The Politics of Urban Form', p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape and Centre of Resistance, A Social and Economic History of Korsten, 1931-1962', (B.A. Hons. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> J. Cherry, 'Blot on the Landscape', p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> *EPH*, 19 January 1928.

<sup>11</sup> Over 100 000 people perished in SA in a few weeks, D. Ferguson, 'Consult the Doctors', (Cape Town, 1976), p. 2; R. Trehaven, "More Memories of the "Spanish Flu" Epidemic",

Beginning in early October, in the poorer, working class areas - first North End, and then in the South End forty eight hours later - by the 16th December it had struck at most households in the city. Whole families caught the disease. The city was virtually rendered a 'ghost town' with homes, offices and factories closing their doors. The suffering in New Brighton was extreme and saw the digging of mass graves. Moving accounts have been recorded of many giving up their lives to care for the sick. All in all, there was a total of 27 306 cases and 2 017 deaths.<sup>12</sup> The health authorities were sufficiently moved to enact the Public Health Act of 1919. This centralized control of all public health matters under the Minister and Department of Health and forced Municipal Councils to appoint Medical Officers of Health (MOH) to keep the government informed. Special provisions were made for infectious diseases, TB and venereal diseases. It also forced Municipalities to keep the government informed, on an annual basis, about the supply state of housing and urban overcrowding.<sup>13</sup>

It was apparent, though, that unless the urban infrastructure was drastically improved in the poor areas, disease would flourish.<sup>14</sup> Thus the inter-war period saw the continuation of many notifiable diseases such as diphtheria, typhoid (enteric fever), TB especially in Korsten, and small-pox; the latter always feared as an import from the 'native territories'. The significance of the Infectious Diseases Hospital, the former Lazaretto, established in this period to cater for notifiable diseases and epidemics, is crucially clear.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, appalling location conditions which had led to a huge death rate in New Brighton in the 1918 Influenza epidemic supported a consistently high incidence of TB. Poor sanitation caused dysentery here and, in 1916 and 1920, outbreaks of typhoid (a sure indicator of bad sanitary

*Looking Back*, vol. 28, 1, March 1989, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> R. Trehaven, "A Note on the "Spanish Flu" of 1918 in Port Elizabeth", *Looking Back*, vol. 27, 2, September 1988, pp. 31 - 33.

<sup>13</sup> UPE, Statutes of the Union of SA, 1919, Cape Town, 1919; CeA, JUS, 1/307/19, vol.190, Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1919; Dr Scroggie was appointed the first MOH for Port Elizabeth on 1 May 1920.

<sup>14</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1924, Report of the MOH, p.21; 1923, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth, A Social Chronicle to the end of 1945*, (E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997), p. 95.

conditions).<sup>16</sup> Typhoid also found a reliable breeding ground in Korsten where an alarming number of cases were reported in 1926.

Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s TB continued to be the biggest killer of the poor in PE, but it was only after the inclusion of Korsten into the Municipal area, that the PEM was forced to take note of TB as the most serious disease afflicting the city. According to Marais, coloureds were particularly affected by poor health conditions. In 1896, the Government Health Office had pinpointed coloureds countrywide as the chief sufferers from TB, caused mainly by overcrowding in insanitary conditions. Also in 1914 the TB Commission concluded that TB was four to six times more prevalent among coloureds than Europeans and more widespread in the towns than the rural areas.<sup>17</sup> However, since blacks formed the largest group in Korsten, they must have comprised a sizeable, and certainly by 1936, the predominant sector of the afflicted.<sup>18</sup>

TB spread easily in overcrowded, unhealthy living conditions, especially from one family member to another, causing intense misery. The PEB reports that of the 28 TB patients they assisted during 1928-9:

"Five are married couples, the husbands and wives both being victims of the complaint. A widow, who just lost two daughters as the result of tuberculosis, has herself now contracted the disease. She occupies a room in a yard which she shares with her three remaining children."<sup>19</sup>

Recovery could take as long as up to two to three years, and this was not always permanent, leading

<sup>16</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/26, Health and Licence Committee, 17 January 1920; G. Baines, 'New Brighton, PE - 1903-1953: A History of an Urban African Community', (PhD, UCT, 1994), p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1962), p. 259.

<sup>18</sup> The Stella Londt Convalescent Home was only opened for TB in 1935 - the final realisation of the Ministering League's dream.

<sup>19</sup> PEB, Annual Report 1928-9, pp.4-5.

often to "serious economic and domestic problems."<sup>20</sup> Thus, at a Dominion Conference in Johannesburg in 1936, Mrs. Tonkin, recognizing that women were the strong link between housing and health, emphasized that public money spent on child welfare work, T.B. and venereal disease was wasted until proper housing with low rentals was obtained and that "It was essential that every women (sic) should understand these facts."<sup>21</sup>

While the provision of infrastructure has always been worse in poorer urban areas, in SA, where segregation was increasingly institutionalized, statistics highlight the racial and class composition of those most vulnerable to disease: in 1918, the influenza epidemic killed mainly 'non - Europeans' and the white poor. For example, within two weeks of its outbreak about the beginning of October, the MOH stated that there had been 600 cases reported at the North End.<sup>22</sup> In 1920 11 Europeans and 80 non-Europeans died from TB; in 1923, the statistics were 3 and 63 respectively; in 1936, 35 Europeans, 124 'Eurafricans' and 158 Africans died.<sup>23</sup> The local state's concerns were also differentially applied not only in terms of class and race but also as regards gender. It was particularly the squalid, peripheral areas of Korsten and New Brighton that tended to be seen by the authorities in terms of either their cost or their health threat to the white population. Concern expressed about earth floors and cow dung in New Brighton causing an increase in dust which spread TB, was reduced to a fear that the disease would then be transferred by the large number of (female) domestic servants and factory workers to "the citizens of PE and their families."<sup>24</sup> Korsten presented the very same concern.<sup>25</sup> In 1928 the New Brighton Superintendent expressed his interest in de-verminising blacks coming into the location in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, although this was never considered

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Ferguson, 'Consult the Doctors', p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> 'NCW News', vol.1 (4), September 1936, p.4; *EPH*, 17 August 1936.

<sup>22</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/23, Health and Licence Committee, 14 October 1918.

<sup>23</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1920, Report of the MOH, p.19; 1923, p.29; 1936, p.67.

<sup>24</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1926, Report of the New Brighton Superintendent, p.64.

<sup>25</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes, Report of the PE Municipal Boundaries Extension and Re-Distribution of Wards Commission, 1927, p.16.

for urbanising whites. Blacks were obviously seen as the importers of disease. Finally, the MOH, rather mercenarily, reported that if the health of blacks in the PEM was improved by better housing and living conditions, the Provincial Hospital bill funded by the PE ratepayers would inevitably decrease.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2. VENEREAL DISEASE

Less visibly, these degenerate social conditions led to a chain reaction of family instability, promiscuity, the spread of diseases such as syphilis, premature births and greater infant mortality. Maternal syphilis was a notable factor in stillborn infants.<sup>27</sup> The impact of venereal disease (VD) on the family was quite severe since treatment was prolonged. Although syphilis was the most severe form of VD, the symptoms of gonorrhoea, the most common, dragged on for weeks, sometimes months. The MOH, Dr. Ferguson, reported the emergence of many domestic problems such as babies that ended up in hospital with gonorrhoeal conjunctivitis, and more seriously, "patients (who) often talked of suicide."<sup>28</sup>

Venereal disease statistics, however, are a highly unreliable basis for an analysis of health, since there were strong social and religious taboos, particularly the moral constraints of Christianity, which prevented women especially from revealing themselves to be sufferers. The MOH reported in 1929 that neither European nor 'non-European' females were keen to complete treatment which was conducted at the Health Centre's VD Clinic established at the old Lock Hospital in 1926 (see section 4.3.).<sup>29</sup> Thus, special provision was made for separate consultations, not only according to race but

<sup>26</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1934, Report of the MOH, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. D. Ferguson, *Civilisation for Africa, A Study of the Impact of Modern Scientific Medicine on Africa. The Dawn of Civilisation in the Eastern Province*, (Port Elizabeth, 1981), p.57.

<sup>28</sup> D. Ferguson, *Civilisation for Africa*, p.57; D. Ferguson, 'Consult the Doctors', p.4.

<sup>29</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the MOH 1929, p. 53; CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Venereal Disease, 1925 - 9.

also to gender.<sup>30</sup> Yet, certain conclusions drawn from the statistics can be validated, such as that non-Europeans, especially coloureds, generally showed an increasingly higher incidence of VD. Also, factors such as the black urban practice of establishing temporary sexual unions, as well as the greater likelihood of the fragmentation and instability of both black and coloured families due to greater poverty, contributed to higher levels of susceptibility to VD. In Durban, the MOH reported:

"It is a hygenic maxim that 'civilisation means syphilization'. All the circumstances connected with a transition from the primitive to the civilised state are favourable to the spread of venereal disease of (sic) this we have an outstanding example in the case of the native population, whose contact with urban civilisation is all the more so, because it is intermittent and indifferently controlled."<sup>31</sup>

This opinion was endorsed by the local MOH, Dr. Ferguson:

"My experience indicates that the problem is associated with the world wide drift of rural populations to the towns and cities. The incidence of venereal disease is much greater in the peri-urban areas of PE than for example in Cuylerville in the country district of Bathurst. The nearer the city the more chance of venereal disease."<sup>32</sup>

This racial profile also applied to females. In 1927, VD figures show nearly five times as many 'non-European' female cases attending the VD clinic as white and by 1931, the gap between white and non-white females had widened even further. In fact the number of new European cases had actually dropped, suggesting the upward social mobility of the former.<sup>33</sup> In 1935 the Assistant MOH outlined the enormity of the problem and particularly as it affected black and coloured females:

"There were during 1934 about 12 000 consultations and of these approximately 50% took place at the non-European session held on Thursday afternoons at which only women and children attend."

He proclaimed Port Elizabeth as one of the largest VD centres in the country, citing the increase of the

<sup>30</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1928, Report of the MOH, p.75.

<sup>31</sup> TCF, Report of the MOH, Venereal Disease, 30: 188E, cited in D. MacKenzie 'A Social History of African Women in Durban, 1920 - 1950', (MA, University of Natal, 1984).

<sup>32</sup> D. Ferguson, *Civilisation for Africa*, p.58.

<sup>33</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1927, Report of the MOH, pp. 59-60; Report of the MOH 1931, p.75.



aforementioned group as being over five times higher and the increase of clinic attendances for all races as over three times higher than figures for Johannesburg which had a population over four times greater.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4.3. INFANT MORTALITY<sup>35</sup>

However, it was the issue of maternity care that had especial significance for working class women due to the prevalence of a chronically high rate of infant mortality (see Tables 4.1 - 4.3).

The enormity of the problem afflicting Port Elizabeth was emphasized by the MOH in 1920 by pointing out that the European rate of 129,5 per 1 000 births was the highest in the country. Cape Town, whose health problems among the labouring poor had an older history and which was estimated to be equivalent in size, had an infant mortality rate of 81,6 per 1 000 births.<sup>36</sup> As late as 1926, there was hardly any difference at all between the numbers of European infant mortalities for the two cities: 61.47 and 65.18 per 1 000 births in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town respectively. Amongst the whites it was most prevalent in the Afrikaans sector (see Table 4.2.). 'Non-white' figures, however, were always dramatically higher than that of Europeans during the entire study period, being approximately three times higher despite the fact that the European population was larger (see Tables 4.1 and 4.3). In 1926, 'non-white' figures also exceeded those for Cape Town (213.06 as opposed to 175.49 per 1 000). In 1928, in Johannesburg, where the population was about four times greater, there were 705 black infant mortalities per 1 000 births (as opposed to 425 in Port Elizabeth.)

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<sup>34</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/9, Report of the MOH, 29 April 1935.

<sup>35</sup> 'Infant' is taken to mean children under 1 year (PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1923, Report of the MOH, p.18.)

<sup>36</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1920, Report of the MOH, p. 16.

**TABLE 4.1.**  
**Infant Mortality in Port Elizabeth, 1919 - 1936<sup>37</sup>**  
 (rates per 1 000 births)

Year	Whites	Coloureds
1919	49.8	245.9
1920	129.5	263.2
1921	91.7	270.3
1922-3	94.1	242.0
1923-4	112.8	220.3
1924-5	97.3	243.3
1925-6	61.5	213.1
1926-7	81.2	219.0
1927-8	99.4	232.6
1928-9	87.1	176.8
1929-33	no figures available for these years	
1933-4	78.0	193.9
1934-5	90.7	253.8
1935-6	61.3	232.5

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<sup>37</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1919-1927; CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/5, NAB Minutes, 12 November 1931.

**TABLE 4.2.**  
**'Dutch' Infant Mortality in Port Elizabeth, 1925 - 1930<sup>38</sup>**

Year	Births		Deaths		I.M. Rate	
	Dutch	Other Epn.	Dutch	Other Epn.	Dutch	Other Epn
1925-6	328	404	23	22	70,12	56,93
1926-7	357	394	36	31	92,16	78,93
1927-8	407	388	49	30	115,98	67,27
1928-9	361	389	40	27	110,80	69,40
1929-30	461	393	64	24	138,83	61,06

Causes of high infant mortality were class-based. A Johannesburg missionary in 1928 linked its prevalence among blacks to VD, TB, alcoholism and the low standard of urban living which in turn derived from the lack of a living wage, the lack of facilities for pre-natal care for working class and poor women and the ignorance of mid-wives and mothers about feeding.<sup>39</sup>

The MOH confirmed:

"Parents of the better classes show a lamentable ignorance in common sense methods of rearing babies and yet the death rate amongst these classes is very much lower than amongst the poorer classes in slum dwellings."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, Census and Statistics, 1925 - 37.

<sup>39</sup> D. Gaitskill, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-1939", *Journal of African History*, 24, 1983, p. 250.

<sup>40</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1925, Report of the MOH, p.55.

**TABLE 4.3**  
**Infant Mortality in New Brighton, 1927 - 1932<sup>41</sup>**  
(rate per 1 000)

Year	Rate
1927-28	351.14
1928-29	319.08
1929-30	332.00
1930-31	230.33
1931-32	171.30

Certainly poor living conditions often led to early marriages and large families. The poor standards in some sectors of midwifery prior to 1931 would also have played a role in failed deliveries. Against this background, diarrhoea and enteritis, prevalent everywhere in Port Elizabeth but especially common in Korsten and New Brighton, contaminated children through unclean milk and were the chief causes of infant mortality in all racial groups.<sup>42</sup> These two diseases probably were the main contributors to Port Elizabeth's high infant mortality rate.

A high rate of deaths among whites endured throughout the study period, most particularly in the early to mid-1920s (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2) when urbanization and poverty were greatest. Still by 1930 the MOH noted a high rate of infant deaths in the industrial (ie. white) section of the community.<sup>43</sup> However, while he reported the lowest rate in 1936 since 1910, attributing it to the employment of Health Visitors and the establishment of clinics, in the same year, Mrs. Holland described Port

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<sup>41</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/5, NAB Minutes, 12 November 1931.

<sup>42</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1925, Report of the MOH, p.55; 1922, p.28; CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/724, MOH to PECC, 20 December 1924; By 1928, milk in the PEM was still only inspected on registered premises, but not tested due to the lack of a laboratory.

<sup>43</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1930, Report of the MOH, p.28.

Elizabeth's infant mortality to the NCW executive as 'urgent'.<sup>44</sup> The NCW, in turn, wrote to the finance committee of the PECC pointing out that the death rate was far higher than in any other large centre of the Union and asking for the additional appointment of an MOH, preferably a woman assistant MOH who could concentrate on the enormous health problems afflicting women and child care.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.4. LOCAL HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN

Local government's concern for maternal and family health, though often compromised by other municipal issues, became more visible. It was of particular concern to the authorities that the poorer classes fell victim to infectious and venereal diseases and infant mortality on such a large scale.<sup>46</sup> Thus, on the basis of these issues, the evolution of a three - pronged approach to local health care for women manifested itself. A Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme was instituted by both the Health and Licence Committee and the Child Welfare Society (CWS) at the instigation of the MOH on 29 September 1920.<sup>47</sup> The CWS, itself, had been established in 1917 under the Children's Protection Act, no. 25 of 1913, and after representations from the NCW, 'Infant Protection Visitors' or Nurse-Inspectors, had been appointed under its auspices by the Magistrate.<sup>48</sup> Their time was largely engaged in Infant Consultation Bureau work and dispensing practical advice in mother-craft.<sup>49</sup> However, the new initiative provided for the extension of this type of care without the involvement of central government by the appointment of two Health visitors responsible to the MOH and the welfare centres at the North and South End.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1936, Report of the MOH, p.66.

<sup>45</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/2, NCW, General meeting, 13 February 1936.

<sup>46</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/25, Health and Licence Committee, 1920.

<sup>48</sup> TAD, A 296, NCW Minutes, 3/22/1/1, 8 June 1917.

<sup>49</sup> Child Welfare Society, First Annual Report, 1918.

<sup>50</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ, 1/2/1/26, Health and Licence Committee, 1921.

The Health Visitors would visit homes and

"study the conditions under which the children must be reared and can demonstrate the methods of caring for the child with the means at the disposal of the mother and above all can give advice on the bad home conditions which are invariably present." <sup>51</sup>

However, at the instigation of the NCW, who had felt that a District Nurse "would be of greater value to the community than Lady Health Visitors" a Red Cross District Nurse was appointed on 26 March 1923. <sup>52</sup>

**TABLE 4.4.**  
**Number of Health Officers and Visitors to Population**  
**in Each of the Major SA Cities, 1936<sup>53</sup>**

Town	Population	Health Officers	Health Visitors	No.
C.Town	293 279	12	34	8 625
E.London	46 855	2 and 2 part-time	3	15 618
PE	99 050	2	5	19 810
Durban	223 211	5	8	27 901
Jo'burg	448 000	2 and 8 part-time	14	32 000

She covered the municipal area single handedly, visiting homes, including hovels and stables, some

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<sup>51</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1925, Report of the MOH, p.55; Health Visitors received a salary of 210 pounds per annum and a uniform (*EPH*, 30 March 1922).

<sup>52</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Mins, 27 June 1922; February 1925; the NCW announced a collection of 378 pounds 19s in aid of the District Nurse Fund (TAD, A 296, 3/222/1/1, NCW AGM, 9 February, 1923.)

<sup>53</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1678, Census and Statistics, 22 February 1936.

housing between six to ten children.<sup>54</sup> The public had to raise one hundred pounds towards her salary, the Provincial Administration one hundred and fifty, while patients paid five shillings per year, six pence per month or threepence per visit to offset the authorities' costs.<sup>55</sup>

Then in 1925, a great advance in the coordination of white women's local health care occurred. After the institution of the Pact government, nationalist - based campaigns for 'volksgesondheid' were launched from 1925 by D.F. Malan, the Minister of Health. These were particularly sensitive to infant mortality, child care and the role of women in family health. These initiatives were taken up by the Afikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV) who promoted the establishment of maternity clinics and the training of midwives, especially in the rural areas.<sup>56</sup> Then in April 1926, the government-run Lock Hospital for VD cases at the corner of Adderley and Quick Streets, which had been handed over to the Municipality in 1924, was turned into the Municipal Health Clinic Centre<sup>57</sup>. It housed two badly

<sup>54</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1926.

<sup>55</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p. 159; TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 13 October 1922.

<sup>56</sup> M. Du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap': The ACVV and the Management of Childbirth, 1925 - 1939', Conference for Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Durban, February 1991; this built on earlier initiatives of Afrikaans speaking organisations as far back as 1910. In 1918, the Suid Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie established a training school for midwives (see C. Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in South Africa, 1652 - 1960*, p. 350, cited in M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap'.)

<sup>57</sup> There was talk in 1921 of a VD clinic being set up at the Provincial hospital (CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/26, Health and Licence Committee, 1921, p.388). However, the old government Lock Hospital continued to be used until, at the urging of the MOH, it was converted into a Municipal VD clinic in 1924 (PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1924, Report of the MOH, p. 28). About mid 1925, an agreement was entered into between the Walmer Municipality, Korsten Village Management Board, the Divisional Council and the PEM that all VD patients would attend the VD hospital maintained by the city (at the N. End clinic). This inclusion of all races probably explains why in 1926 the predominantly white ratepayers of Ward 7 in which the clinic was located, lodged a complaint against the presence of the clinic (CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Letter from Ward 7, Ratepayers' Association, 12 April 1926). The old building was finally demolished for the new North End Clinic which opened in 1932.

needed ante- and post- natal clinics, a VD and the first dental clinic which opened on 10 January 1927, all run by the Assistant MOH.<sup>58</sup> Such was the local emphasis on maternity and child care that even the Dental Clinic, run in conjunction with the Child Welfare Society, was specifically for "patients (who) were pregnant and nursing mothers of children up to 10 years."<sup>59</sup> The VD clinic mainly treated day patients although it also retained some make-shift, short - term accommodation.<sup>60</sup> A caretaker and his wife, who doubled as a female attendant, ran the establishment.<sup>61</sup> It is notable that despite the positive work being done in health care, it was distinctly class-based: the MOH was keen to confine such a clinic to the North End, reporting that "the Provincial Hospital did not cater for the class of person" he wanted to go to the health clinic.<sup>62</sup> At this point the Child Welfare 'Baby Bureaux' were also handed over to the local authorities. There was still a great need for a free maternity home or ward at the N.End and in 1930 a maternity wing was added to the Salvation Army's Rescue Home, now known as the Salvation Army Mothers' Home.<sup>63</sup>

In an attempt to make the care more gender specific the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the NCW and others called for the appointment of a woman doctor as an Assistant MOH.<sup>64</sup> This call was echoed by the MOH in 1928.<sup>65</sup> She would control the Health Visitors, midwives and the Maternity and Child Welfare clinics, as was the case in Cape Town.<sup>66</sup> Yet, the class and gender bias

<sup>58</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes, Report of the MOH, 1929, p.41.

<sup>59</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p.171.

<sup>60</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Venereal Disease, Report of the MOH 'Municipal Health Centre', 1925.

<sup>61</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, 15 March 1926.

<sup>62</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Minutes Health and Licence Committee, 16 February 1926.

<sup>63</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, pp. 107, 183.

<sup>64</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Minutes Health and Licence Committee, 16 February 1926; *EPH*, 20 January 1928; TAD, A296 3/22/1/2, NCW Minutes, 13 February 1930.

<sup>65</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1928, Report of the MOH, p.68.

<sup>66</sup> CAD 3/CT vol. 4/1/5/571, 1931.



of the local state remained in evidence: a woman columnist in *The Herald* highlighted these areas when she criticized the imbalance between the PECC's prioritization of Humewood's development and that of female and family health. She compared the 12 234 pounds spent on public Health in 1926 with the 9 040 pounds spent two years later on what was supposedly a growing city. Meanwhile the estimates for development in Humewood alone were 23 551 pounds. Why, she asked, could not just 3 000 pounds be taken which would more than maintain the woman doctor so badly needed as an assistant MOH to take charge of Maternity and Child Welfare work. She called on women municipal voters to voice their discontent over the matter.<sup>67</sup> A woman doctor was, however, not appointed. However, many of those most in need of such care were not able to vote (see section 1.3.).

Nevertheless, in 1929 an impressive attendance of 1 805 white women was reported at the maternity clinic. Despite the lower 'non-white' female population, 2 368 of their number also attended and in 1928, the lowest figures were recorded for 'non-European' infant mortality since 1910. The Public Health Department prided itself on achieving the education of "a not inconsiderable portion of the adult female population...".<sup>68</sup> Certainly, by 1931, the attendances had increased by 37% over the previous year and in June of that year midwives were finally forced to register under the Public Health Act.<sup>69</sup>

Links between poverty and "women's inability to control the number and frequency of pregnancies" and the subsequent inadequacy of child care were also increasingly recognized by, among others, the local women councillors and the Cape ACVV.<sup>70</sup> In an effort to reduce the huge size of families so common to the poorest class of women, Mrs. Gipson, Mrs. Anderson and Dr. Joan Morrison opened a birth control clinic in 1931 under the auspices of the Mothers' Welfare Centre. The initiative occurred in the context of developments in Britain, where the subject of contraception, known mainly

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<sup>67</sup> *EPH*, 20 January 1928.

<sup>68</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1929, Report of the MOH, pp. 5152.

<sup>69</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1931, Report of the MOH, p.73; CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1707, Registration of Midwives, 1931 - 48.

<sup>70</sup> M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap', p.4.

to the middle classes since the 1870s, and female sexuality had been disseminated among the working classes by Marie Stopes from 1918.<sup>71</sup> Contraceptive devices at this time, consisted of "withdrawal, injections, of alum and water, the vaginal sponge soaked in quinine, quinine pessaries, the sheath, and the Dutch cap ...". Aside from the sexual liberation of women, Stopes' ideas were also directed by the less altruistic notion of eugenics - the belief that the working classes, if left to reproduce unchecked, would lower the mental and physical stock of the nation.<sup>72</sup> Given British class consciousness in Port Elizabeth, eugenics is likely to have also featured in the thinking of the local health authorities, especially since the white birth rate was relatively high in the first two decades of the century (see Table 4.5). The MOH reported that the rate of 33 per 1 000 in 1920 was higher than that of six other SA towns.<sup>73</sup> These trends possibly reflect greater ignorance about birth control prior to industrialization, the return of soldiers from WW1, given the town's intense loyalty to Britain, and more substantial influxes of rural whites into Port Elizabeth than those of other centres (see Table 2.1. section 2.3.). Undoubtedly, industrialisation brought with it some awareness of birth control, although the town's working class, particularly in the 1920s, tended to resort to abortion and infanticide (see section 7.5). By the 1930s, however, both the birth rate and the number of infanticides among whites had dropped considerably, suggesting an increased awareness of contraceptives in the urban milieu and use of the new clinic. Here, mainly rubbers, the 'Dutch cap' and spermicidal jellies were on offer.<sup>74</sup>

In 1934, the opening of the maternity wing of the Provincial Hospital established the practice of the training of midwives and an Assistant Medical Officer, while three nurse lecturers were to be appointed by the Health Department to deal with maternal and infant welfare, especially in the rural districts.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Other cultures had known about contraception for centuries (M. Hill, *Women in the Twentieth Century*, Chapmans, 1991, '1907'.)

<sup>72</sup> M. Hill, *Women in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapmans, 1991,) '1907'.

<sup>73</sup> PEM, Mayor's Minutes for 1920, Report of the MOH, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Interview, Dr. P. du Toit; the intravaginal 'Dutch cap', which had been invented in Holland in the 1870s, was the most popular method until the 1950s (M. Hill, *Women in the Twentieth Century*, '1907'; Interview, Dr. Kristal).

<sup>75</sup> TAD A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW AGM, 10 November 1933.

**TABLE 4.5.**  
**Birth Rate Among Whites in Port Elizabeth, 1917 - 1940<sup>76</sup>**  
(rate per 1 000)

Year	Rate	Year	Rate
1911	29,8	1928	25,6
1912-15	not available	1929	23,6
1916	31,3	1930	25,5
1917	29,6	1931	25,3
1918	29,9	1932	22,7
1919	28,1	1933	25,0
1920	33,1	1934	25,0
1921	28,3	1935	20,0
1922	32,1	1936	28,4
1923	31,2	1937	24,6
1924	27,1	1938	23,9
1925	26,6	1939	23,8
1926	25,3	1940	23,1
1927	25,3		

The next year the Red Cross established a local branch in Port Elizabeth consisting of female councillors, doctors, and other socially-concerned bodies. Amongst various services, it also taught first aid, home nursing and health propaganda.<sup>77</sup> By 1939 and 1940, white infant mortality had steadied at

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<sup>76</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1911 - 1940, Reports of the MOH.

<sup>77</sup> A Voluntary Aid Detachment had operated since 1935 but run from Cape Town (M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, p. 199).

63,3 and 60,8, respectively.<sup>78</sup>

Thus maternity care in the PE Municipal area was finally coordinated in the first half of the 1930s, and centralized in an important working class area. This was in line generally with the state's interest in 'Volksgesondheid' and a developing awareness of the need for institutionalized welfare systems.

## CONCLUSION

Port Elizabeth was unable to cope with the growth surges of the 1920s which, exacerbated by high levels of poverty and poor infrastructure, gave rise to chronic social conditions. It was struck by a number of epidemics, such as the 1918 Spanish Influenza, and endemic diseases coterminous with industrialization, such as Typhoid, Enteritis, TB and Venereal Disease. The latter brought its own special cultural and ideological difficulties. Such afflictions always hit the working class hardest by rendering working mothers and male breadwinners out of action. Husbands without work increased already existing burdens and hardship on women in their bid to maintain the survival of their families. Hard hit, too, were children who often died in their infancy. The class-based emphasis of these social conditions was responded to by the PECC's establishment of the Infectious Diseases Hospital near the South End in 1894 and the Health Centre in the North End. The siting of the latter in the old Lock Hospital which had targeted prostitutes, further underlines the health hazards borne by the working class. Nevertheless, much was done in this period to address the problem of maternal and infant health, by way of the appointment of health visitors, a Red Cross District Nurse and the establishment of the North End Health Centre.

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<sup>78</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1939, 1940, Reports of the MOH.

Greater despair existed among the South African poor in the industrialized, more centralized and more segregated society of the mid-1920s than in pre-industrial periods. This tended to be due to the appearance of marginalized groups, from rural societies fragmented by commercial farming or drought and/or the lack of community support in the city.<sup>1</sup> In Port Elizabeth this was particularly so because of the city's centrality in 'poor white territory' but also because of the impact of this burgeoning, impoverished, rural population on a rudimentary urban infrastructure. The large numbers of mainly Dutch immigrants flooded the employment market and swamped housing so that many were plunged into destitution, especially in the working class areas of the North and South End including the Baakens Valley and Korsten.<sup>2</sup> Shortage of housing and widespread slum conditions led to disease and unemployment. Unemployment and employment at low wages restricted workers to the occupation of overcrowded, unsanitary housing and deepened the cycle of poor health - most particularly TB - the ability to secure or retain work and thus the susceptibility to poverty. Thus, housing, health and poverty remained a persistent triad underlying and undermining the lives of the working class. The stress of social misery sometimes also led to patterns of dependency, gambling and drink.<sup>3</sup> As working class women actively interfaced with the economy and were traditionally responsible for the children, they tended to be the main protagonists in much of the urban drama. Thus, Wylie has indicated in her work on the Southern African poor that female - headed households were particularly affected by the pressures of industrialization, while in Britain, as late as the 1960s, Oscar Lewis noted a high proportion of unemployed or

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<sup>1</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community: The Survival of the Poor in Cape Town, 1880-1910", *SAHJ*, 24 (1991), p. 128; M.E. Rose, 'Poverty and Self-help: Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in A. Digby, C. Feinstein and D. Jenkins, (eds.) *New Directions in Economic and Social History Vol.11*, (Macmillan, 1992), p. 151; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History*, (Cambridge, 1987), cited in E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community", p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *EPH*, 5 January 1922.

<sup>3</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V(b)*, (Stellenbosch, 1932), pp. 21, 24.

underemployed single mothers amongst the poor.<sup>4</sup> However, a comprehensive analysis of female poverty is impossible to attain since the marginalized poor, that is those who had fallen out of the ambit of the public conscience into vagrancy, begging or petty thieving, usually went unrecorded by welfare organisations. Legislation tended to further marginalize them. White females who struggled to avoid falling prey to such an existence often appealed to local government and organisations for help, and these records will have to suffice as the source of information on poverty in Port Elizabeth.

### 5.1. OFFICIAL ATTITUDES TO POVERTY

Attitudes to poverty, heavily influenced by those of Victorian England, underwent a shift in the study period. In England, in the early 1800s, a distinction had arisen between "poverty, an honourable and economically necessary state, and indigence or pauperism, a condition of dependence, indolence and loss of individual self-reliance...". This developed into a moralistic separation between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, the latter being usually found in the larger, overcrowded cities, and perceived as a threat to the integrity of the nation.<sup>5</sup> But by the end of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to measure poverty scientifically. Rather than being seen as a result of individual failure there was now a recognition of the Smilesian concept of individual self worth and a belief in the wider causative role of socio-economic factors. Upliftment could therefore be more fully exploited if imposed on whole groups.

Yet Van Heningen demonstrates that at the turn of the century in the Cape these concepts were not yet embodied in colonial government legislation, which only made provision for the sick poor. Provision for the unemployed or indigent was withheld, until 1919, for fear of encouraging reliance on the government. Then it was directed to the 'respectable poor' who increasingly became synonymous with the 'white poor'. In 1920, G.H. Ludorf, Inspector of Labour, betrayed this bias when he testified to the Unemployment Commission:

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<sup>4</sup> D. Wylie, 'The Changing Face of Hunger in Southern African History 1880 - 1950', *Past and Present*, 122, Feb. 1989, pp.159-99 cited in E. van Heningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community", p. 128; M.E. Rose, 'Poverty and Self-help', p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> M.E. Rose, "Poverty and Self-Help", pp. 150-1.

"Some years ago they would, no doubt, have been looked down upon and despised, but it is different today, when they command the respect of those who know WHY THEY HAVE COME TO BE WHAT THEY ARE."<sup>6</sup>

It was the Church, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, that started the first social movements which sought to provide education for the white poor, orphanages and industrial and domestic science schools. The DR Church had also instituted the first 'poor white' conference as early as 1916, and in 1918, the Inwendige Zendige Kommissie to investigate the problem of the poor white.<sup>7</sup> Private welfare organisations such as the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV), the WCTU, the NCW and locally in Port Elizabeth, the PEB, also shouldered much of the burden. However, in 1932, the Carnegie Commission assessed that the church lagged too far behind the state in terms of encouraging material self-help and concentrated more on the spiritual needs of their congregations. What help they did give was focussed rather on the symptoms of poverty such as orphans, outcasts and the blind, rather than the causes of poverty. It was recommended they complement the work of the state by helping to change the mentality of dependency that was developing among many of the poor.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1930s, the Carnegie Commission reflected SA's absorption of developments in British social philosophy firstly by maintaining the 'respectable/indigent' division in listing five broad categories: those who were physically undermined, the 'respectable poor' afflicted by social factors basically beyond their control, the aberrational type, the pauper and criminal types and finally varying combinations of all of these.<sup>9</sup> It also reported on the need for a scientific approach to social upliftment:

"It is only since the seventies and eighties that the individualistic has made way for the organic conception of society. According to the latter, society is an organism, the soundness of which as a whole depends on the soundness of each component

<sup>6</sup> CeA, K 35, vol. 3, Unemployment Commission, Minutes of Evidence, 25 and 26 November, 1920-1, p. 2160.

<sup>7</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth, 1902 - 1937: 'n Kultuurhistoriese Ondersoek', (PhD., University of PE, 1993), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), pp. 56-58.

<sup>9</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p. 130.

part ..... It is this conception which has given rise to the intensified social care of the worker classes of society which is so characteristic of our times."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, local, nationalist-based, poor - white support now dovetailed with British shifts in the philosophy of poverty assistance.

This had manifested itself in the first Union Government legislation on poverty in 1919, stimulated by the massive urban influx from the rural areas. The Cape Provincial Administration implemented Ordinance 4 of 1919 which, often erratically interpreted, was the only legislation in the study period specifically aimed at addressing the needs of the poor. It provided for central government to pay 'ordinary poor relief' in the form of pauper rations to the destitute and accorded local government the option of paying 'additional' poor relief.<sup>11</sup> The scale of rations under 'ordinary poor relief' issued to European adults was seven lbs of mealie meal and a quarter pound each of sugar, coffee and salt per week. Meat, at the rate of one pound per week, was only issued upon presentation of a certificate from the district surgeon. Children were issued two thirds the rations of adults.<sup>12</sup> Usually more whites were favoured in the allocation of the magistrate's rations than 'non-Europeans', despite the fact that the latter formed a greater part of the poor. This applied particularly to white women probably due to the prevalence of single mothers in poverty. In 1928, about 1 000 pounds was being given in the form of 'ordinary' poor relief.<sup>13</sup> Limited medical attention was also provided for paupers via the District Surgeon.

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<sup>10</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Cape of Good Hope, Provincial Council Ordinances, 1911-1920, (Juta, Cape Town); The Carnegie Commission estimated that the 374 664 pounds spent by the 4 provincial councils by 1932, compared well to other countries ( M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, Part V(b), p. 76). Discussion was also under way in the NCW as to the best method of establishing a home for inebriate women as in Pietermaritzburg (TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 25 July 1922; 11 August 1922; 8 September 1922).

<sup>12</sup> CeA, K35, Unemployment Commission, 1920, p. 2224.

<sup>13</sup> *EPH*, 24 January 1928.



**TABLE 5.1.**  
**Paupers Assisted in Port Elizabeth<sup>14</sup>**

	1920		1927		1928	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
WHITES	--	35	82	103	120	191
'NON-WHITES'	--	38	136	147	83	120

Municipalities were permitted to donate 'additional poor relief' if the 'ordinary' relief was deemed insufficient. The amount of 'additional relief', a quarter of which was reclaimable from central government, was left entirely up to the discretion of the Cape Municipalities. 'Additional poor relief' also allowed for the payment of subsidies, shared by both Provincial and local government, to registered charitable organisations. However, since this was to be done on a 'pound for pound' basis, it threatened to put an unrealistic burden on charitable organisations whose work was already cut out for them by the personalised nature of their care.<sup>15</sup> In 1927, a statement of Additional Poor Relief for the year reveals the following female-related categories of poor attended to: the PEB, other Charitable Institutions including the Salvation Army, confinements, maternity and child welfare, pauper burials, pauper rations, assistance for TB patients and food for school children.

However, most manifestations of poverty were not only linked more directly to inadequate urban infrastructure and a paucity of opportunities but also the negative attitude of the local council. The PECC struggled against accepting municipal responsibility for social welfare and the poor, continually squabbling with central government as to where the responsibility for additional poor relief lay. At the outset of the study period, the limited empathy of the local authorities is particularly apparent in the TC's statement when, at the behest of the PECC, he asked Parliament for assistance in dealing with the large number of vagrants and cripples "many of whom come into the city from Country Districts, and all of whom are begging and exposing their deformities in the

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<sup>14</sup> CeA, JUS 439 1/82/28, Annual Report of Magistrate, 1928; CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, 1920.

<sup>15</sup> PEB, 'The Work of the Ladies' Benevolent Society', November 1934.

public streets..."<sup>16</sup> In 1924, the MOH showed similar dispassion in rebuking the PEB for overstating the plight of a destitute family named Loots living in a cellar in Elizabeth Lane. Both a PEB visitor and Sister Nuttall, the District Nurse, had verified that the mother was emaciated and the children were covered in sores. In response, the MOH high-handedly threatened that related discussion about the erection of a poor house would be discounted, if appeals were to be exaggerated.<sup>17</sup> Essentially, the PECC's concern about housing and care of the work force did not extend to the poor. Certainly, pauper housing was never given serious consideration.<sup>18</sup> Of the approximately 5 500 pounds spent on welfare in 1926, 37% was raised by street collections and donations.<sup>19</sup> In 1935, out of the 15 615 pounds voted by the Council for "Grants in Aid, Legal Obligations and Additional Poor Relief", 4 567 pounds went to Additional poor relief, including 2 525 to the Charity Organisation, 300 to the Ministering League, 50 to St. Marks Mission and 200 to two Salvation Army Homes.<sup>20</sup>

Neither was the public itself keen to assume financial responsibility for the poor. Some, felt that the notion of a British Poor Law was inadvisable and that public donations would preempt the government forcing extra taxation on the city in this way. "Voluntary giving is infinitely the cheaper" proclaimed the PE Advertiser.<sup>21</sup> A local columnist expressed the feeling of certain elements in the council, that PECC benevolence would only increase the population influx.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/22, Report of the Health and Licence Committee, 22 February 1917; 3/PEZ 1/1/1/116, Letter TC to House of Assembly, 2 March 1917.

<sup>17</sup> PEB, Correspondence, Letters, PEB to PECC, 24 and 26 January 1924.

<sup>18</sup> *EPH*, 24 June 1928.

<sup>19</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, 'Social Welfare Work', 1927.

<sup>20</sup> CAD, SWP vol. 10 48/7, Appendix A.

<sup>21</sup> *PE Advertiser*, November 1927.

<sup>22</sup> *EPH*, 27 January 1928.

## 5.2 THE FEMALE POOR

Urban conditions were however exacerbated by a depression between 1920 and 1924. Poverty increased dramatically in the last three months of 1920 and the cost to the government of pauper relief trebled.<sup>23</sup> Despite the post-war recession, the Magistrate reported that generally, there were very few vagrants in the district. Yet, in 1921 PECC records indicate that many vagrants lived in the bush in the Baakens River Valley which runs through the northern limits of the city.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, only two European women appear in the Criminal Records book for vagrancy. Ellen Manton and Elizabeth Selby both in their early 60s regularly tested the patience of the court. In their cases, harsh sentences of one month with no option of a fine and sometimes with hard labour, may have been welcome, since they at least obtained shelter and food.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes the borderline between vagrancy and other forms of poverty was blurred. Shelter, for example, was sometimes sought in sheds, tumble-down buildings and hovels. A report to the Unemployment Commission stated:

".. we discovered four adults sleeping under a house with the chickens. They admitted they had lived there for two months. Their household furniture consisted of a couple of dirty mattresses, a few old boxes and some cooking and eating utensils. I could multiply such cases indefinitely."<sup>26</sup>

Generally, however, the profile of female poverty was characterized by women trying and often failing to hold a home together in the face of both the high cost of living and the inadequacy of official and social welfare support during the study period. In 1925, the historian, W.M. Macmillan, estimated in the Cost of Living Report that 10 pounds a month was required for a family of five to keep them on the breadline, an amount unattainable for single factory workers and

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<sup>23</sup> CeA, JUS 1/543/20, Annual Report of Magistrate, 1920.

<sup>24</sup> CeA, JUS 1/543/20 Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1920; CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/26, Minutes Standing Committee, 1921.

<sup>25</sup> CAD, 1/PEZ, 1/2/2/1/3, Criminal Record Book, 9 October 1924, 30 October 1924; 1/PEZ 1/2/2/2/12, Criminal Record Book, February 1930.

<sup>26</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, p. 2154.

domestics.<sup>27</sup> Thus when ill health or tragedy struck destitution loomed large. In 1926, the case of an unnamed woman in the PEB records reflects dire straits of Dickensian proportions. The woman had been in hospital for several months due to two severe operations, her husband having died tragically one year previously. Several children had been placed in different homes. Prior to her illness she had been Matron to the EP Children's home, but no longer had the strength for heavy work. Although she hoped her skill in needlework would secure her work in the near future, she was in the meantime forced to resort to charity.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, a Mrs. Millard faced a spiral of diminishing support systems. After her husband had lost a leg on the Railways, he was retrenched with very inadequate compensation. Lack of funds meant that her sole means of income, a sewing machine, was to be repossessed. Since she herself had to undergo an operation, and her mother was already receiving aid from the PEB, Mrs. Millard was forced to consider putting her two children in a home and to appeal to charity.<sup>29</sup> In another case, the link between poverty, despair and immorality was underlined. Mrs. G.M. Schultz' husband had gone to Cape Town to look for work and she had not heard or received money from him. She threatened to throw herself "away in the streets" if she could not elicit help.<sup>30</sup>

All of the above cases represent individuals who found themselves unprotected by the local state, state legislation and the magistrate's office. It was the overburdened and underfunded charity organisations that attempted to assist such individuals, and that in turn unsuccessfully tried to pressure the local state for more funds or to directly assist those in need. The case of Alice Snyman demonstrates most graphically the inadequacy of the local and central state's welfare net. Mrs. Snyman who lived at the back of Solomon Row, a highly unsanitary area, had suffered the onset of chronic rheumatism after a stroke. In one of many letters to the Acting Magistrate, Florence Nuttall, the District Nurse, described her condition thus:

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<sup>27</sup> Union of South Africa, Report of the Cost of Living Commission, UG 47-'25, pp. 10, 20.

<sup>28</sup> PEB, Letter, Christian Women's Temperance Union to PEB, 20 August 1926.

<sup>29</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Poor Relief, Social Welfare Committee, Visitor's Report, 25 February 1930.

<sup>30</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, 15 November 1927.

"Her plight is really dreadful. She is lying on a few bags on the floor, a helpless invalid. She cannot even turn herself or move without assistance and the only person she has to look after her is her daughter, who is a consumptive herself, under the care of the Ministering League Nurse. I have been attending her mother for months but she really has a dreadful time in the house of the people with whom she is staying; they do her out of the different comforts which I and others have managed to procure for the poor creature at different times from different societies etc. and ill treat her and her children. Really if you could see her you would understand her pitiful condition. One leg almost contracted under her and it is almost impossible to prevent bedsores as lying on the hard floor (the mattress I managed to get for her has been stolen or disappeared of course). She is also suffering from incontinence of urine and really needs constant attention....."<sup>31</sup>

The care of paupers continued to be a constant cause of dispute during the study period between the PECC and the Magistrate's office. Repeated appeals had been made to the latter for Snyman's admission to the Infectious Diseases Hospital after which the Magistrate redirected the case to the Provincial Secretary and the City Health Department. But the MOH justified its rejection on the grounds that Snyman was neither an Infectious Diseases case and thus referable to the Infectious Diseases Hospital, nor did he have council authority to incur expense for her at the Provincial Hospital. Whereas hospitalisation of paupers could be ordered by the Magistrate, the Provincial Hospital was also unwilling to keep her because of "the indefiniteness of the length of her stay there."<sup>32</sup> Deference to financial considerations and the inadequate integration of state services indicates the level of desolation into which paupers were allowed to fall.

For some women, the cause of financial misery lay closer to home. Although I have found no specific evidence relating women to gambling in Port Elizabeth, the practice was a general factor in women's poverty. During the study period, the Carnegie Commission found that on the Rand:

".... a great number of the poor engage in betting on horse and whippet racing and in gambling and sweeps of all kinds.....Women are often worse gamblers than men. Cases have been met with where mothers lock up their children in the house and go to the race-course. There very often the last penny is wagered and lost, so that they may even have no money for the return tram-fare. Very respectable men and women sink into degradation, drink and immorality through gambling and betting

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<sup>31</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Letter from the Acting Magistrate to Town Clerk, 8 August 1927.

<sup>32</sup> CAD 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Letter Acting Medical Officer of Health to the Mayor, 12 August 1927.

debts."<sup>33</sup>

For other women, a gambling husband was a more insidious problem. Often such a situation would be entrenched by the implicit threat of violence or desertion. A gambling husband would be an impediment to affording child care and thus attaining employment, trapping a woman in poverty, perhaps fear and certainly despair. Although 'Mrs. M''s husband had neither employment nor trade he was at first reported to the PEB as sober and honest and amenable to doing odd jobs when possible. They had two daughters aged nine and six years and a two month old baby and lived in two rooms at a rental of three pounds a month. When Mrs. 'M' approached the society, her rental was three months in arrears, she felt she could no longer throw herself on the mercy of relations and her health was under threat. However, the husband was subsequently found to be a gambler, never spoke to his wife and only gave her a few pence now and again to run the family.<sup>34</sup> Evidently, Mrs. M. had been too frightened or despairing to challenge or expose him to the PEB.

Yet, female industrial employment in the Great Depression of 1929-1933 soared. Here, exploitative low wages which permitted wider employment saved many from starvation. Nevertheless, this trend coexisted with cases of abject poverty visited by the PEB. Mrs. Clulow, a home visitor, reported on the endless cycle of poverty in which many women were trapped, namely that the majority of the women were quite incapable of work as their starved condition rendered them unfit for employment (see section 2.4.). Nobody would be willing to employ such women, or even send washing to the 'pitiful' hovels in which they lived, she noted. There were always children and almost always the inevitable baby expected. The older girls usually found work but only of a casual type since unsuitable nourishment from infancy rendered them too weak and incompetent to get anything better.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p.41; this may easily have applied to Port Elizabeth since the local branch of the NCW was very concerned about lotteries (TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Mins. 1928 -1934).

<sup>34</sup> PEB, Letter to H. Samuel, 29 June 1926.

<sup>35</sup> PEB Minutes, 11 December 1933, pp. 217-218.

### 5.3 A PUBLIC CRISIS

Finally, only in 1928, when the destitution of white women became a major public embarrassment and roused fears of inter-racial 'immorality' did the PECC engage in public debate. For about three months a debate was waged in the EP Herald about evidence of real starvation and destitution among women who were sleeping on park benches and on the beach. The paper revealed the situation of a 17 year old woman, Mrs. James who, after her husband was imprisoned for theft, pleaded with the magistrate to jail her to provide her with food and shelter. A female companion, who had been sleeping on the beach, appealed for the same. Both had approached the Municipality without success. A public outcry ensued with both the press and local charitable organisations once again throwing down a challenge to the PECC to sort out poor relief with central government. The press reported that there were actually "scores of women in dire distress...".<sup>36</sup> Once again 'black peril' fears and concerns over inter-racial social and sexual 'immorality' became entangled in the issue, with the Herald stating:

"One often hears of cases between whites and blacks, and unless something is done it is quite conceivable that a woman like this, sleeping on the beach, might come into contact with native peoples, with serious results."<sup>37</sup>

Now the PECC's concern shifted from financial conservatism over poor relief, to the defence of Port Elizabeth's image. This was especially important at a time when it was marketing the good management of a contented all-white labour force. Councillor Reverend Clapp bemoaned the fact that this issue had been publicised in the Cape Times and also displayed unbelievable ignorance at this late stage over the role that poverty played in the health of the city. Despite being Chairman of the PECC's Health Committee, he insisted to the EPH that there was no need for anyone to go without a meal and a bed in Port Elizabeth. He maintained that there were homes that women could go to such as the Salvation Army Rescue Home.<sup>38</sup> This was also supported by the SA Home itself which said it could always cope since it had a maximum of fourteen beds with twelve usually

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<sup>36</sup> . *EPH*, 24 January 1928.

<sup>37</sup> *EPH*, 19 January 1928.

<sup>38</sup> *EPH*, 26 January 1928.

occupied.<sup>39</sup> Rather than confront the issue of poor white women, Clapp chose to labour the case of the second, seemingly disreputable, woman who had appealed for help and may have been trying to abuse state support. The Herald, not to be deflected, said the real issue was not these particular women but the large numbers of destitute women for whom there was no support.<sup>40</sup> Local welfare organisations endorsed this since their records showed women were being refused help all the time - even those sent to them by the magistrate. They pointed out that accommodation like that offered by the Salvation Army Rescue Home would never cope with the large number of destitutes. In short, the PECC was not only evading the situation but trying to deny its existence.

In 1928, the Public Health (Amendment) Act resulted from the Pact government's increasing concern for 'poor white' health and allocated greater financial responsibility for welfare to provincial departments.<sup>41</sup> By 1932, various types of social legislation had appeared but only enabling existing government departments such as Labour, Lands, Internal Affairs, Education, Health, Agriculture, Railways and Immigration to devote funds to social rehabilitation.<sup>42</sup> During the Depression, central government attempted to alleviate unemployment by instituting relief works. Until 1935, when the Department of Labour was renamed the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, there was, however, no department of Social Welfare while preventative and rehabilitative work and trained social workers did not exist.<sup>43</sup> Thus much rehabilitative work had to emanate from the public or community-based self-help and private welfare organisations.

#### 5.4. SELF - HELP

Van Heyningen's exhaustive analysis of structures available for the poor of Cape Town,

<sup>39</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ, 4/1/1/1029, Minutes Social Welfare Committee, 18 April 1928.

<sup>40</sup> *EPH*, 27 January 1928.

<sup>41</sup> M. Du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap': The ACVV and the Management of Childbirth, 1925 - 1939', Conference for Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Durban, February 1991, p.8.

<sup>42</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), pp. 76-77; p.143.

<sup>43</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p.89; A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 February 1930.



demonstrates that self help organisations, largely shaped by language and religion, emerged among communities<sup>44</sup>. Networks of assistance in the Dutch community are described in section 6.2. These also occurred among the Muslim and Jewish communities which tended to be by-passed by the authorities or private welfare organisations due to ethnic or racial prejudice. Kemp, the Social Welfare Officer for PE, complacently reported in November 1926,

"practically every Religious Community in the town has an "Almonry Fund" out of which they financially assist those of their own number who require such assistance."<sup>45</sup>

In the case of the Jewish community, this strategy was bolstered by a desire to avoid further racial friction. Certainly in PE as elsewhere, the huge influx from Eastern Europe and America towards the end of the nineteenth century was viewed with alarm by SA Jews for fear that their "poverty and alienness" would cause anti - semitism. Thus, it became imperative to implement some sort of upliftment: The Union of Jewish Women stated their aim was to integrate Jewish women more fully into the community at large while the Jewish Benevolent Society made jobs and capital available.<sup>46</sup> Understandably, then, there is no evidence of Jewish females in blue collar jobs in Port Elizabeth. Poor immigrant girls or women were either quickly married off or set up in a family business in which they were expected to make a substantial contribution in terms of labour. Others were given sizeable sums to establish some security for themselves. The PEJLA suggested that Mrs. Goldberg who had been accommodated by Mr. Cohen for six weeks, should receive a train fare to Dordrecht and fifteen pounds to enable her to get work there. This was a much larger amount than grants given by the PEB, indicating the concerted effort at upliftment made by the Jewish community.<sup>47</sup>

Christian churches also saw to the needs of their congregations. The turn of the century had seen

<sup>44</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community: The Survival of the Poor in Cape Town, 1880 - 1910", *SAHJ*, 24, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, Report of the Social Welfare Committee, 17 November 1926.

<sup>46</sup> PEJLA, Minute Books, 1933-1942.

<sup>47</sup> PEJLA, Minute Book, 4 November 1924.

a transition in the churches from paternalist philanthropy to self-help. Increasing evangelism at that time drew the poor more closely into the ambit of the church giving rise to Friendly Societies.<sup>48</sup> A Girls' Friendly Society was established in Port Elizabeth while the Methodist Women's Auxiliary had a Youth branch in the North End.<sup>49</sup> The Afrikaans community in Port Elizabeth, relatively small and almost marginalized by the dominant British ethos, had also been without the spiritual support of a church and minister until 1907. Nevertheless, social organisations or individuals that came to its aid were strongly affiliated to the Dutch Reformed Church, including mainly the ACVV, Helpmekaar and Louisa Meyburgh.<sup>50</sup> The ACVV, established in 1904 in the Cape as a colony - wide organisation, played a significant role in the mobilization of Afrikaners around church and language, "closely committed to the Dutch Reformed Church, but not controlled by it." It particularly targetted the social, cultural and spiritual welfare of the urban Afrikaner wife and mother, with a necessary bias towards the poor white.<sup>51</sup> In Port Elizabeth, they were active in all these respects, and anxious to safeguard the racial purity of Afrikaner working girls. In 1924, and again in 1926, they unsuccessfully attempted to establish a hostel for women but, due to lack of finance, it was only realised in 1948. Also prior to the study period, Louisa Meyburgh, 'an urban missionary' of sorts - described by Terblanche in fervent terms typical of nationalist writing, as die 'heldin van die stad' - had been a major force in establishing the Dutch Reformed Church in Port Elizabeth in 1907. Thereafter, particularly in the inter - war period, she continued to be very involved with the spiritual and material welfare of urbanising Afrikaners.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community", p.138.

<sup>49</sup> PEB Minutes, 14 May 1934, p.264; The Story of the Methodist Women's Auxiliary in South Africa, 9, p.29, 1937. (reprinted 1961).

<sup>50</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth', pp. 24 - 25; H.O. Terblanche, "Louisa Meyburgh: Heldin van die Stad", *Historia*, vol. 24, 2, September 1979, pp. 12 - 20; M. du Toit, ' 'Gevaarlike Moederskap': The ACVV and the Management of Childbirth, 1925 - 1939', Conference for Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Durban, February 1991.

<sup>51</sup> J. Butler, "Afrikaner Women and the Creation of Ethnicity in a Small South African Town, 1902 - 1950", in L. Vail, (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, (London, James Currey, 1989), p.63.

<sup>52</sup> H.O. Terblanche, "Louisa Meyburgh: Heldin van die Stad", pp. 11 - 12.

## 5.5. WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

White women in general, tended to find assistance largely in the plethora of private organisations, mentioned in Chapter 1.5. They, especially the PEB, were left by the authorities to shoulder a large part of the burden of the poor. As stated previously, the PEB dealt with food relief, employment and care for the aged and sick. Focussing mainly on women, they paid maternity and other grants, passed on clothing from societies, such as the Congregational Church Women's Association, visited homes and secured work.<sup>53</sup> In 1923, the PEB specifically asked the mayor's office to refrain from sending men to the PEB offices as the society only helped women who were unable to rely on male relatives.<sup>54</sup> Thus, distress through unemployment was usually not assisted by the PEB if the applicant had a healthy husband or employable children. By 1924, socio - economic hardships had supposedly reduced the scope of their work to the more "necessitous appeals from widows, deserted wives, the very old, the blind" and those incapable of self-support who were liable to drift into abject poverty.<sup>55</sup>

Yet there was still concern for general rehabilitation in the PEB's address to the Finance Committee of the PECC:

"Relief to be of practical value must be sufficient to prevent a family during the temporary disablement of the earner from sinking so low that its rehabilitation to its former state is impossible."<sup>56</sup>

Certainly, the PEB played an ambiguous role in the social life of the city. On the one hand it saw itself as a friend of the poor; on the other, a vital instrument in the progress of the city, linking its services to the needs of employers. Since prolonged illness was not supported by the employer, the PEB's supplies of medicine, nourishment and support hastened convalescence and a return to

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<sup>53</sup> PEB, Minutes, 4 December 1933, p.216.

<sup>54</sup> PEB Correspondence, 74, PEB to PECC, 26 June 1923.

<sup>55</sup> PEB, J. Coulter, 'The History of the Port Elizabeth Ladies' Benevolent Society, 1861-1986', p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> PEB, Miscellaneous, Address to Finance Committee of the PECC, 15 September 1925; PEB, Miscellaneous, Circular issued to City Council, 10 September 1925.

work.<sup>57</sup> It also directly subsidized certain employers since some women elicited charity to supplement informal or part-time work. For example, Marta Botha found temporary work at a factory at one pound per week while on the PEB books, and Margaret Ludwick, who found that laundry work did not bring in enough money also appealed to the PEB for charity.<sup>58</sup>

The PEB's work, however, was perhaps limited by the lack of an overall concept of social reorganization so that, like the Dutch Reformed Church, they dealt only with the symptoms of poverty. The Carnegie Commission was concerned that charitable organisations had too little understanding of the many aspects of social work:

"The percentage of charitable funds devoted to social rehabilitation of the destitute is far too small and that spent on actual relief too large ..... too little (done) to prevent conditions of the destitution ..... The evil effects are the deprivation ... of ... self-respect and initiative, the encouragement of dishonesty, of ungratefulness, of dependence ..."<sup>59</sup>

This was so in the case of Johanna Nutall. She had to pay one pound a month to a 'girl' to look after her children while she looked for work. However, after she found work at Playdon's Boot factory, she chose not to notify the PEB and lose her grant.<sup>60</sup> Johanna Maria Bouwer had refused a good job as a housekeeper at two pounds ten shillings a month 'all found', which the PEB had found for her, preferring to continue relying on their charity.<sup>61</sup> In these ways, then, such welfare organisations unwittingly subsidized employers by helping underpaid women who were struggling with low wages and perhaps helped to perpetuate misery.

Nevertheless, as shown in chapter one, the PEB relentlessly pressed for greater aid from local and central government whose assistance to the chief benevolent societies was all too meagre. The plight of the poor is graphically illustrated in yet another appeal to the PECC for finance by the PEB, who donated an average of 15/6s per person per month:

<sup>57</sup> PEB, Annual Report, 1931-2, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> PEB Minutes, p. 204.

<sup>59</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b) p. 143.

<sup>60</sup> PEB Minutes, 5 February 1934, p. 231.

<sup>61</sup> PEB Minutes, 5 March 1934, p. 240.

"today....we consider that 30/- should be the minimum ..... grant given to a single European person; the practical value....is doubtful when it is remembered that rent, food, soap, fuel for cooking and for warmth have to be provided on 1/- per day. Since rents range from 15/- to 25/- for one room per month, very little is left for the necessaries of life."<sup>62</sup>

However, not only was the financial aid of welfare organisations severely limited but they themselves usually imposed the notion of Christian, and increasingly racial, 'respectability' as a condition for assistance. While the PEB extended its services to New Brighton, Korsten and Bethelsdorp in 1920/1, and as late as 1930 asserted their work was carried out "irrespective of creed, class or colour", their records reflect a racial hierarchy of concern. For instance, it acknowledged

"..receipt of a parcel of babies' clothes from the Presbyterian Hill Church Ladies Association....with the proviso that these garments are not to be given to coloured people."<sup>63</sup>

It also qualified a recipient as "coloured, but respectable"<sup>64</sup>

Although in 1927, there were more coloured cases of aid than white, (206 coloured cases as opposed to 153 whites), this was perhaps because the economy was in an upswing and the 'civilised labour' policy drew more white women into factory work.<sup>65</sup> However, funds were always at a premium and, particularly in times of economic downturn, both coloured and black women were sidelined. Thus in 1923, the PEB had decided:

".... that the funds did not at the time permit of further assistance to coloured people unless the conditions were exceptional."<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, in 1934 when the Society was in dire financial straits, it stipulated that no help was to

<sup>62</sup> PEB, Miscellaneous, Adress to the Finance Committee of the City Council, 15 September 1925.

<sup>63</sup> PEB, Minute Book, 1922-27, 4 May 1923, p.50; Annual Report 1929-30, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> PEB, Minute Book, 1922-27, 20 August 1923, p. 76.

<sup>65</sup> PEB, Annual Report 1927-8, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> PEB Minutes, 30 April 1923, p. 47.

be given to Natives except in exceptional circumstances.<sup>67</sup> Thus, what aid was given could be largely concentrated on white women.

The Salvation Army also attempted to cope with PE's poverty. In the 1920 recession, where wages were insufficient or men were on short time, the Salvation Army fed one loaf of bread per day to each of 100 white families. Their charity was not for the unemployed or for paupers helped by the magistrate, but was rather a stop gap, supplementing the income of those beginning to drift into indigency. Families in which there were two or three factory hands, for example, did not need to be helped. In this way then, working white women were a significant factor in the shaping of private welfare programmes : the Salvation Army allowed them to subsidize their family income and help buttress the position of employers against unaffordable, higher wages and recession.<sup>68</sup> This in turn alleviated the burden of private welfare organisations and stemmed the tide of poverty.

Yet the Salvation Army's help, like that of the PEB, was also racially selective. Van Heyningen characterizes the founder of the Salvation Army as...

" a good imperialist .... General Booth's initial intention was to evangelize amongst 'such English-speaking persons as do not attend any place of worship.' Booth's first concern was always for the urban masses of Britain and he saw Africa primarily as a dumping ground for them."<sup>69</sup>

But ethnic chauvinism extended to racial bias in SA as evidenced by the statement of Major Dickerson of the Salvation Army to the Unemployment Commission, that he thought that there was no unemployment among 'people of colour' in the post-war depression.<sup>70</sup> Such a bias was underscored by the terms of the 1919 ordinance, which set out rules for racially separate accommodation. The Salvation Army night shelters, which have been discussed in chapters 4.4. and 7.4., while fulfilling an important need, were usually for whites only and later for non - Europeans

<sup>67</sup> PEB Minutes, 25 June 1934.

<sup>68</sup> CeA, K35, Unemployment Commission, p.2104.

<sup>69</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community", *SAHJ*, 24 (1991), pp. 133-4.

<sup>70</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, 1920, p. 2104.

of a 'better' class.<sup>71</sup> In Port Elizabeth, the Salvation Army was the only organisation which had such a place for poor women (and unmarried mothers), between 17 to 21 years.<sup>72</sup> Overall, insufficient material provision was made for poor white women and even less for women of colour. Thus, much of the 'non-white' or non-Christian poor, became marginalized by organisations and often criminalized by legislation, so that it was white women that increasingly became the beneficiaries of charitable organisations.

## 5.6. CO-OPERATION AND CO-ORDINATION

Even so, resources were stretched. Given the enormity of poverty and the multitude of poor relief agencies the risk of duplicating aid was high. Moves were afoot therefore, from the mid twenties to the mid thirties, to establish a central body for the co-ordination of poor relief. In 1923 there had supposedly been a system of cards where the MOH had been keeping track of poor relief. However, poor relief organisations had been largely uncooperative. Then, in 1925, Mrs. Anderson, a member of the City Council strongly backed by women's organisations, put forward the idea of a Social Welfare Department as part of the PEM.<sup>73</sup> A Social Welfare Committee, with representatives from the PECC and welfare organisations, was immediately established in order to launch the Department. Funding was to be obtained in the usual way - from street collections, contributions from business, a Provincial grant on a pound for pound basis (as stated by Ordinance), and a PECC grant from 1927.<sup>74</sup> The proposed department would register applications for poor relief and oversee the coordination of funds but a Municipal Social Welfare Office was only finally established in 1933.<sup>75</sup> It fell into disuse after only six months when it was taken over by the PEB, who itself withdrew altogether from charity work shortly afterwards.<sup>76</sup> In the meantime, at the end of the

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<sup>71</sup> In Port Elizabeth the Sydenham Sanatorium was bought as a home for orphan and neglected children in 1922 (CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/27, Finance and General Purposes Committee, 1 December 1922.)

<sup>72</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

<sup>73</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1029, 18 November 1925.

<sup>74</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 12 Feb 1926.

<sup>75</sup> PEB, Annual Report 1933.

<sup>76</sup> PEB, Annual Report, 1934; *EPH*, 1934.

Depression, the NCW had organised a public meeting in the Feather Market Hall to press the PECC into increasing its grants to charitable societies or failing this, to take on the whole problem of poverty as a municipal responsibility. Although the PECC made a donation of two hundred and fifty pounds, the PE public, probably again fearing a municipal 'poor tax', joined ranks with the PECC and central government in rejecting responsibility for the poor.<sup>77</sup> Finally, in 1935, a Central Charity organisation was re-established to which the PECC granted 2 525 pounds excluding grants to the Salvation Army and St. Marks Mission.

## CONCLUSION

Women were particularly vulnerable to poverty during the inter-war period as evidenced by their relatively high numbers in pauper relief grants and the public crisis in 1928. Their low wages were an indication that they were expected to be reliant on the income of fathers or husbands to whose fortunes they were therefore inextricably tied. Thus, family structures were threatened under the stress of unemployment, the breadwinner's ill - health, desertion, drink or gambling while female - headed households struggled most during industrialization. A crisis of both funds and child care blocked employment and created for women a never-ending cycle of poverty. Throughout the study period there were commissions of investigation by church and state, an ongoing debate about the role of central and local government and the church, as well as attempts to organise a central charitable body. The local state was particularly resistant to helping any more than it was required to do by the Poor Relief legislation of 1919. Many communities, especially those marginalized by official and private structures such as the Jews and the Muslims, resorted to enduring traditions of self - help. Similarly, while the Afrikaans community and the ethnically motivated ACVV did much to support their own women, private welfare organisations, especially the PEB, played a significant role in attempting to alleviate poverty for white women in general. They were therefore not only a link between white ethnic groups but also between classes. However as the 1930s progressed and the 'civilised labour' policy began to 'kick in' more white women were slowly able to rise above the spectre of poverty, ultimately leaving their sisters of colour behind. Engineered social mobility thus enabled many more poor white women to attain middle-class 'respectability' in the long term.

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<sup>77</sup> TAD, A 296, NCW Minutes, 11 August 1933; 8 September 1933; PEB, Annual Report, 1933.



**PART IV - THE MIDDLE CLASS DREAM -**  
**'STABILITY', 'DOMESTICITY', 'RESPECTABILITY AND THE FAMILY**

Chapter 6 - **THE FAMILY**

6.1. **INTRODUCTION**

The middle class dream was an ideology which emerged with the bourgeoisie under industrial capitalism. It consisted of guiding concepts, such as 'stability', 'domesticity and 'respectability', which served to maintain the economic system and created an imaginary identity for those who achieved or aspired to achieve its goals. Industrialisation had had a major impact on the shape of the working class family and the role of women in it, resulting in the formation of nuclear families as work became separated from home.<sup>1</sup> In this context, men were the breadwinners and women gained more stature as homemaker, 'queen' of the household and ultimately preserver of the values and morals of a capitalist, Christian society.<sup>2</sup> The prevalent Victorian values further underlined this division of roles by attributing qualities to women such as 'femininity' and 'refinement' and expecting their women to pursue leisure and the idle arts. The ideals of 'stability', 'domesticity' and 'respectability' also arose out of the family Christian model "produced by evangelicalism in answer to industrialization and increasingly adopted by not only the middle class in Britain and America but, by the end of the nineteenth century, the working class as well."<sup>3</sup> In terms of these concepts, women were expected to construct productive, stable families for capitalism by concentrating their energies on the domestic sphere, rearing children in a protected, nurturing environment and inculcating strict moral norms which were geared to reproduce the whole ideology.

For working class women however, "the profound contradiction" was that they were increasingly compelled to enter wage labour and struggled to reconcile the mores of the time with the harsh new

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<sup>1</sup> Since the working class consisted of extended and female-headed families, related and unrelated groupings, and co-habiting couples, the term 'family' will serve to refer to any of these households.

<sup>2</sup> B. Ekloff and S.P. Frank, (eds.) *The World of the Russian Peasant. Post Emancipation, Culture and Society*, (Boston, Unwyn Hyman, 1990), pp.47-48.

<sup>3</sup> D. Gaitskill, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-39", *Journal of African History*, 24, 1983, p.241.

realities of their world.<sup>4</sup> The constructive and destructive forces of capitalism, new opportunities, urban reconstruction, slum living, exposure to new diseases, all demanded that urbanizing families create dramatically new strategies to survive. Whether involved in production or merely reproduction, these women were at the forefront of a dramatic transformation situated between family and a variety of often contending demands on their allegiance such as state policies, employment, home conditions, marital relations, motherhood, morality and urban community issues. The impact of capitalism on the working class family: due to the exploitative wages of capitalism, the whole family, including the mother, was drawn into the workforce. This had a detrimental effect on the family, impaired stability at home, was conducive to excessively high infant mortality rates and detracted from the attainment of the Victorian family ideal.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, the ideals of 'femininity' and 'refinement' became increasingly hard to realise and the concept of motherhood more pragmatic, even brutal (see Section 7.5). In exploring the historical complexities of motherhood in South Africa, Walker has also revealed its varied, sometimes intersecting identities.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the patriarchal order of the rural family was transformed in the cities. Now much of the power shifted to employers and to a degree to women entering previously male dominated jobs. Atomization, where each member of the family became a wage earner, was a further threat to household structures. Yet, despite the stress of transformation, the family survived. How did this occur in Port Elizabeth, how did the family redefine itself and to what extent was this achieved within the constraints of the hegemonic ideals of 'stability', 'domesticity' and 'respectability'? This chapter will address these issues.

Chodorow asserts that women's mothering has become "(h)istorically and cross culturally .....a

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<sup>4</sup> N. Chodorow, "Mothering, Male Dominance, and Capitalism", in Z.R. Einstein (ed.), *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, (Monthly Review Press, London, 1979), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> L. German, *Sex, Class and Socialism*, (Bookmarks, London, 1994), pp. 15 - 42.

<sup>6</sup> C. Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 21,3, September 1995, pp. 417 - 437.

fundamentally determining feature of social organisation."<sup>7</sup> Bozzoli, in attempting to define women's experience more explicitly and perhaps more problematically, has identified the 'family' as one of various interlinked 'sites of struggle' for women.<sup>8</sup> Manicom, however, points out that a timeless principle such as 'struggle' is confined to 'specific patriarchies' and is not applicable to all experiences. It is, in fact, less visible in the industrialized 20th century and she suggests that it was the state which played a determining role in shaping the experience of the 'family' and 'women'<sup>9</sup>. In the analysis below, I will represent individual women and the family unit in Port Elizabeth as having undergone a cultural transition during urbanization which continued throughout the inter-war years and which was shaped by both the state and capitalism, as well as by attitudes differentially appropriated by women themselves.

British Victorian social norms about womanly virtue and family ideals were transmitted to colonial society throughout the Empire. Although initially serving the bourgeoisie, these ideals were aspired to in SA by all classes, though tailored by notions of racial exclusivity. The predominance of English speaking families in Port Elizabeth made transplantation of this ethos easier, though not automatic. Recent research has shown how much of the 'home' culture was both emulated and modified in the colonies.<sup>10</sup> Afrikaans women were imbued by the concept of the 'Volksmoeder', which although different, dovetailed in some respects with Victorian ideals for women. Derived from the participation of women in the suffering of the SA War, values of virtue, moral sensibility, political independence, racial superiority, purity, bravery and courage - highly useful to constructing an imaginary nationalism - had initially been created by male writers and attributed to Afrikaans women.<sup>11</sup> Although also appropriated mainly by the bourgeoisie, this identity of

<sup>7</sup> N. Chodorow, "Mothering, Male Dominance and Capitalism", p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> B. Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol.9, (2), April 1983, pp. 139-171.

<sup>9</sup> L. Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", *Journal of African History*, 33, 1992, pp. 449-450.

<sup>10</sup> N. Chaudhuri, and M. Strobel, (eds.), *Western Women and Imperialism, Complicity and Resistance*, (Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> E. Brink, "Man-made woman: Gender, Class and the ideology of the Volksmoeder," in C. Walker, (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p. 276.

pioneering self-sacrifice was aspired to by working class Afrikaans woman through the nobility of hard work, stoicism, self-reliance, domestic competence and resilience, creating a hardier 'angel of the house'.<sup>12</sup> Imbued with a strong respect for Christian dogma, the adaptation to hegemonic norms was certainly culturally easier for both English working women and poor whites, than it was, say, for women of other races. The Carnegie Commission emphasized the respect held by poor whites both for the church and law and order. Out of approximately 350 families visited in SA's industrial areas, over 90% of the parents had got married in church, were church members or had christened their children.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the state's civilised labour' policy was to ensure social mobility and increasing material comfort for white families so that the Christian ideals of domesticity and social respectability were more easily attained. Nevertheless, urbanisation, congested living conditions and deprivation tended to narrow the boundaries of 'respectable' family life.

## 6.2. THE STATE, THE HOUSEHOLD AND SOLIDARITY

The classic theory of the social impact of colonial capitalism and Victorian norms on the family was not entirely applicable to Port Elizabeth, especially in terms of the atomization of the family unit. Initially, it was poor provision of affordable housing by the local and central state in the 1920s, rather than family fragmentation, that threatened standards of 'respectability' because of drastic overcrowding and unhygienic living conditions. Yet it also led to the support of an extended family. The MOH reported in 1932:

"There are still houses available for both Europeans and Eurafricans who can afford to pay an economic rent, but the economic position still prevents many houses from being occupied by only one family, the result is that families are sharing houses."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, extended or multiple families in one dwelling were often the norm in the working class areas. In 1921, 20% of the houses in the North End were rated by the MOH as overcrowded and 17% sheltering more than one family (see section 1.4). This was perpetuated by the reduced earning

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<sup>12</sup> C. Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa", p. 433; V. Woolf, *Killing The Angel in the House*, (Penguin, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V(b)*, (Stellenbosch, 1932), p.19.

<sup>14</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1932, Report of the MOH, p.74.

power of parents due to their low educational standards and skill levels. By 1932, the Carnegie Commission's nationwide sample of 462 families in Port Elizabeth showed 44.8 % of the parents had attended primary or farm schools only; 39% could barely read or write; 11.9% were totally illiterate.<sup>15</sup> Evidence given to the Unemployment Commission in 1920 reported:

"It is difficult for the fathers to obtain employment - most of them are accustomed to manual labour and they can only be utilised as labourers on the railways and in the service of the Municipality."<sup>16</sup>

Yet as evidence of rising educational standards, 44.8% of the sons and daughters had passed Standard six and a total of only 29.2% had left school before this. Of 562 female factory employees 57% had attained standard six or higher.<sup>17</sup>

The 1931 Voters' Roll indicated some change in the housing situation, but recorded that large families of between four and six adults were still commonplace. Out of a sample of 204 residents in the North End, there was almost as many extended as nuclear families. This was without the inclusion of those under 21 in the figures indicating that families tended to consist of parent(s) fully or partially supported by children and/or their spouses. Many homes also included lodgers.

Again, in contradiction of the classic Marxist theory of family atomization under capitalism, stable family structures were emerging. In PE North, in all the mainly white suburbs of Sydenham, North End, but especially Sidwell and Kensington, the vast majority of women over 21 were housewives (72%, 71%, 82%, 79%, respectively) and had not been forced to abandon the family for wage labour (see Table 6.1.). In Korsten, a predominantly black area, white housewives formed as much as 84 % of the white female population. This was because not only were older women from the rural areas unskilled but also, being married, were often viewed as unemployable. However, some older women were forced to be self-reliant. Widowed or deserted by 1931, they took to self-

<sup>15</sup> cited in E. Brink, " 'Maar 'n klomp "factory meide': Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s", in Belinda Bozzoli, (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987), p. 185.

<sup>16</sup> CeA, K 35, vol. 3, Unemployment Commission, Minutes of Evidence, Port Elizabeth, 25 and 26 November, 1920-1.

<sup>17</sup> cited in E. Brink, "'Maar 'n klomp "factory meide'", p. 185.

employment as dressmakers, particularly in Kensington and Sydenham.

**TABLE 6.1**  
**Percentage of White Female Occupations in PE (North) Suburbs, 1931<sup>18</sup>**

Occupations	Kensington	N.End	Sidwell	Sydenham	Korsten
Professional§	2,0	2,0	--	2,2	--
Miscellaneous*	1,2	1,1	0,5	1,8	1,5
Clerical¥	2,7	5,0	0,9	5,1	0,4
Housewives	79,0	70,9	81,5	72,2	84,4
Tradeswomen <sup>o</sup>	1,5	3,7	0,2	2,2	2,0
Factory Workers●	7,2	9,0	7,6	6,1	3,5
Domestics <sup>o</sup>	3,2	5,7	6,5	6,5	7,4
Seamstresses <sup>f</sup>	2,8	2,0	1,9	2,7	0,8
Midwives	--	0,2	0,2	0,2	--
Waitresses	0,4	0,2	0,5	0,3	--
Pensioners	--	0,2	0,2	0,7	--

- §Professional - includes nurses, teachers  
 \*Miscellaneous - includes examiners, bookbinders, bakers, postmistresses, furriers  
 ¥Clerical - includes bookeepers, cashiers, clerks, typists, stenographers, telegraphists  
<sup>o</sup>Tradeswomen - includes shop assistants, saleswomen  
<sup>o</sup>Domestics - includes domestics, housekeepers, housemaids, companions, governesses, cooks  
 ●Factory Workers - includes machinists, pattern cutters  
<sup>f</sup>Seamstresses - includes dressmakers, upholsterers, costumiers, milliners, clothmakers and cottonweavers

While eight out of a sample of eleven were married, six of these had no husbands appearing on the Voters' Roll. Only three lived in families with men in the skilled trades, five lived with other

<sup>18</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

women and two lived completely alone, increasing the need for their reliance on this type of work.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, by this time, only a relatively small percentage of husbands fell into the 'retired', pensioner or unemployed category. The largest group of 43 (or 8%) was in Sydenham. Usually the majority of the men were employed as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, the single largest category in all areas but especially in Sidwell and Kensington, being skilled labourers. This included electricians, fitters, clickers, pattern cutters, duco sprayers, masons, mechanics, blacksmiths, shoemakers, cabinet makers, bakers, butchers or carpenters. This category probably included sons since, according to the Carnegie Commission, they tended to gravitate towards skilled jobs. While 5.5% were employed as commercial and clerical workers, a few even belonged to the professions.<sup>20</sup> In Kensington, the category of semi-skilled workers, for example, drivers, handymen, conductors, machine operators, bricklayers, checkers and pressmen, was virtually the same size.

However, extensive underemployment of males, necessitating a combined family income to survive, occurred in the remaining three areas, especially in Sidwell, where the second largest group of males consisted of unskilled workers. The Railways and, during the Depression particularly, relief works absorbed many of the previously unemployed Sidwell and North End males, where there were large numbers of labourers (over 90 in each area) who were able to bring in, an albeit low, wage. This was so in the case of Johannes Nel who came from the Pearston district to settle in Sidwell and was employed by the Railways to work on the excavation of Happy Valley for the construction of the Charlie Malan Quay Number one at a wage of four pounds per month.<sup>21</sup> Altogether, 'retired' and lowly paid semi-skilleds and unskilleds usually comprised around 50% of all the male adults.

It was the children of the Afrikaans - speaking working class families who were most employable and played a crucial role in the survival of the family, whether extended or nuclear, in this period of transition. The income of daughters who usually worked as factory workers or domestics, was especially significant. The Carnegie Commission reported that out of 121 white women employed

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<sup>19</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Electoral Division, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>20</sup> cited in E. Brink, " 'Maar 'n klomp "factory meide' ", p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, Johannes Benjamin Nel, conducted by M. Nel.

in a shoe factory, 12 were married and had their own homes, seven were boarding and five were living in a girls' hostel. The majority of 97 were living with their parents or with relatives, such as aunts or married sisters.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, out of a sample of 149 female factory workers on the 1931 Voters' List, living mainly in the North End, the majority (92) were unmarried although the real figure would be far higher since many of them were too young to be on the roll. An analysis of 47 of the 154 factory workers' in PE(North) revealed that they lived with their families, including mainly employed male relations: six labourers, six semi-skilled and thirteen skilled workers, two in clerical positions, six pensioners and only six were retired men. Most of these young women also lived with housewives and sometimes domestics or other factory workers. This indicates a family profile with a relatively stable framework in place where factory workers, whether married or otherwise, lived in large extended families with a number of wage earners and the stabilizing factor of someone to run the home.<sup>23</sup> Reliance on the earnings of children is documented by the Carnegie Report. S.S., who based his move to Port Elizabeth from Willowmore on the prospects of his daughters' earnings was quoted:

"I was a "bywoner" at Willowmore. Through the kindness of friends my daughter of 18 got work in a boot factory here. Seeing how well she got on - she gets 20/- a week - we decided to move to Port Elizabeth, as existence at Willowmore was impossible owing to the droughts. I am now a railway labourer earning 6/- per day. Two of my children work in boot factories, and one is a bottle-maker. Our combined income enables us to live and to look after the six smaller children. Our prospects are much rosier now than in the old days."<sup>24</sup>

Domestics, lived in similarly structured families. As with factory workers, they were invariably single. Out of a sample of 44 on the 1931 Voters' Roll for PE North, only two were married. Occupying primarily Korsten, then Sydenham and Sidwell, and then the North End, they too lived in extended families including one or two other women, at least one being a housewife. However, in the given sample, male relations, numbering amongst it, truck drivers, labourers and foremen, tended to include mainly the more skilled - furriers, bookeepers, clerks, carpenters, butchers,

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<sup>22</sup> J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Economic Report. Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus. The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I*, (Pro-Ecclesia Drukkery, Stellenbosch, 1932), p. 216.

<sup>23</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>24</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p. 13.



cabinet makers, painters - suggesting a more economically, solid family base. In many cases, these extended families also took in lodgers. The family of Esme Fowler, a domestic who lived at 12 Rhodes St., North End, included two butchers, her mother a housewife, a male bookkeeper, and a male 'checker' as a lodger.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, while overcrowding in homes still existed by 1931, its by-product, the extended family, afforded financial and domestic support. Often young couples made recourse to communal living. Mrs. Hartman, whose husband was unemployed, found that her rental in Sydenham of six pounds per month was as much as her monthly salary at the Algoa Sweet factory. She and her husband thus shared the accommodation with her brother and his wife at a charge of two pounds per month. This, together with the income her husband received from soleing shoes at home, covered their food: sixpence would buy meat for two to three days, and one shilling would buy 12 lbs rice.

Sydenham was a slightly more well-to do working class area than other areas in the North End. Here women were related to more self-employed men, those with some specialised training, for example, opticians, jewellers, etc. professional people and a particularly high percentage of clerical workers, for example, bookkeepers, clerks, civil servants, cashiers, telegraphists and telephonists than in any other area.<sup>26</sup>

While necessary elements of the ideal family structure - mother at home, father working - were already in place during the first half of the study period, the so-called atomization of the family was often strongly countered by a sense of home building and solidarity. J. Nel and his wife, Johanna, fled their drought-stricken farm in the Pearston district in 1930, settling first in a cottage in Dolton Road, Sidwell at the back of the residence of Hans Smit. Soon, they moved to Patience Street to one of the so-called Sid Wells corrugated iron houses, in which a number of the newly arrived Afrikaner families settled.<sup>27</sup> Resourcefulness and the use of farm skills, necessitated by intense deprivation particularly in this suburb, is remembered with pride and a sense of self-sufficiency in the testimony of J. Nel:

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<sup>25</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>26</sup> Union of SA, Voters' List, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, J. Nel.

"...little attempt was made at gardening (whether vegetable or flower) possibly because nearly all families kept their own chickens.....Swiss dairy goats in the backyard, and the offspring of these would be sold ....Most of the families retained strong links with the farming areas they had left. Some farmers had regular orders for meat among the families and would come to town to deliver.....The four rooms were usually turned into a kitchen, two bedrooms and a dining room. Most families took their meals in the kitchen, and the dining room was used as a lounge.....these humble little homes, ....were often furnished with beautiful family heirlooms, which had accompanied the family on their urban migration.....The kitchen served as a bathroom. Water would be boiled on the stove and poured into the huge zinc tubs the housewife would do her washing in. The soap used: green sunlight soap, considered an indulgence (clothes were washed with big slabs of home-made "boerseep" which my grandmother obtained from the farm).....In the evenings, candles and paraffin lamps were used to provide lighting."<sup>28</sup>

The women, J. Nel recalls, possessed excellent cooking, baking and sewing skills. The vast majority of them stayed at home, looking after their families, fully occupied doing all the housework without the benefit of the numerous servants they had had on the farm. Most women made their own and their daughters' clothes on Singer sewing machines. Amongst the very poor, children's clothes, particularly underwear, was made from bleached flour bags. The children went barefoot: to school, to church, everywhere. Susanna du Preez also remembers her sister would buy offcuts from work (Mosenthals) and make it into clothing to give to family members.<sup>29</sup> Again, Nel recalls the varied manual skills of the Afrikaner men who were always busy fixing machinery and cars and making things. His father, for example, made beautiful wall cabinets and shoes for himself and fellow workers. Individuals would also trade particular skills, the variety of which virtually became a medium of exchange and a cornerstone of support in the struggling community.<sup>30</sup>

Such one-dimensional discourse reflecting industriousness, happy self-denial and social unity can be ascribed to a number of factors: a natural inclination to forget hard times, lapses of memory, or individual pride. However, Anderson's point about how nations imagine themselves, may be applicable to exclusivist communities such as those of the Afrikaner and therefore, more to the

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<sup>28</sup> Interview, J. Nel.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, S. du Preez.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, J. Nel.

point.<sup>31</sup> In Nel's case, the Afrikaner's nationalist, self - consciousness seems to have come to the fore embodying two important social concepts - the indomitable will of the struggling urban Afrikaner and the all-important cornerstone of the home, the Volksmoeder.

Nevertheless, poverty, overcrowding, ill-health and fragmentation put many households under stress. As regards the family of 'S.S.', mentioned earlier, the Carnegie Commission reported that they occupied "a two-room dwelling made of packing cases with an iron roof. Eleven people sleep in two small rooms, only 8 by 10 feet each."<sup>32</sup> The difficulty of girls' boarding arrangements in the city and the related concerns about morality in 1926 were reported by Dorothy Tonkin, Inspectress for Factories:

"It is not unusual to find four or five in a room and the food provided is far below the necessary standard of health. This accommodation is offered in very poor homes and is very cheap (from 7/6 a week upwards)."<sup>33</sup>

The struggle to establish homes in the face of these problems resulted in the use of social networks and improvised living arrangements. Often accommodation connections were made through relations, friends, the community or the workplace. After the death of her grandmother, 16 year old Corrie Gerber left a sheep farm in the Steytlerville - Graaff Reinet district and came to Port Elizabeth in 1928. Here she had no family, no friends or contacts. Once working at Playdon's boot factory, she managed to arrange accommodation for 10s per week in Albert Street, North End, with a Mrs. Jacobs, mother of a work mate.<sup>34</sup>

Others, having found their niche in the labour market, bore the burden of contributing to two families: while boarding with people in town, they also supported families in the hinterland. Susanna du Preez and her family, for example, were involved in a series of moves after her father sold his portion of the farm, Paarlskranz, in the Uniondale district. After moving to Willowmore,

<sup>31</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, cited in E. Brink, "Man-made woman", p. 274.

<sup>32</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family*, V(b), p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> CeA, VWN, 3973, PG 652/62/127, Evidence, Mrs. Tonkin, NCW, Port Elizabeth, 1926.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, Corrie Gerber.

her father took work on the farm, Waaikraal, near Oudtshoorn. Another move this time to Rooi River, saw his departure from the land when he took work on the railways there. Finally, In 1926, Susanna left them on a farm at Addo near Port Elizabeth and started work at Mosenthals while boarding in overcrowded conditions. Here she was expected to contribute to the upkeep of the household in terms of cash and household chores, paying half her salary of 15s for rent and performing all the washing and ironing. At the same time, she took food and goods nearly every weekend to her Addo family.<sup>35</sup>

### 6.3. MARRIAGE - "STILL MAINLY RESPECTABLE"

In 1926 in Port Elizabeth, 50% of all marriageable white women (above the age of 15 years) were married which, while it may have indicated demographic stability, did not necessarily denote domestic stability.<sup>36</sup> The political economy of the Eastern Cape in the 1920s was exacting its toll on marital patterns and family cohesion in Port Elizabeth in terms of urbanisation, poverty and unemployment. Such factors themselves often gave occasion to marriages. The Carnegie Commission reported that generally poverty caused early marriages amongst poor white girls, with most marrying before they were 20 years old. In images that conflict with the report of M. Nel, it attributed this to

"the improvident, happy-go-lucky habits of the poor whites (or most of them); the future and care of home and family weigh very lightly with them. Miserable housing is another reason. The son or daughter gets "fed up" with the living conditions in the overcrowded home, ... And it costs so little to put up a shanty similar to that of their parents ..... And when drunkenness and discord are to be found in the home, children marry early, in order to escape a miserable home-life."<sup>37</sup>

Given the pressure of urban conditions for working wives and mothers, this escape was not always satisfactory and the cherished dreams of marital bliss, domesticity and respectability, often elusive. The church ceremony itself was losing favour. Civil marriage ceremonies gradually became more commonplace among all classes partly because of financial constraints, and partly because they

<sup>35</sup> Interview, S. du Preez.

<sup>36</sup> Union Government, Report of the Cost of Living Committee, UG. 45- 1927, 1926.

<sup>37</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p. 31.

afforded less publicity to 'forced' marriages, themselves symptomatic of a breakdown of the family ideal.

Yet, the Carnegie Commission maintained that the state of marital affairs among the poor was "still mainly respectable".<sup>38</sup> and that divorce or desertion did not seem to occur more amongst the poor than the more privileged classes. In corroboration of Walker's historical placement of motherhood, the Commission reported

"In fact the contrary appears to hold..Family ties are generally strong; so that it has become proverbial among our people that poor parents are fonder of their children (often foolishly so) than other parents are."<sup>39</sup>

However, it acknowledged that with "the presence of so many examples of degeneration" and a marked increase in the number of divorces since WW1, the 'respectability' of the family was seriously under threat. This was attributed to economic conditions causing the wife to work and the lack of all the necessary home accoutrements.<sup>40</sup>

While the Carnegie Commission's appraisal of family cohesion among poor whites was attributed to strong religious beliefs and the need for 'respectability' in the face of poverty, the dependent legal position of women in general must have deterred many from seeking their freedom. Aside from material burdens, working class women laboured, as did their more affluent counterparts, under the patriarchy inherent in both public and private law and internalized in marriage. They had neither the vote until 1931, nor the same legal rights as their husbands. Roman Dutch law which applied to all non-Africans withdrew equal legal rights as soon as women married, and gave them the status of a minor. In a divorce, guardianship over children automatically fell to the father, unless the court ruled otherwise. Women had also not been able to testify against their husbands

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<sup>38</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> C. Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa", pp. 417 - 437; M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p.19.

<sup>40</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p. 32.

until March 1918.<sup>41</sup> Some of these conditions, such as control over property and children, was only redressed in 1953 by the Matrimonial Affairs Act.<sup>42</sup> Such values of 'social' patriarchy of the time were unselfconsciously disseminated in the local newspapers, entrenching widely held perceptions about women's levels of intelligence, values and morality.<sup>43</sup>

Often the legal machinery was insufficient to support a deserted wife. Maintenance was provided for under the Children's Protection Act of 1913, as well as a legal mechanism for the poor to gain access to the courts.<sup>44</sup> But as Burman and Naude have pointed out, a woman had to know her rights, have the confidence to go through court procedure and be able to ignore the possibility of physical abuse. There also had to be evidence of paternity, the likelihood of money and knowledge of the whereabouts of the man.<sup>45</sup> Mrs. Kathleen Pero of Central, Port Elizabeth, was pregnant when her husband deserted her. Although she instituted criminal proceedings against her husband for maintenance he simply absconded. Without friends and relatives she had to take a room at the Silver Grill Cafe. For several months she managed to maintain herself and a child of 12 months by entering domestic service. Finally, her pregnancy forced her to stop work, with the result that she could not meet her weekly rental of one pound. Finally her money gave out and the Court had to appeal to a private charity, the PEB, on her behalf.<sup>46</sup> When government maintenance grants were

<sup>41</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1/, 8 December 1916; 3/22/1/1, 14 March 1918.

<sup>42</sup> C. Walker, 'The Women's Suffrage Movement in South Africa', Centre for SA Studies, UCT, 1979, pp. 56-57.

<sup>43</sup> The following jokes encapsulate these perceptions: "An echo is the only thing that can cheat a woman out of the last word."; the music hall artiste had to sit on a jury in a Divorce Court. The proceedings were too dull and she was overcome. Only water was available and nothing stronger. She concluded that the accused should 'get off' because "men are such nice creatures."; also: "I'm not at home to him" said the 1920 girl. "But, my dear", said her mother, "you haven't even looked at the name on the card," "No, but I can tell by the sound that it's not the type of car I want." *PE Advertiser*, 26 January 1922, 20 January 1924.

<sup>44</sup> Union of SA, Statutes of the Union of SA, 1913, (Cape Town, 1913).

<sup>45</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard: The Social Consequences of Illegitimacy in Cape Town, 1896 - 1939", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 17 (3), September 1991, p.391.

<sup>46</sup> PEB, Acting Magistrate to PEB, 74, 18 July 1927.

withdrawn in 1928 due to the declining economy, Mrs Anderson of the Child Welfare Society justifiably pointed out the immediate distress this caused.<sup>47</sup>

Such legal constraints helped to extend and maintain the ideology of paternalism in the social and economic fabric of SA society while the reality was often very different. While employers had been quick to encourage reliance on the male as breadwinner and even the PEB only helped women who were unable to rely on male relatives, this was predicated on the theory of a family wage. However, this was often not applied in Port Elizabeth due to undercutting by blacks, women and mechanization. It has already been shown (see Chapter 2) how, while the Pact government managed to ensure the employment of large numbers of whites in Port Elizabeth, it did not have the same success here with wage elevation. Further, older men were often unemployable, due to lack of skills and were often bypassed in favour of their more employable daughters, thus preventing them from bringing in any wage at all. The argument for a male breadwinner was further undermined by the existence of a large number of housewives, many of whom were involved in informal work, while during the Depression, the employment of women in industry soared. Moreover, not only were women often taking jobs that had traditionally been the preserve of their menfolk, but many enjoyed the freedom of working away from home.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the ideology of the male as head of the household was not always true in that the practice often fell far short of the ideal.

Did this create stress and instability within the family - a site of struggle as Bozzoli has called it - or did it in fact make for solidarity? Undoubtedly loss of male control over income in the face of prevailing patriarchy, must have created stress for working class men. Such insecurities, along with struggles over economic resources in the urban milieu, were sometimes translated into fears of inter-racial sex between white women and males of other races (discussed in section 7.3). Alternatively, fears were manifested in domestic violence or abuse. Patriarchy assumed a harsher face in the society of the working class, where everyday struggles to survive must have increased its brutality. Only with the financial and moral support of the PEB did Martha West, two months after appealing to the Society, finally find the courage to escape her violent husband who was

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<sup>47</sup> TAD, A 296, NCW Minutes, 3/22/1/1 9 November 1928.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews, Mrs. Boucher, van Soelen, Gerber; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity, Women in South African Industry, 1900 - 1980*, (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1992), p. x.

imprisoned for raping another woman.<sup>49</sup>

The social breakdown of familial groupings at the lower end of the social spectrum, in terms of youthful corruption, substance abuse, moral deviance, brutality and violence, is clearly evident not only in the outcome of Nancy Francatelli's case but also in its details. She was only a child of 12 years old when she met Johannes Gouws, a works foreman at a boot factory, Primsoles. At this time she had passed standard six and was going to night school while she worked at the Gold Seal Sandwich Company in the day. She soon set up house with him in two rooms at the back of Martha Roberts' house in Prince Alfred Rd. However, Gouws smoked aspirins and opium from time to time, becoming noisy and aggressive so that Francatelli left him after numerous arguments. He threatened her at various times, but she was frightened and her refusals to return to him drove him to smoke more aspirin and become more moody and indolent. Finally when she was working for Mrs. Eliason as a nursemaid in Buckingham Road, Gouws caught up with her and, as she went out walking with her charge and another domestic employed in the same street, shot and killed her.<sup>50</sup> While such violence was seemingly not the norm, it indicates the potential level of disintegration for those households threatened with social marginalization.

#### 6.4 TRANSFORMATION: CHILD CARE AND THE STATE

Transformation and elevation of the white working class woman and her family - realisation of the 'powerful dream' - was, essentially achieved by the intervention of state legislation and the creation of a more effective, urban infrastructure. Central to this was attention to the children of working class families. The concept of 'childhood' was, according to German, part of preparing the individual to be a good citizen and capitalist worker.<sup>51</sup> As such, local child support in SA, grounded in the Children's Protection Act of 1913, was heavily weighted in favour of whites. During the early years of the study period, the Child Welfare Society had listed their concerns as the conditions in which families lived, poor parenting skills, the factory employment of very young

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<sup>49</sup> PEB, Minutes, 16 April 1934, p.253.

<sup>50</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/304, Rex vs Johannes Stephanus Gouws, 1935.

<sup>51</sup> L. German, *Sex, Class and Socialism*, p. 39.



children, neglect, abuse, desertion and the high infant mortality rate.<sup>52</sup> As late as 1930, this was linked directly by the MOH to the large families, increases in the birth rate and the inability to command living wages in order to feed, clothe and house their children properly. With specific reference to poor whites, he noted:

"in some cases, their intelligence is so low that they could not properly care for their children under town conditions if they did have the money to do it with."<sup>53</sup>

In 1920, 75 of the 102 white families that came to Port Elizabeth between October 1918 and October 1919 had between five to ten children. Many of them, it was reported to the Unemployment Commission, needed to be placed in institutions because parents could not afford to keep them or wilfully neglected them.<sup>54</sup> In the same year the Magistrate reported that, under the Children's Protection Act, 34 children had been registered as protected infants. After a number were removed to other centres or returned to their parents, 63 were still left on the books. Another 56 were left with their parents although committed to the care of the Child Welfare Society. They received grants from the Education Department, the spending of which was monitored by the CWS. The Magistrate reported: "the grants have been of the greatest benefit to the children of respectable parents who would otherwise have been dragged down in the depression of abject poverty."<sup>55</sup> Single mothers, however, did not receive grants, despite the CWS's fight throughout the 1920s to achieve this in the face of regular criticism for promoting illegitimacy.<sup>56</sup> By the late 1920s, during the economic boom, however, the number of protected infants registered during the year had dropped to eight in 1927 and six in 1928, while the number of CWS cases had risen to 189 and 78 respectively, possibly indicating, at least temporarily, the positive impact of a more stable economy on family cohesion.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, by the 1930s little change in family composition had taken place. Many of the hundreds of indigent families located in Port Elizabeth by the Carnegie

<sup>52</sup> CWS, First Annual Report, 1918.

<sup>53</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1930, Report of the MOH, p. 61.

<sup>54</sup> CeA, K 35, Unemployment Commission, 2160.

<sup>55</sup> TAD, JUS 1/543/20, Annual Report of the Magistrate for 1920.

<sup>56</sup> CWS, 75, Annual Reports, 1917-1993.

<sup>57</sup> TAD, JUS 439 1/82/28, Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1928.

commission in the early 1930s, had a high average of 6.57 children per family.<sup>58</sup> Harradine notes:

"At this time many of the poorest women, often with unemployed and consumptive husbands and living in one or two rooms, were condemned to lives of constant pregnancy and the burden of trying to provide for large numbers of children."<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the EP Children's Home, based on revenue from the Provincial government, the church and other sources, housed only 51 white children in 1919; similarly, the Roman Catholic Nazareth Home had 136 charges, all of whom were white.<sup>60</sup> Juvenile Boards which had already been operational were formally instituted by the Juveniles Act, No. 33 of 1921.<sup>61</sup> The PE board was run by local councillors, businessmen and socially prominent women such as NCW members in order to oversee the transition of youths between 14-18 from school to the workplace - specifically to prevent them leaving school too early, to assist them in further education while in jobs and to rehabilitate young criminals.<sup>62</sup>

These developments were strengthened by the state's contribution to the preservation of gender roles in further legislation. Protective legislation in 1931, providing for better working conditions for women in industry tended to encourage the notion that the wife's place was at home. Meanwhile the local state established maternity and VD clinics in the late 1920s and the Clarendon creche, a training centre for nursery nurses and a mothercraft centre for white, working class mothers in 1932. This consisted of a Child Welfare Society Day nursery and a baby Home, where mothers going on holiday or in need of a special rest could leave their children.<sup>63</sup> All state improvement led to a cyclical increase in the standard of living, whereby the increased expenditure for reproduction would ultimately lead to a drop in the number of births and, again, an improvement in the standard

<sup>58</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p.32.

<sup>59</sup> M. Harradine, *Port Elizabeth. A Social Chronicle to the End of 1945*, (E.H. Walton, Port Elizabeth, 1997), p.191.

<sup>60</sup> Union of SA, Report of the Secretary for Education, Part 11, Child Welfare, UG 61-1920, p.25.

<sup>61</sup> *EPH*, 21 March 1922.

<sup>62</sup> *EPH*, January 1922; *EPH*, 21 March 1922.

<sup>63</sup> CWS, Annual Reports, 1917 - 1933, 75.

of living. Mrs. Hartman, whose financial struggles in the 1920s were referred to earlier, was to take in a foster child in 1951 despite the fact that she held down a full day job including night shifts, had no domestic help, and had four of her own children. Domestic pride ensured that she nevertheless managed to impress the visiting Social Welfare worker with her standard of housekeeping. 'Oxshit', she notes, was rubbed regularly on the path to prevent dust inside.<sup>64</sup>

However, many of the working class families were still under pressure and threat of disintegration by 1936. Infant mortality, as an indicator of family stability and white social mobility, was still a cause for concern. While the MOH was able to report the lowest recorded rate of white infant mortality in that year, as noted in section 4.3, the NCW reported it as being one of the highest in the Union.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, housing was still insufficient so that in 1935, the MOH considered that 2 000 dwellings of a sub-economic type were necessary to hygienically house the existing population.<sup>66</sup> He attributed the drop in infant mortality to the growing success of the maternity clinics rather than an improvement in housing. Moreover, while the Carnegie Commission reported in 1932 the almost 'abnormal' care shown by poor whites for their children, in 1936, CWS reports about poor white families were still dismal, reflecting neglect, cruelty and the large numbers of families needing assistance:

"Year after year the names of certain families appear on our books; dependence is their natural condition, children grow up without any hope or aim, "Child Welfare" is expected to supply their needs..... There is a constant influx to our City from The Platteland (sic) and the bulk are quite unsuited for urban life. Thus sooner or later they swell the numbers on local Charitable Institutions. The chief sufferers, however, are the families of the unfit bread-winner."<sup>67</sup>

Although by this time the PEB had been uninvolved with poor relief work for the past two years, the poor white problem was now monitored by a central charity body established in 1935 (see chapter 5.6).

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<sup>64</sup> Interview, Mrs. Hartman.

<sup>65</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1936, Report of the MOH, p.66; TAD, A 296 3/22/1/2 NCW, Minutes, 13 February 1936.

<sup>66</sup> MM, MOH, 1935, p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> CWS, 19th Annual Report, 1936.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the family in the urbanizing industrial society of Port Elizabeth was both a nucleus of non-bureaucratic support<sup>68</sup> - a defence mechanism - in conditions of alienness, as well as Bozzoli's 'site of struggle'. Thus, both tendencies must be recognized. The white working class family was both shaped by and responded to external forces such as the state, capitalism and gender ideology in industrializing, segregating Port Elizabeth. It exhibited, therefore, the duality of a struggle with domestic patriarchy, but also co-operation against capitalist exploitation; in the early phase of its transition, many families exhibited, by default, the broad outlines of the ideal family - mother at home and father working - due to the absence of welfare systems. Solidarity emerged as a theme where parents relied on daughters' earnings and where roles were combined in instances such as mother/informal worker. Positive aspects were also manifested in their networking, improvisation, community co-operation, communal living, and a tendency to strong family ties. However, these families also tended to atomization, which is inherently divisive, and conducive to exploitation in seeking to justify the absence of a family wage. Thus female 'dependency' and family 'respectability' continued to be illusive. Moreover, women's familial roles were often undermined by chronic social conditions, a tenuous urban infrastructure all of which intensified the struggle to generate income and raise families. Many families responded to, or at least aspired to, hegemonic norms and expectations. Perhaps it was precisely familiarity with flexible, familial arrangements that allowed Mrs. Hartman, whose financial struggles in the 1920s were described earlier, to continue improving her household conditions. Others developed a psychology of reliance on the State or, at worst, deviance. Patriarchy, more brutal in the working class, tended to threaten the survival of the family. Progressively, the state intervened offering the 'powerful dream' to whites elevating the family and emphasizing the notion of the women's role within it. This process was started and made great progress in the study period. Economic growth, the passage of time and the increased industrialization of WW2 would see to this.

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<sup>68</sup> a term from Jane Humphries cited in A. Amsden (ed.), *The Economics of Women and Work*, (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 151.

## Chapter 7 - MORALITY

### 7.1. PROMISCUITY AND PROSTITUTION - THE DEBATE OVER CONTROL

The search for 'respectability' discussed in the last chapter was also intimately connected to the morality of the ruling class. To what extent was 'respectable' morality achieved by white working class women? An understanding of this will necessitate consideration of the links between local sexual morality and the hegemonic ideology - a combination of 19th century Victorian morality and notions of the new purity movement that had developed in the late 1800s. It is also to be noted that sexual morality, in this period of urbanisation and social reorganisation, was increasingly defined by race. Disintegration of accepted norms often resulted in inter-racial sex, a 'crime' peculiar to SA from 1902 and even prostitution and illegitimacy, the shame of which sometimes led to abortion or infanticide.

The strongly British ethos of Port Elizabeth maintained Victorian ideology well into the 1920s and 1930s. Neither industrialization nor the absorption of other ethnic or racial groups had occurred on such a scale so as to transform the Victorian - rooted perceptions of the ruling classes. In a study on Victorian prostitution in Port Elizabeth, I have pointed out that the shaping of sexual morality had been

"closely tied to the development of capitalism. In a society where the application of industrious labour to the accumulation of capital was paramount, restrictive social behaviour was seen as consolidating the ideological foundations essential for a stable society and material gain. Restraint and social respectability were therefore the greatest social virtues.....A bachelor, therefore, was required to adhere to the principles of restraint, both in the accumulation of capital and in the saving of libido which would well-prepare (sic) him for marriage.....For women, (as nurseries of children and the home) the very essence of their sexuality was stifled by ideals of Femininity, Weakness and Servility, as well as frigidity. Thus, a holistic social psychology was created for the furtherance of society's material survival."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, double standards were an intrinsic part of this morality since male sexual drive was legitimated by the 'silent sanction' of prostitution. "...The prostitute became a necessary, yet reviled member

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<sup>1</sup> P. Gibbs, 'Prostitution and Morality in Port Elizabeth, 1802-1902', (BA.Hons., University of SA, 1990), p.19.

of society."<sup>2</sup> The double standard was enshrined in SA's Contagious Diseases Acts of 1868 and 1885, where women were targeted as the key agents in the transmission of venereal disease. The 1885 Act set up Lock Hospitals in the seaports and main towns of the Cape for the treatment and internment of female patients suspected of carrying and sexually transmitting the disease.

However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the purity movement in Britain and SA, took up cudgels against the 'double standard' attacking the legality of prostitution, attempting to liberate women and instil new attitudes with regard to morality, drink and gambling. It took root in Port Elizabeth in the early 1890s. Ironically, by attempting the moral rescue of lower class women, middle class women achieved some freedom from the (male) source of their own oppression. Through organisations such as the WCTU and the NCW, they could express their frustrated social identities in important activity outside the home. Many of these organisations, while not originally established around issues of sexual morality, were nevertheless able to implement their Christian moral bias in the process of rescuing 'fallen' women. The effects of the purity movement's work culminated in Cape Colonial and later Provincial legislation. The Police Offences Act of 1882 which provided for the penalising of prostitution or soliciting, was extended in 1898 by targeting pimping and procuring. However, although the Betting-Houses, Gaming and Brothel Suppression Act No. 36 (otherwise known as the Morality Act) was passed in 1902, the concept of 'double standards' became skewered which further served the interests of white men: now inter-racial sex and prostitution were outlawed, but not between white men and black women. Finally, by the beginning of the study period the Contagious Diseases Act was repealed by the Public Health Act no. 36 of 1919, signalling a major triumph for the reformists. Now venereal disease among the entire population was monitored and both sexes were liable for enforced medical attention or

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<sup>2</sup> P. Gibbs, 'Prostitution and Morality in Port Elizabeth, 1802-1902', (BA.Hons., University of SA, 1990), p. 20; Arguably, as with the adjustment of Victorian Cape liberalism, as pointed out by Trapido, when ideology and the interests of a relatively powerless section of the population were compromised for practical purposes, so the latter dictated the adjustment of Victorian sexual needs at the expense of a sector of the labouring class (S. Trapido, " 'The Friends of the Natives': Merchants, Peasants and the Political and Ideological Structure of Liberalism in the Cape, 1854 - 1910", in Marks, S. and Atmore, A., (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, (Longman, 1980).

internment in the Lock Hospital.<sup>3</sup> In the Port Elizabeth milieu of the 1920s and 1930s, as with the rest of the country, therefore, notions of female purity had been sanctioned by law.

Nevertheless, the duality of Victorian sexual standards lingered. Ratepayers of Ward seven, objected in letters to the Magistrate and the Town Clerk in 1925 and 1926 respectively, that the Venereal Diseases Hospital be allowed to remain in the main thoroughfare of the North End, calling it "a veritable blot on an otherwise respectable locality" and "an utter disgrace to a civilised community".<sup>4</sup> Schools, churches, main tram lines and the "highly respectable class" of Sydenham residents all surrounded the site, they complained. Worse still, young children's curiosity about the place is generally sated and the "demoralizing effect is incalculable." Motives for the complaints become suspect, however, in the ratepayers additional concern for members of their 'respectable' community who may be forced to use the hospital:

"persons (who) can be seen entering or coming out of the Hospital, and if they have the misfortune to be known, even if not, suffering from disease, the stigma is enough to damn them socially or morally. Cases can be given where a person's character has been materially damaged..."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the purity movement's philosophy also flew in the face of reality; that is, the historical and universal legacy of prostitution, the social aberrations deriving from poverty in an industrializing town and the existence of indigenous cultural norms. For industrialisation itself had not only brought with it social problems but a host of moral ones complicated by racial issues. The latter enflamed new, urban, economic insecurities of white men translating them into fears of a racial

<sup>3</sup> *EPH*, 5 January 1922; An urban legend may have existed among the Xhosa as regards this hospital: Louisa Mtimka reports that it was a notorious place where the police could take women and have illicit intercourse with them. It was also a place where diseased or vagrant men and women were separately housed in the day and allowed to mingle at night. It seems that this myth is a combination of suspicion about the police and hearsay about the sexual connotations of the Lock Hospital. Its name, 'Leeukop', was also probably distorted from 'Lock Hospital', via 'lock up' (Interview, Louisa Mtimka).

<sup>4</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Letter Ratepayers' Association to Town Clerk, 30 March, 1926; 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Letter Ratepayers to Magistrate, 11 July 1925.

<sup>5</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Letter Ratepayers' Association to Town Clerk, 30 March, 1926; 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1234, Letter Ratepayers to Magistrate, 11 July 1925.

onslaught on white women as reflected by the 1927 Immorality Act. This extended the provincial bans on inter-racial sex and prostitution, though not marriage, to white men and black women.

To what extent, then, were working class women able or willing to appropriate these ruling notions of respectability? The dividing line between immorality and poverty was fragile. Working class women often became 'fallen women' through economic necessity due to the perils of poverty and precarious family stability in industrializing Port Elizabeth. Early on in the study period, promiscuity was a perceived phenomenon of the urbanisation process. The Magistrate noted that while there had been no prosecutions for soliciting, it was "confidently believed that intercourse goes on extensively." The fact that this was based on a large number of maintenance orders granted and claims of non-support, mainly for illegitimate children may imply that the problem centred less on professional prostitution and more on promiscuity.<sup>6</sup> Much of the immorality centred on overcrowded living conditions which together with the general lack of education, reported the MOH in 1924, led to a "low moral tone".<sup>7</sup> This was corroborated by Mrs. Tonkin who reported that in a section of the North End in 27% of the houses surveyed, unmarried men and women and adolescent boys and girls were sharing the same sleeping quarters:

"All too frequent cases came to our notice which illustrated the appalling dangers which country girls were facing during their period of adjustment to city life, dangers to which only too many succumbed. Their moral outlook was black."<sup>8</sup>

The terminology referred to above - 'a black moral outlook' - contains a dual meaning: firstly that many girls were not merely victims in these unfavourable living conditions but that their own moral outlook had deteriorated. Paradoxically, then, sex for many girls may even have been deliberately traded for shared living quarters, as a survival technique. But also abrogation of existing moral boundaries threatened racial segregation and the entire social order. Concerns expressed by the authorities echoed the fears of rural Afrikaner families about their daughters' safety in the towns. The city has widely been seen as a place of "deracination, alienation and 'unbridled, sexual

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<sup>6</sup> CeA, JUS 1/307/19 vol. 190, Annual Report of the Dept. of Justice, 1919; JUS 1/543/20, Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1920.

<sup>7</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1924, Report of the MOH, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> CeA, VWN 3973, PG 652/62/127, 'Welfare of Girl Workers', D. Tonkin, Social and Industrial Review, p. 415.



passion'".<sup>9</sup> Because they shared these views, local government, Dutch churches and organisations like the Cape Armesorg Commission spearheaded the search for a solution to the general moral regression of the poor white.

Ultimately, reformist solutions by central and the local state in Port Elizabeth involved the provision of more white housing and the Athlone Girls' club for white factory workers (see chapter 2.3.6.), further underlining the causative link between the state of the economy and morality. In a town where white labour was important, the state saw the connection between a controlled morality and the workforce's stability.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Club authorities, supported by the PE public and other bodies, determined to shape a paternalist, prescriptive morality acceptable to themselves. In 1925, the Report of the Central Housing Board had expressed concern about the "grave dangers to which any girl coming to work in PE is exposed in consequence of the lack of suitable accommodation". It also echoed the racial concerns of the Afrikaner churches about girls having to hire rooms "from undesirable persons".<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Eastern Province Herald's relief is clearly discernable when it notes early in 1928, that the new hostel should help girls to avoid the "dangers and pitfalls" which face girls coming to Port Elizabeth from the country.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the prevalence of churchmen on the committee, the organisation of 'wholesome' recreational pursuits and prayer meetings, and the banning of men from the premises, were strictures to prevent such pitfalls.<sup>13</sup> There also seems to have been some censure of the girls' existing morality since Tonkin went so far as to proclaim cultural chauvinism and racial supremacy as allies in their bid for the girls' moral survival:

".....given the proper stimulus and the proper treatment, the South African girl of

<sup>9</sup> G. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, cited in J. Hyslop, 'The Representation of White Working Class Women in the Construction of a Reactionary Populist Movement: "Purified" Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against 'Mixed' Marriages, 1934 - 1939.' (University of Witwatersrand, African Studies Institute, African Studies Seminar Paper, 24 May 1993, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Thus hostels for black women never materialised.

<sup>11</sup> Union of SA, Report of the Central Housing Board, 1924, UG 31-'25, p.18.

<sup>12</sup> *EPH*, 21 January 1928.

<sup>13</sup> Union of SA, Report of the Central Housing Board, UG 31-'25, p.18; Interview, Miss Boucher.

the poor white type can very quickly be brought to a higher standard of citizenship and of restored self-respect and efficiency. Those pessimistic thinkers who consider the type irreclaimable have, I think, disregarded the factor of heredity. They forget the soundness of the British, the Dutch, and the French stocks from which these girls originally sprang."<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, girls were reported as having quickly assimilated the ethos of the club, supported the slogan - 'to safeguard the honour of the institution' - and that after six months they displayed a 'changed' outlook.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the hostel were not passive recipients in this process. Not all the girls, for example, were 'reclaimable', some, according to Miss Boucher, a resident at the Hostel, being quite " 'rough' - with men".<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, cohabitation outside of marriage was not found by the Carnegie Commission to be commonly practised. It reported that "the percentage living together without being married was negligible".<sup>17</sup> Cases of 'immorality' are combined with figures for desertion and divorce and even so make up no more than 12% of those interviewed. Recognizing that illegitimate births and syphilis were not proof of immorality, only a general conclusion was drawn, namely: "immorality is no more a characteristic of the poor than of any other section of society."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it was admitted that urban conditions had given rise to many conditions of degeneration all threatening the respectability of the family very seriously.<sup>19</sup>

But the moral consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation did go deeper than promiscuity. Van Onselen has noted that "large scale conspicuous prostitution was a by-product of the first

<sup>14</sup> Union of SA, 'Social and Industrial Review', June 1926, vol. 11 (6), p. 417.

<sup>15</sup> Union of SA, 'Social and Industrial Review', June 1926, vol. 11 (6), p.417.

<sup>16</sup> Interview, Miss Boucher.

<sup>17</sup> M. E., Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V(b)*, (Pro-Ecclesia Drukkery, Stellenbosch, 1932), p.30.

<sup>18</sup> M. E., Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> M. E., Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family, Part V(b)*, p. 32.

explosive stage in the growth of the industrial city."<sup>20</sup> Industrialisation did not lead to a huge gender imbalance in Port Elizabeth, as in early Johannesburg, and thus a corresponding demand for prostitutes. Nevertheless there would have been a market for prostitutes among the seasonal, white, male workforce generated by General Motors in particular, and a 'floating' population of black males in New Brighton and in the PEM.<sup>21</sup> However, industrialisation was not the only factor which contributed to the growth of prostitution. SA sex markets presented an attractive option to women who had been excluded from European labour markets by the growth of heavy industry or depression in the mid-1890s.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the repeal in 1919 of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the Cape, which had in 1885 pushed prostitutes to the Transvaal, must have opened the way for their return. Thus, the numbers of local and professional prostitutes had probably increased by the opening of the study period, although I have found no evidence to confirm this.

Who were these women? In his study of turn-of-the-century Johannesburg, Van Onselen refers to immigrant Jewish prostitutes who had come to SA via New York from Eastern Europe, as well as to German women who had been dislocated from wage earning by heavy industry.<sup>23</sup> In the 1890s Transvaal pimps had also found "the older social formation of the Cape Colony tended to yield a slightly readier supply of poor, vulnerable or marginalized women. Small numbers of coloured domestic servants who had already been seduced by white men could occasionally be recruited from Cape 'boarding-houses', while job adverts placed in the Colony's newspapers - via bogus 'employment agencies' - sometimes succeeded in luring naive European women into the Transvaal's 'houses of ill-fame'"<sup>24</sup> But the extent of organized prostitution in the Cape is hard to ascertain. By 1932, according to Pendla, a member of the New Brighton Advisory Board, it was still mainly coloured women who practised prostitution in New Brighton as well as some black

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<sup>20</sup> C. van Onselen, "Prostitutes and Proletarians, 1886 - 1914", in C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, 1, New Babylon*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> The 'floating' population serviced mainly the harbour, the railway and other municipal works.

<sup>22</sup> C. van Onselen, "Prostitutes and Proletarians", p.108-109.

<sup>23</sup> C. van Onselen, "Prostitutes and Proletarians", p.108-109.

<sup>24</sup> C. van Onselen, "Prostitutes and Proletarians", p.120; Van Onselen also found certain mining magnates to be the owners of brothels, (*Ibid.*, p. 115).

women who spoke Dutch and associated with them.<sup>25</sup> Although some black women frequented the harbour at night, according to Mtimka, financial needs for many of those unattached would have largely been settled through urban arrangements such as 'ukusheshwa', where migrant men established temporary, domestic partnerships with women.<sup>26</sup> Certainly in a sample of 27 (approximately one third) of the women listed in the Criminal Record book for the PE Magisterial district of 1917, as many as 14 were prostitutes and all but one were coloured. In March 1921 the two couples charged with behaving indecently consisted of coloured and Khoi men and women.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the majority of prostitutes, contravenors of the CD Acts and those accused of drunkenness came from the coloured group. This may be due to the combination of poverty with which Marais strongly associated this sector of the population (see section 1.1.) as well as a possible tendency to greater alienation and marginalisation and a weak sense of cultural identity.

Local white prostitutes may have been in the minority. White women in Port Elizabeth were not ousted by heavy industry as in Germany but, in fact, found employment in the new factories - something that was even accentuated in the Depression. They also benefited, as has been noted, from government assistance in the creation of hostelry and 'poor white' housing. Moreover, few appear in the Criminal Record books, though this may be partly attributable to their greater earning capacity and thus ability to pay police bribes.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, as Hansi Pollak has pointed out, factory workers and domestics, often needed to supplement their low wages by prostitution.<sup>29</sup> Very young factory workers who received correspondingly low pay were more susceptible to both the financial inducements of prostitution and the psychological manipulation by pimps. Fourteen year old Gertina van der Mescht and her fifteen year old sister, Magrita, came to Port Elizabeth to work

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<sup>25</sup> UCT, BC 630, Native Economic Commission, p. 6039, 1932.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Louisa Mtimka; Mayer, writing of East London in the 1960s, notes that "prostitution as a regular means of subsistence is hardly known in the locations." (P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen. Conservatism and the Process of Urbanisation in A South African City*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1961), p. 253.

<sup>27</sup> CAD, 1/PEZ 1/2/1/79, Criminal Record Book, 1916-17.

<sup>28</sup> Little is mentioned about prostitutes in the EPH issues researched.

<sup>29</sup> H. Pollak, 'Women in the Witwatersrand Industries', (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1932), pp.189, 210, Addendum, p.59.

as domestics. At one time or another they also worked in a canning and a sweet factory, respectively. After a short while, they were introduced by an older sister, a 'Mrs. Slabbert', also a domestic, to Florence Scheepers and thus to prostitution. Although initially employed by her as a nursemaid, this was merely a device to lure Gertina, along with other very young girls, into prostitution. They started by walking the streets at night approaching 'boys' and then men for money. Whereas Gertina had earned 19s per week at a canning factory, prostitution usually earned her five shillings a time and since in one night she had as many as two or three men, she could make more than her weekly factory wage in two nights. (The most she had made was up to one pound ten shillings in one night).<sup>30</sup> Although the girls had to give Scheepers half of their earnings, the financial attraction of prostitution to white domestics and factory workers is clear. Recognizing the economic link, the NCW pressured the PECC to establish an employment bureau to monitor all servants "in view of the spread of contagious diseases and their attendant evils."<sup>31</sup>

Downtown areas would have included the harbour, various sections of Main, Queen, Prince and Adderley Streets, slum areas as well as Alice Street in Central which had been the hub of the notorious 'Irish Town' and brothels in the 19th century.<sup>32</sup> Alice Street was again cited as a problem in 1920 in the records of the Health and Licence Committee. One property had unsanitary conditions in the yard and housed 'undesirable' - probably meaning racially mixed - men and women in one room.<sup>33</sup> Sex was generally had by the van der Mescht prostitutes on the North End beach, St. Georges Park or in hotel rooms, while generally, public places such as beaches, railway stations and parks was a major concern of the period with the latter a key recruitment area for procuresses to conduct their trade in young girls.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/200, Rex vs Florence Scheepers, 8 March 1927.

<sup>31</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1 NCW Minutes, 14 June 1918.

<sup>32</sup> J.J. Redgrave, *Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days*, (Wynberg, Rustica Press, 1947), pp. 367-8.

<sup>33</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/25, Health and Licence Committee, 19 July 1920.

<sup>34</sup> see editorial in *Standard and Diggers' News*, 15 October, 1896, cited in C. van Onselen, "Prostitutes and Proletarians".

## 7.2. THE WOMEN POLICE.

Such places were earmarked for attention by the NCW which was at the forefront of the purity movement. In the absence of an aggressive government policy they were particularly vigilant as moral watchdog in promoting a variety of preventative measures. These included the patrolling of St George's Park, the appointment of a Probation Officer, criticizing insufficient lighting of the Donkin reserve and certain parts of the North End as well as approaching the Postmaster about girls alone at the switchboard on Sundays and public holidays.<sup>35</sup>

However, it was particularly the establishment of women police that became a major project which was to dominate NCW communication with the local and central government for over 14 years. As early as 1916, the idea of the PECC employing women police had been mooted by both the WCTU and the NCW.<sup>36</sup> The practice had been implemented in Britain and in the ports of Cape Town and Durban due to the influx of army personnel in World War 1 but was later abolished by the Minister of Justice.<sup>37</sup> Their rather ambitious goals had been essentially to safeguard the morals of women and girls, taking care of "young girls and children found on the streets at night", the notification of parents or guardians of problems, the visiting of "girls in their homes", the publicisation of the dangers of immorality, the detection and destruction of prostitution and the easier eliciting of information from rape victims.<sup>38</sup>

Yet the battle for their deployment constantly foundered on ambivalence and opposition from the local and central state, respectively. Was there for Port Elizabeth, as van Onselen has indicated for the Rand, a split between the forces of repression and control? It seems so. On the face of it,

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<sup>35</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes 11 November 1921; 14 June 1929; 12 July 1929; 13 September 1929.

<sup>36</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/28, Council Minutes, 20 December 1916; *EPH*, 14 March 1918.

<sup>37</sup> M. Hill, *Women in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapmans, 1991) '1921'; "A Plea for Women Police by Mrs. Julia Solly", *The SA Nation*, 12 December 1925; CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/37, Minutes, 27 July 1927.

<sup>38</sup> G.D. Gray, "Policewomen", *Nongqai*, October 1916; *Cape Times*, 16 March 1917.

women's organisations who spearheaded the purity movement were opposed by central state which seemed disinclined to actively erode prostitution. Yet a more fragmentary picture emerges, with some elements for change in the NCW being compromised by patriarchy and conservative family connections. Similarly, conservatism in the PECC seems tempered by both a concern for the moral welfare of its female labour force in terms of hostelry and an openness to the principle, at least, if not the cost, of women police. Thus, although the PECC maintained they could not fund such a project, they undertook to promote the idea to the Prime Minister.<sup>39</sup> Nothing was achieved and in 1918 the NCW continued to pressure both the local and central states directly.<sup>40</sup> In June 1920, the NCW again unsuccessfully urged the Minister of Justice to alter the Police Act to permit the inclusion of women and their immediate employment in the larger centres of the Union and to make provision for women Superintendents.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps in recognition of prevailing chauvinism, in 1922 they diplomatically resolved to use the word 'patrol' not 'police'.<sup>42</sup> An interview that year with the Commissioner of Police was equally unsuccessful. However, the NCW acted on his recommendation of requesting the Child Welfare Society (CWS) to appeal for patrols.<sup>43</sup> This connection was based on the aforementioned concern about soliciting in parks by young black or coloured nursemaids in charge of white children. This appeal was also unsuccessful and in 1925 the CWS reverted to the NCW for "suggestions regarding the urgent need for supervision or patrolling of Public Parks with a view to safeguarding children in the charge of native and coloured nursemaids."<sup>44</sup> As urbanization progressed, further reports were made of women being followed, harassed in the streets and open spaces, yet reluctant to talk to male police.<sup>45</sup> In desperation, at one

<sup>39</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/22, Report of the Health and Licence Committee, 25 January 1917; 3/PEZ 1/1/1/116, Town Clerk to NCW, 15 March 1917.

<sup>40</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/2/1/23, Report of the Public Recreation, Parks and Bath Committee, 6 June 1918, pp.175-6.

<sup>41</sup> TAD, JUS 419 1/57/16, Letter NCW to Minister of Justice, 17 June 1920.

<sup>42</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 20 Feb 1922.

<sup>43</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 17 Nov 1922.

<sup>44</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 9 October 1925.

<sup>45</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1514, Police Control, 1927.

stage, NCW members patrolled St Georges' Park themselves.<sup>46</sup>

By 1927, promiscuity was still identified with the girls from the rural areas who came to work in the factories and businesses. A governmental Labour committee tied "the moral retrogression of this type" to their uselessness as "worthwhile labour" - once again counting the financial cost of white girls' immorality to the state (see section 2.3.6.)<sup>47</sup>

In 1927, at the instigation of the NCW, a mass meeting of women sent a petition to the PECC who again shortsightedly, felt that they and the ratepayers could not fund the bill for women police.<sup>48</sup> The Department of Justice also refused the application on the grounds that the experiment in Cape Town had been "useful in a way" but "not an unqualified success". In keeping with the prevailing antagonism to contact between black men and white women the government professed concern over the safety of white women patrols due to the predominance of blacks in the population. It however seemed disinclined to note the irony that this action might keep white prostitutes off the streets, thus adding class discrimination to the Victorian double standard regarding gender. Male policemen had however, already been armed in 1926.<sup>49</sup> The NCW pointed out that uniforms would protect women police, since the District Nurses went all over the city in lonely places "secure in the protection afforded by the uniform".<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, after failing to acquire financial support from the PECC, the NCW in a new and imaginative attempt at addressing the problem towards the end of 1927, themselves decided to fund

<sup>46</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1927, p.20.

<sup>47</sup> Union of SA, "Hostels for Rural Children in Town Industries", Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Findings of the Cape Armsorg Commissie, 'Social and Industrial Review', vol.3, January 1927, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 13 May 1927; PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1927, Report of the MOH, pp. 20-21; CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/40, Report of the Finance, Town Lands and General Purposes Committee, 17 February 1928.

<sup>49</sup> J.D. Brewer, *Black and Blue. Policing in South Africa*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 91.

<sup>50</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1514, Letter NCW to TC, 15 Nov 1927.



an investigation into the need for women patrols by a noted social welfare worker, Frieda Hartley. This was on condition that the PECC would give serious consideration to her report.<sup>51</sup> She found that women frequented the parks and beaches by day and the streets, cinemas, the jetty and the Donkin Reserve late at night. Once again, the 'park' (presumably St. George's Park) was noted as being extremely risky after nightfall. She strongly urged the appointment of women patrols with official status which she envisaged would also overcome the 'native problem' of white female insecurity.<sup>52</sup> Curiously, although Mrs. Hannam, President of the PEB, supported the idea of women police, she attempted to minimize the negative aspects of the report. It seems possible that she was against the idea of publicizing immorality in a town in which her husband was a councillor.<sup>53</sup> In May 1929, before the report was issued, the tenacious NCW asked the PECC for a policewoman on a year's probation. Again this was referred to central government with a council contribution being promised if the application was successful. Once again it was refused.<sup>54</sup> In April 1929 the NCW failed to get the PECC to contribute to the expense of publishing the Hartley report, although it did agree to send a precis to the Minister of Justice.<sup>55</sup> By 1929, both requests had been refused and the matter was virtually dead. Indefatigably, at their Biennial Conference in Bloemfontein in 1930, the NCW once again resolved to propose the establishment of women police as well as the provision of matrons on trains to chaperone women and girls travelling alone.<sup>56</sup> Thereafter the project lapsed with women police only being employed decades later from 1972.

However, discussions about immorality and respectability in SA were not confined to the issues of promiscuity and prostitution alone. Inter-racial sex and miscegenation became an increasingly controversial issue in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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<sup>51</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes, 31 December 1928, pp. 13-14.

<sup>52</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 4/1/1/1514, 'The Need for a "Woman Patrol" in PE', by Frieda Hartley, 6 June 1929.

<sup>53</sup> TAD, A 296 6/2/1, I 163, NCW, Mrs. Hannam, 22 June 1955.

<sup>54</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1/1/42, Report of Finance, Town Lands and General Purposes Committee, 30 May 1929; 3/PEZ 1/1/1/43, 12 July 1929. Lady detectives had been employed as far back as the SA War.

<sup>55</sup> TAD, A 296 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 June 1929, 12 July 1929.

<sup>56</sup> TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 March 1930.

### 7.3. INTER-RACIAL SEX AND MISCEGENATION

Racial tension about sex was subsumed into the morality war waged by the purity movement. It was first legally defined by the Morality Act no. 36 of 1902 and popularly manifested itself in the 'black peril' scares discussed in section 2.4. In a powerful analysis of the links between racist NP propaganda on morality in the 1930s, material issues and the role of gender, J. Hyslop situates such fears essentially in the process of urbanisation. He points to gender power relations being fundamental to the upheavals of multiracial urbanisation, to the moral hysteria about sex across the colour line and to domestic violence. He argues that central to this male populist 'madness', were "the social and economic upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s (which) gave rise to an Afrikaner female proletariat whose new-found independence threatened the patriarchal relations of white society." In the Transvaal, this erupted in antagonism to the industrious Gujerati Indians in particular.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, in Port Elizabeth industry, women had replaced a large number of men in industry with the advent of deskilling in the second half of the 1920s, and again in the Depression; in 1926, men were retrenched in the clothing industry while women were increased fourfold (see section 2.3.3.1). These trends, together with the emergence of a cheaper black class and the continuance in the Cape of inter-racial sex and marriage (see Table 7.1.) seems to have compounded white male insecurity.

A letter from Griqua Manufacturing, a clothing company, to the Town Clerk, for example, complained about the Council's 'degrading' decision to allow the establishment of the nearby Walmer location. They maintained it threatened the safety of their female employees, and equated it to the granting of licences to Asiatics to trade amongst the white population, which they termed 'bad enough'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, tension about race and gender often masked economic insecurity and fear.

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<sup>57</sup> J. Hyslop, 'The Representation of White Working Class Women in the Construction of a Reactionary Populist Movement:' p.3.

<sup>58</sup> CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1275, Letter Griqua Manufacturing to TC, 3 May 1926, and to District Commander SA Police, 26 May 1926; CeA, ARB, LC 1054/283, Divisional Inspector to Development of Labour, 16 February 1927.

**TABLE 7.1**  
**Mixed Marriages in the Cape, 1911 - 1934<sup>59</sup>**

Year	European Males to 'non-European' Females	'Non-European' Males to European Females	Total
1917	91	62	153
1918	134	61	195
1919	93	25	118
1920	76	41	117
1921	84	29	113
1922	58	21	79
1923	72	23	95
1924	75	26	101
1925	77	32	109
1926	59	16	75
1927	84	26	110
1928	87	21	108
1929	60	19	79
1930	51	18	69
1931	53	13	66
1932	57	11	68
1933	50	13	63
1934	48	14	62

As early as 1920, Port Elizabeth's strongly British class ethos had also played a role in engendering a virulent racist ideology where its proponents saw themselves as the gatekeepers of British values on the colonial frontier. At an NCW monthly meeting, Mrs. Fox-Smith spoke on the subject of girls coming out from England to marry coloured men and read a letter dealing with a particular instance on the Armadale Castle. It was decided to suggest to Mrs. Bainsfather, a member of the International Conference of Women (ICW) in England, that she bring this matter before the

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<sup>59</sup> Union of SA, UG 35 - 1936, Report on the Vital Statistics of the Union of SA, 1934.

authorities at 'home'. This agent of universal British respectability promised to use her influence to stop women emigrating for this reason.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the PEB, another representative of contemporary, middle-class, colonial racism failed to see the irony in their assumption of moral rectitude over English women's racial 'transgressions'.

One such person "not knowing the dreadful thing she was doing", had married a coloured soldier she had met in England during the war. He had died since their return to SA so that the PEB was most concerned to assist her passage back to England. This would avoid her being compelled to reside with her late husband's relatives - "a truly terrible fate to overtake a very superior young Englishwoman".<sup>61</sup> The same organisation also viewed the inter-racial marriages of Ada Johnston from Sidwell and her daughter as "somewhat unsatisfactory". A 50 year old white widow of an Indian school teacher, her eldest daughter was also the widow of an Indian.<sup>62</sup>

Yet nor were concerns over inter racial sexuality confined to whites. Shula Marks indicates black men also had fears about losing control over their women since the structure of indigenous patriarchy was threatened by migrancy and Christian ethics about female dependency and monogamy. In fact, she notes, problems of sexual purity ran through this period as "a reflection of the dominated and distorted nature of sexual relations for both black and white women in the 20th century."<sup>63</sup> Pendla's reference to coloured women as constituting the only prostitutes in New Brighton has been noted earlier while graphic details of the social shame arising from black women's seduction by white men is noted in the fictionalized story of Daniel Vananda.<sup>64</sup>

Reflecting these trends, the Pact government passed the Immorality Act in 1927, consolidating

<sup>60</sup> TAD A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Minutes, 14 May 1920; 8 October 1920.

<sup>61</sup> PEB, Letters, 29 April 1927.

<sup>62</sup> PEB Minutes, 4 December 1933, p. 216.

<sup>63</sup> S. Marks, *Not either an experimental doll*, p. 24.

<sup>64</sup> UCT, BC 630, Native Economic Commission, 1932, pp. 6007 -8, p. 6039; for further evidence of Pendla's preference for racial division, see CAD 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/9, Minutes of the NAB, 11 August 1935, 1/3/2/15/10, and Minutes of the NAB, 2 April 1936, 10 September 1936; W.C. Scully, *Daniel Vananda: The Life Story of a Human Being*, (Cape Town, Juta, 1923)

existing provincial legislation that had banned sexual intercourse between black men and white women. It now extended the ban to white men and black women and to prostitution across the black - white divide, although not prohibiting marriage. An immediate increase in the number of marriages registered between white and black followed, as well as the sudden appearance of a new class of 'criminals': in Port Elizabeth in the next year, there were five so-called 'immorality' cases.<sup>65</sup> Yet, although inter-racial marriage was still legal, in an era of increasing segregation, it was nevertheless seen as a sign of moral decay and failing respectability. In 1934 the National Party mounted another attack on mixed marriages through proposed legislation. Its defeat by the United Party was short term, but for the long term the seeds of total separation had been sown. In the Cape, however, inter-racial marriage was to decline by approximately another 40% during the 1930s (see Table 7.1).

#### 7.4. ILLEGITIMACY

Illegitimacy as an urban problem has always been defined by the boundaries of western marriage so that in a multi-racial, multi-cultural society, connotations of morality are not easily applicable. Thus, in her study of black women on the Reef, Longmore affirms that:

"...illegitimacy has been found in all periods of social upheaval; it everywhere accompanies great changes in social standards, more especially the meeting of two or more cultures with divergent standards of sexual morality."<sup>66</sup>

This could equally apply to the merging of rural poor white girls into an urban culture where young working class women attempted to adjust to both adulthood and urbanisation, and find their place in 'respectable' society. It thus raises issues about the options available within groups, the changing perspective of the local state and the wider spectrum of social attitudes within the study period.<sup>67</sup>

Illegitimacy among whites in Port Elizabeth increased considerably after industrialisation and during times of destabilisation, such as WW1, the post-war economic recession and the Depression (see

<sup>65</sup> TAD, JUS 439, 1/82/28, Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1928.

<sup>66</sup> L. Longmore, *The Dispossessed : A Study of the Sex-Life of Bantu Women in Urban Areas in and around Johannesburg*, (London, J. Cape, 1959) p.51.

<sup>67</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard: The Social Consequences of Illegitimacy in Cape Town, 1896-1939", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 17, no.3, September, 1991, pp. 373 - 374.

Table 7.2).<sup>68</sup> This was due to the prevalence of promiscuity together with an ignorance about birth control.

**TABLE 7.2**  
**Percentage of Illegitimacy in the PEM, 1917 - 1936<sup>69</sup>**

Year	Epns.	'Coloureds'	'Non-Epns'	Black
1917	8,2		30,8	
1918	8,2		27,7	
1919	14,5		32,8	
1920	7,3		26,8	
1921	6,4		28,1	
1922	5,6		31,9	
1923	4,7		32,7	
1924	6,8		26,4	
1925	4,1		29,1	
1926	6,9		30,9	
1927	6,5		31,7	
1928	7,7		26,8	
1929	4,3		29,9	
1930	5,7		26,3	
1931	4,9		27,5	
1932	7,1	38,5		67,7
1933	-----	-----		-----
1934	6,2	36,1		69,5
1935	4,4	32,8		70,2
1936	5,2	35,6		72,2

<sup>68</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1930, Report of the MOH, p.59.

<sup>69</sup> PEM, Mayors' Minutes for 1917-1936, Reports of the MOH (until 1932, figures for blacks and coloureds were combined under the heading 'non-European'); G. Baines, 'New Brighton, Port Elizabeth - 1903-1953: A History of an Urban African Community', (Ph.D., University of Cape Town, 1994), p.157.

The majority of maintenance orders in 1919 were for illegitimate children as was half of the 44 cases under the Deserted Wives and Children's Act, No. 7 of 1895.<sup>70</sup> Although the rate of illegitimacy had dropped by 1936, it was still higher in Port Elizabeth than the national average for whites (5,2% as against 2,3%), possibly due to the continually large influxes of poor whites.<sup>71</sup> In the same year, about 20% of factory workers in Port Elizabeth, who applied for maternity grants, were unmarried and about 75% of the married women had only married after pregnancy was established.<sup>72</sup>

However, legitimate births were important to industrialist capitalist society to ensure continuity of the family unit. Although the Child Protection Act of 1913 provided for maintenance from the father of an illegitimate child, social bias was against helping the mother or the child for fear of encouraging the problem. As has been shown, when the Child Welfare Society in the 1920s fought to ensure the processing of maintenance payments for single mothers, they were often criticized on this basis (see section 5.4).<sup>73</sup>

By February 1922, the NCW called for amendments to the Act in order to deal with the increasing prevalence of illegitimacy amongst the European and coloured sections of the community. In order to deal with "this national evil", the Child Welfare Society and the NCW prepared a resolution to be laid before the House of Assembly recommending compulsory registration of the father of an illegitimate child in order to ensure equal responsibility and called for severer penalties for the failure to maintain children.<sup>74</sup>

In the meantime, deepening divisions about class and race must have contributed to the sense of

<sup>70</sup> CeA, JUS 1/543/20, Annual Report of the Magistrate, 1920.

<sup>71</sup> Union of SA, UG 18 - 1938, Report on the Vital Statistics of the Union of SA, 1936.

<sup>72</sup> CAD, LIP 5/1 vol.11, Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Factories Division, Annual Report, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Child Welfare, 75, Annual Report, 1917 - 1993, p.1.

<sup>74</sup> *EPH*, 30 March 1922, p.4; TAD, A 296, 3/22/1/1, NCW Special General Meeting, 20 February 1922; NCW Minutes, 17 November, 1922.

shame felt by white mothers of illegitimate children. White illegitimate births were a small percentage of the overall number of births indicating the marginalization of this group within their own community. This particularly applied to factory workers, given their high numbers in this category and tends to explain the fears of the authorities as regards factory worker morality. The Carnegie Report indicates how deeply entrenched Christian norms were among the poor white community from whose ranks the factory workers came. Since illegitimacy was far greater among coloureds and blacks, and given the prevailing sense of racial separation, the Christian burden of shame for white girls must have been deepened. Among the Jewish community, the issue of respectability was a distinct concern in cases of illegitimacy. When a Jewish girl was 'in trouble' she was always looked after by the community. Although not stated, it could well have been to combat anti-Semitism.<sup>75</sup>

While moral discrimination was imposed from above, there must have been various women of all races, for whom poverty and unemployment were paramount and who therefore exploited illegitimacy as a survival strategy. Mr. A.C. van Renen, the Magistrate for Port Elizabeth, told the Native Economic Commission, how the Children's Protection Act was being used by certain black women:

"It is easy enough to get an illegitimate child and easy enough to pick a man who is in a position to pay. The consequence is that these women have illegitimate children. When the child is two or three months old, a complaint is lodged with the police and the charge is brought of non-support under the Act quoted. The man usually pleads guilty, sometimes disputes paternity, but that is not easy to do when the evidence is castiron. The sentence is three months imprisonment with hard labour, suspended for three years, on condition that the accused pays the usual 5/- per week to the Clerk of the Court for support of the child."<sup>76</sup>

The problem was typified by the example of a coloured woman who had had seven children by different fathers and obtained maintenance from four. Out of thirty black women on the maintenance register of the magistrate for illegitimate children "you never get a case against a man

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<sup>75</sup> E. van Heyningen, "Poverty, Self-Help and Community: The Survival of the Poor in Cape Town, 1880-1910", *South African Historical Journal*, 24, (1991), p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> UCT, BC 630, Native Economic Commission, p. 6072.



who is not in a position to pay."<sup>77</sup>

In the inter-war years, a connection between the growing infant mortality rates, particularly for blacks, and illegitimacy was a strong reason for the development of maternal health strategies by MOHs. Dr. Ferguson, Port Elizabeth's own MOH, ascribed it to the fact that the mother did not have a husband to look after the child; secondly, she was often ashamed of the birth, and furthermore the child was very often diseased - more so than the legitimate child. She would often try to get rid of the child before it was born.<sup>78</sup>

Unofficial assistance was minimal: organisations such as the PEB gave assistance only to 'deserving cases'; that is, those that were morally 'respectable'. I did not come across one instance in their records of an unmarried mother receiving aid. Since medical institutions, for example, the Provincial Hospital, are likely to have only admitted married women, and the maternity homes - nearly all in the middle-class area of central - were probably fee - paying and many of these homes usually also had criteria for admission based on race and age, the only remaining option in Port Elizabeth for working class women would have been the Salvation Army home (see section 3.1.).<sup>79</sup> Whereas in the early part of the century, the emphasis of the Rescue Homes had lain more in the moral salvation of girls, by 1901 in Cape Town and by 1929 in Port Elizabeth there had been a shift to the establishment of Maternity Hospitals where the provisions were mainly pragmatic, ie dealing with the consequences of illegitimacy, namely confinements. Thus, the Shepherd St. home was initially for both white and coloured unmarried mothers and for women in need of shelter. The unmarried mothers stayed till the babies were adopted. Even so, the running of these homes, according to Burman and Naude, was harsh, functioning on the same lines as remand homes, where inmates performed hard labour. As in the PE Lock Hospital for venereal disease, they had to do all the laundry and cleaning, this being based on the belief that hard work would lead to mental discipline and moral salvation.<sup>80</sup> Thus, at this stage, assistance for unwed mothers was highly inadequate, so that often girls would look for options outside the walls of existing institutions, such

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<sup>77</sup> UCT, BC 630, Native Economic Commission, p. 6073.

<sup>78</sup> BC 630, Native Economic Commission, D. Ferguson, p. 5764

<sup>79</sup> S. Burman, and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", p. 383.

<sup>80</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", p. 384.

as abortion, birth concealment or infanticide.

### 7.5. ABORTION, BIRTH CONCEALMENT AND INFANTICIDE.

Although abortion was a crime in SA during the study period and many cases appear in the Cape Town Supreme Court records, only two Port Elizabeth cases appear for the entire study period in the Grahamstown Supreme Court Records. Burman and Naude's work confirms that few abortionists ever came to court and fewer were proved guilty.<sup>81</sup> However, Helen Bradford has detailed SA's long history of abortion indicating that it was a fact of life during the pre-colonial, colonial and the industrial eras.<sup>82</sup> Thus, abortions must have been widely performed on women of all races in Port Elizabeth without surfacing in the courts because it was easier to perpetrate and conceal than, say, the option of infanticide.

During the pre-colonial era abortions were carried out in response to patriarchal imperatives and administered by women using herbal remedies. The arrival of whites saw a spread of abortifacients and techniques from the underclasses upwards and their absorption by coloured and white rural midwives. However, penetration of the capitalist economy paralleled a move away from homespun abortifacients in the late nineteenth century to reliance by those who could afford it on more expensive surgical methods in the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> It also entailed control over abortion by the emergent male dominated medical profession:

"...the consolidation of a well-paid medical profession went hand in hand with regulation, delegitimation or eradication of 'lay' competitors. Buttressed by economic transformation, backed by the state, and bolstered by the pace of developments in medical science, surgeons had begun to drive white merchants and black herbalists out of the abortion market."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", pp. 378 - 9.

<sup>82</sup> H. Bradford, 'Herbs, Knives and Plastic: 150 Years of Abortion in South Africa', (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, African Seminar Programme, 1993).

<sup>83</sup> H. Bradford, 'Herbs, Knives and Plastic: 150 Years of Abortion in South Africa', (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, African Seminar Programme, 1993).

<sup>84</sup> H. Bradford, 'Herbs, Knives and Plastic', p. 6.

Nevertheless, working class women in industrializing Port Elizabeth were forced to resort to the cheaper option of inducing abortion themselves using herbs, drugs or instruments or seeking illegal abortionists many of whom were qualified or unqualified midwives running informal centres.<sup>85</sup> In the Cape, the latter were usually coloured and many of the customers white.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, according to Mrs. C. Jantjes, a coloured woman living in Korsten in the 1930s, aborted fetuses (and live babies) would be found in a large centrally placed cattle kraal.<sup>87</sup> Police, she said, would then make the rounds to see which women of the area still had milk in their breasts.<sup>88</sup> Procurers of prostitutes also provided abortion, in a kind of 'package deal' along with the provision of clothing, accommodation and food. In evidence given in the case against Florence Scheepers, pills were promised if girls got pregnant.<sup>89</sup>

The case of Maggie Zeelie provides clarity on the social network that tended to surround such operations and why a girl would opt for abortion rather than keeping the child or the more drastic measure of infanticide. In December 1920, Zeelie underwent an abortion performed by Johanna Koekemoer, a white housewife. An instrument was inserted into the girl's body, certain powders were administered, her body was rubbed with a certain ointment and she was dosed with pills. It was organised by her father Isaac Zeelie, who was prosecuted, along with Koekemoer, since his daughter was a minor.<sup>90</sup>

As Burman and Naude have shown, the involvement of fathers was fairly frequent. While many women learnt of abortionists either through discretely worded newspaper advertisements or by word of mouth, Maggie Zeelie would have been unlikely to know how to go about securing an abortion

<sup>85</sup> H. Bradford, 'Herbs, Knives and Plastic', p.5.

<sup>86</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", p. 379.

<sup>87</sup> Supposedly where the spinning mills are situated today, (Interview, C. Jantjes).

<sup>88</sup> Interview, Mrs. C. Jantjes.

<sup>89</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/200, 101, Rex vs Florence Scheepers, 8 March 1927.

<sup>90</sup> CAD 1/2/1/132, 10, Rex vs Johanna Koekemoer, 1921.

due to her age.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, Zeelie, a foreman for the Municipality, had the choice of enquiring among his workmates, probably even finding an abortionist among their wives, or within his community. His contact with Koekemoer finally seems to have come from within the community since the 1931 Voters' List shows that both lived in New Brighton.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, fathers would have been better able to afford the operation rather than underemployed daughters. The price of abortions cited in Cape Town were the equivalent of approximately 10 months of a domestic's average wage. The cost of paying for the confinement and the subsequent rearing of another member of the household, however, may have been more than an overburdened foreman could afford. More specifically, just as men in pre-colonial society exhibited much control over women's bodies, this was still so in the inter-war European working class culture of Port Elizabeth. Upholding social norms and removing the cause of social shame was of paramount importance in the search for 'respectability'. Little else is available in the court documents about the general circumstances of the individuals or why they were both found not guilty. Nevertheless the verdict indicates, as in Cape Town, the general tendency to acquittal since evidence was often difficult to obtain - hence, the abortionist's re-emergence as a factory machinist ten years later on the 1931 Voters' List.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, when Ida Snowball died as a result of a botched abortion by Alice Clench, the abortionist was also found not guilty.<sup>94</sup> It seems only when the procurer was a hardened criminal did the charge of abortion stick, as in the case of 50 year old Annie Matthews, who appeared in court in 1934 on two counts, one of large scale theft (nearly 49 pounds over two months) and abortion on Dorothy Long. Previously, she had been jailed for a total of just over four years on six convictions of theft and fraud between 1918 and 1930, three of which were for contravening the Medical and

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<sup>91</sup> S. Burman and M. Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", pp. 379 - 380.

<sup>92</sup> Although the race of none of the defendants is given in the court documents for this case, it is likely that all were white. The abortionist appears on the 1931 Voters' List which at that time excluded women of other races, and although she lived in New Brighton, by this time a small community of white officials, traders and their families still remained in New Brighton. Further, although the abortionist used manufactured items, residing in New Brighton may have increased her proficiency at abortion by exposing her to the homespun herbal methods familiar to black women.

<sup>93</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/132, 10, 12 December 1920; Union of SA, Voters' List, Electoral Division, Port Elizabeth (North), 1931.

<sup>94</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/311, 14, Rex vs A.L. Clench, 1936.

Pharmacy Act. Sentencing her to eighteen months with hard labour, the judge described her attempt at procuring an abortion - one which included administering certain fluids, striking Long's stomach, the use of 'frogs and crabs' - as an "extremely brutal method of eradicating a pregnancy" and could have caused death.<sup>95</sup>

Yet generally, as Burman and Naude have pointed out, it is clear that the usually young women who found themselves carrying an 'illegitimate' pregnancy, were at a great disadvantage in securing an abortion. If they were to attempt it themselves, the high cost, the illusiveness of contacts, the pain and fear, as well as the illegality of it may have deterred many. On the other hand, involving family assistance may have incurred the added problems of familial disruption and moral shame. Sometimes, the only other option was infanticide.

Birth concealment or infanticide was a fairly common phenomenon, found generally among the working class and equally among all races. Of the seventy eight crimes perpetrated by females listed in the Circuit Courts registers and the Grahamstown Supreme Court records, as many as 36% (28) were cases of birth concealment. Considering that many may have gone undetected, especially in the township, the real total was probably much higher (see Table 7.3). The incidence of the crime is impossible to evaluate since many could have gone undetected. Nevertheless between 1921 and 1928 an average of three birth concealments of all races were recorded every year, found in such places as head downwards in a bush, in a lane, an arcade and on open land.

Although the records of the Supreme Court do not always specify race, one third of the names are recognizably black and the rest seem to be coloured and white. Among whites, the crime was predictably confined to young women who worked in lower echelon jobs such as waitressing, housekeeping, and factory work - women who could probably ill afford the upkeep of a child or an abortion.

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CAD, GSC 1/2/1/285, 181, Rex vs Annie Matthews, 1934.

TABLE 7.3.

Birth Concealment Charges for All Races, 1917 - 1936<sup>96</sup>

YEAR	NAME	RACE	OCCUPTN.	CHARGE	REMITTED/ SENTNCD.
1917	Annie Alberts	--	--	Culp. Hom.	--
1918	Catherine Adlem W	waitress	--	remitted	
1919	Lucy le Grange	W	Housekeeper	Murder	1 week with hard labour
1920	..nil..				
1921	Rachael du Preez	--	--	Concealment	remitted
	Daisy Louw	--	Waitress	Concealment	12 mths. with hard labour (2nd occsn.)
	Martha Venter	W	Machinist	Murder	5 yrs. with hard labour
	Maud Rafferty	--	Dom. Svt.	Murder	not guilty
1922	Martha Masimula	B	--	Concealment	remitted
	Gertrude Message	--	--	Infanticide	remitted
	Mary Zealie	W	Factory wrkr.	Concealment	6 mths. hard labour sus.
1923	Eva Potgeiter	C	--	Concealment	remitted
1924	Sophie Blignaut	C	--	Infantede	5 yrs.
	Minnie Daniels	--	--	Concealment	remitted
	Mary Ngugu	B	--	Infanticide	remitted
	Sanna de Bruin	--	Dom. Svt.	Infanticide	18 mths
1925	Agnes Jolingana	B	--	Concealment	remitted
	Annie de Coito	W	Printing co. worker	Murder	acqitted
	Emma Nqikashe	B	--	Murder	remitted
	Lizzie Matsaluka	B	--	Murder	remitted
	Vivien Nkosinkulu	B	--	Concealment	remitted
1926	Jane Kalipa	B	--	Concealment	5 yrs
1927	Maria Jacobs	C	--	Infanticide	3 mths. hard labour sus
	Eva Felix	--	--	Concealment	remitted
1928	Hester Michells	--	Dom. Svt.	Infanticide	1 yr. hard labour
	Irene Murray	--	--	Murder	Dischgd.
1929	..nil..				
1930	..nil..				
1931	..nil..				
1932	Maggie Toss	--	--	Murder	12mths. hard labour
	Louisa Allen	--	--	Murder	2yrs. hard labour
1933	..nil..				
1934	..nil..				
1935	Katie Noliza	B	--	Murder	6 mths. hard labour
1936	Hettie Tyamzashe	B	--	Murder	9/12mths hard labour

Many at this level were victims of economic hardship, ignorance and vulnerability. The details of such circumstances are graphically clear in Catherine Adlem's case which came to trial in 1918. A 26 year old European waitress, she boarded with the working class family of her workmate, Minnie Snyman, in Cooper's Kloof with whom she had to share a bed. It seems likely therefore that

<sup>96</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/126 - 311, Eastern Cape Division of the Supreme Court, 1917 - 36; CAD 1/PEZ 1/1/1/74 - 75, Records of Proceedings, 1916 - 1935.

her friend helped her to conceal the birth. Finally whether in abandon, despair or shame, Adlem threw her, allegedly stillborn, baby head downwards into the bushes at Cooper's Kloof. It is difficult to surmise the reasons for this action - she may have been brutalized by hardship - but on this the records are silent. On a practical level, she had work and friends and was old enough to take a less desperate course of action. Yet, given probable desertion by the father of the baby, since he is not mentioned in the records, perhaps the shame of transgressing the norms of 'respectable' society, and particularly the Calvinistic norms of much of 'poor white' society in Port Elizabeth was an enormous burden. Then there was restricted access to the, albeit unpleasant, confinement of the Salvation Army maternity home. If all of this could be overcome, a waitress's wage alone could not support two people, let alone the payment of a nursemaid - she certainly could not expect Snyman's family to help in that regard as well.<sup>97</sup>

Others, however, may have found infanticide a relatively easy option having been emotionally hardened by their life on the streets. Martha Venter, according to the judge assessing the murder charge against her in 1921, had "been turned loose on the streets of this city without any control". At the time of the crime she was not living at home with her mother and father, but with a friend, Lettie Geyer and her father. Detective James Easton described the two as girls he had seen "wandering about town" and Venter as a "girl of easy virtue". Certainly, Venter disposed of her new born baby in a cold hearted and murderous way. Having given birth to the child in a toilet at the back of a South End cafe, Venter first attempted to persuade Geyer to suffocate the child and later to throttle it. She then bundled the child into a sack and hit its head against a roadside barrier leaving it under a bush on a footpath near the barrier.<sup>98</sup>

The state's attitude reflected the fact that the crime was at the nexus between emotional social issues such as the protection of children and the patriarchal perception of women's frailty and their position in society. The state took the view that once a baby is separate from its mother's body after birth, and it has breathed, the ending of its life is murder. For this the death penalty was mandatory. Prior to 1917, two other options had been culpable homicide, which was generally

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<sup>97</sup> CAD 1/PEZ 1/1/1/74, Rex vs Catherine Adlem, Records of Proceedings, no. 91 of 1918.

<sup>98</sup> CAD, GSC 1/2/1/133, Rex vs Martha Venter, 1921.

punishable by six months to two years hard labour, and concealment of birth, for which five years with or without hard labour was the maximum sentence imposed. In the Cape, this was only applicable if the crime had been committed by a woman and a man if he had aided and abetted. He, however, was liable to be held guilty of murder if he had perpetrated the death. However, section 338 of Act 31 of 1917, allowed alternative sentences for infanticide, including imprisonment with or without hard labour or detention in a reformatory with apprenticeship thereafter.<sup>99</sup> Nor do punishments seem to have been racially biased (see Table 7.3.). Thus, the courts invariably took a very lenient view of the crime. In passing down judgements it was often made explicit that leniency was partly because the women were usually extremely youthful and partly because of post-natal stress after the birth of, particularly an illegitimate, child.<sup>100</sup> Also, infanticide was sometimes difficult to prove. Even if the baby had breathed after birth it may not have been murdered but merely deserted while wounds were sometimes difficult to detect if the body had decomposed too much. Thus, of the 28 charges of birth concealments registered for Port Elizabeth between 1918 and 1936, nearly half did not come to court and three more were acquitted. Of the remaining women who were sentenced, none received the death penalty while only three received the maximum penalty for birth concealment of five years at a reformatory. The remaining sentences were lenient including a suspended sentence, one week with hard labour and three, six or twelve months with hard labour. Daisy Louw only received 12 months with hard labour despite the fact that it was the second time she had committed this crime. By the 1930s, however, infanticide had declined substantially, probably due in no small measure to the opening of the birth control clinic in 1939.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, those who fell foul of sexual norms and therefore class divides often did so mainly because of poverty, as indicated by the more informal face of prostitution in Port Elizabeth than that on the Rand. Specifically, the spread of immorality was closely tied to unstructured urban development and changes in both the international and local economy. While Victorian morality had been ambivalent to prostitution, emerging reformist solutions to these problems at governmental level

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<sup>99</sup> Union of SA, Statutes of the Union of SA, 1917, (Cape Town, 1917).

<sup>100</sup> GSC 1/2/1/184, re. 8, 1926.



was spurred on by concern for the moral salvation of the white female work force. This involved the preventative measure of providing more housing and the Athlone Girls' Club for factory workers. Control over the morality of women of other races, increasingly significant components of the population, was either ignored or left mainly to administrative restrictions imposed by location superintendents and the all male structures of the Advisory Boards. Pressure for further changes mainly flowed from the women's purity movement, spearheaded by the NCW, in particular, who unsuccessfully appealed for the organisation of women police.

As moral censure was increasingly defined by racial interpretations of class, the forces of repression were strengthened. Despite the prevalence of miscegenation and mixed marriages in the Cape, Port Elizabeth society, conditioned by British class distinction, expressed its aversion to such practices by criticism of Indian traders and monitoring the proximity of white women to men of other races. Thus, sexual morality became a factor in racial segregation, with the control and guardianship of women becoming components in the shaping of state philosophy and legislation.

Meanwhile, social disruption associated with industrialisation had given rise to promiscuity, prostitution, venereal disease and illegitimacy. In the absence of accessible birth control methods, abortion and infanticide were also widespread. However, against the wider background of developments in obstetrics and the Pact government's concern for Volksgesondheid and maternal health care, the local state established a birth control and maternity clinics in the North End, in 1926 and 1933, respectively. These efforts helped reduce social aberrations such as infanticide.

## Chapter 8 - CONCLUSION

To date, there has been an almost total absence of gender history in the historiography of Port Elizabeth. Thus, in seeking to locate the structural position, the economic contribution and the identity and consciousness of the white, most predominant sector of the female working class, I have undertaken the first broad social history of women for Port Elizabeth. Nor is there yet a similar work on white women available for any other centre. While Berger and Brink have produced research on the lives of the female labour force in SA, Berger's is mainly about the politics of work on a national scale, while Brink's work, though including the domestic front, is confined to the garment workers of the Rand.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, I have included as complete an analysis as possible of all members of the white working class, from work, families and morality to poverty and health. I have also tried to assess whether there was a distinct culture which constituted the related groups of the white female working class and to provide the racial context of this class in Port Elizabeth.

I, firstly, argue for the historical significance of white working class women in Port Elizabeth, in terms of numerical preponderance and economic importance. Centred mainly in the North End, they comprised more than half of the white female population of the town. The employable sector of this class was of great economic and ideological significance to the central state and of mainly economic value to the local sources of power, such as capital and the PECC. Non - governmental, middle class, British women's organisations, such as the PEB, emerged as the de facto welfare arm of the local state in their concern for those who had drifted out of the bottom of the labour force. Moreover, white, usually Afrikaans speaking, female factory workers formed a higher percentage of the industrial workforce in Port Elizabeth than in any other centre, sometimes forming the most predominant gender or racial group in the leather, clothing and sweet and canning industries. Facilitated by deskilling, their absorption was at immediate cost to white men in the clothing industry whose numbers were reduced by 75%. The rate of white female employment was due in part to the fact that wages were not as elevated as on the Rand. Lower wages at the coast were facilitated by the relatively large size of the labour reservoir. Therefore, many factories in the aforementioned industries, were able to attract and sustain labour while surviving the Depression.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity. Women in South African Industry, 1900 - 1980*, (Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992); E. Brink, 'The Afrikaner Women of the Garment Workers' Union, 1918 - 1939' (MA, Witwatersrand University, 1986)

In this way, white women's wages subsidized industry during recessions and their employment continued to increase. Due to labour availability and regional pay structuring, white women in Port Elizabeth, unlike other centres, continued to grow in numbers well after the Depression.

However, it has not been possible to discuss the demographic or economic predominance of white working class women without emphasizing their pivotal role in the racialised shaping of class by state and capital. This was most notable in the changing face of labour. Work opportunity in Port Elizabeth escalated at a faster rate than either the Union average or that of the older industrial hub of the Witwatersrand. Well before the apartheid era, first the Smuts but particularly the Pact government did much to encourage white employment especially in Port Elizabeth where the white labour force was so huge. As early as WW1, therefore, white women slotted into a racial and gender hierarchy in industry facilitated partly by deskilling but also by a convergence of interests of state and capital. From 1924, the absorption of women was at great expense to coloured females throughout industry for much of the study period. Increasing segregation also occurred in domestic service and the informal sector. White women were disinclined to participate in domestic service, which was increasingly occupied by coloured women, and hawking which tended to be dominated by Indian men. Municipal regulation, meanwhile, sought to control the conditions under which white women practised laundry work in the employ of Malay, and Chinese men, suggesting the further concern of the local state in the racial alignment of sex.<sup>2</sup>

The improvement of social conditions and the development of housing and health facilities were also largely shaped by concern about sexual contact between white women and black and coloured men. Multi-racial areas, most of which spawned the greatest slums, as well as the levelling effect of the post-war recession, was conducive to racial integration and miscegenation. For white women to live in slum conditions and in such inter-racial proximity was anathema to white supremacists of the period. Here again, local and central state combined to increase white housing in the 1930s and to establish the Athlone Girls' Club, mainly for factory workers. While the establishment of the club was a progressive achievement of among others, the PECC, in rescuing women workers from slum living, it was also a prominent example of control where a convergence of religious,

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<sup>2</sup> M. W. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony 1900 - 1909", *Journal of African History*, vol. 18,3, 1977, pp. 387 - 410.

commercial and welfare interests could monitor the habits of the workforce, inculcate religious values, preserve 'respectable' morality, and, significantly, segregate them sexually from other races. Thus, while historians of Port Elizabeth have so far concentrated on the role of land values, commercial expansion and the sanitation syndrome, in effecting residential segregation during the 1930s, a perhaps lesser factor was also the drive to remove women from inter-racial cohabitation and miscegenation. In this sense then, the absence of clubs for other races was therefore not only reflective of the changing racial composition of the PE female workforce but also of the lack of concern, in this town, for coloured or black female morality.

However, institutionalized segregation was not merely imposed on unwilling women, but rather fostered racial attitudes and stratification which were accepted by white women and derived from a self awareness, a growing consciousness of who they were or could be in the urban environment. When white women got the vote in 1931, against a background of increasing government - implemented segregation, political empowerment in the working class area of North End, manifested itself in support of the National Party and white supremacy.<sup>3</sup> The racial identity the government sought to construct was thus readily internalized by women workers and reflected on the political front.

Despite racial segregation, white working class women did not merely constitute an homogenous group, but formed a composite of overseas and rural immigrants from diverse ethnic groups. This was never static but constantly augmented by the continuing process of urbanisation. The white female working class included groups as diverse as wage labourers, such as young factory workers and domestic servants; informal workers such as a variety of hawkers, boarding - house proprietresses, midwives, seamstresses and some prostitutes; but also the unemployed, such as housewives, who formed the largest group of all, as well as the poor and the destitute. The great variety of class differentiation among women that characterized the inter - war period - not only between formal and informal workers, but also within the informal sector - was countered, by economic links and social relations such as work, residence, language, common experience or place of origin. In the workplace, for example, common identities, tended to develop in the different

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<sup>3</sup> H.O. Terblanche, 'Die Afrikaner in Port Elizabeth, 1902-1937: 'N Kultuurhistoriese Ondersoek', (Ph.D., University of PE., 1993), p. 488.

factories, either according to the prevailing ethos of the establishment or around departments or gender groups and even consolidated by networks of family members and friends who worked in other factories. The transition of the clothing industry, for example, through a variety of forms and stages from sweatshops to wholesale factories, placed outworkers in between the formal and the informal sector. Also, domestic work was closely related to factory work in that many women moved between the two jobs and workers had strong social ties. Both these occupations also had links with prostitution when workers were forced into it by the low coastal wages.

Within these fluid sub - groups of the white working class, I have argued for the complexity of the female identity in families. On the one extreme, were those who appropriated, or attempted to appropriate, the hegemonic ideals of 'domesticity', 'stability' and 'respectability', centred on the industrial nuclear family with the refined, feminine housewife at its core. At the other were those brutalized by poverty. The Carnegie Commission maintained that poor white families, although under threat, were strongly cohesive and ties with their children were inordinately strong.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, German's model of the burdened nuclear family, afflicted by atomization of family members all working outside the home, was not entirely applicable.<sup>5</sup> Communal arrangements in extended families and a vast majority of housewives made for greater support. Identity, in terms of place of origin, seems to have been further consolidated by settlement in common urban areas enhancing a proud sense of home building, innovation and community among many. Yet the notion of 'struggle' and fragmentation of the family is also relevant since marriages did disintegrate due to economic pressures, induced by sickness or unemployment; some daughters had to contribute financially to two households; patriarchy entrenched in law, ignorance of rights and physical abuse ensured that few women sought their freedom even in the face of implied violence. Similarly, although the importance of nurturing children was central not only to the capitalist ethic but also to Afrikaner nationalist ideology, child rearing often represented a different experience for working class white women. Poverty and ignorance about birth control and infant care created high infant mortality rates which persisted until the end of the study period, while infanticide comprised 36% of all recorded female-perpetrated crimes until the early 1930s.

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<sup>4</sup> M.E. Rothmann, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family. Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part V(b)*, (Stellenbosch, 1932), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> L. German, *Sex, Class and Socialism*, (Bookmarks, London, 1994)

Women's experience of sexual morality in an industrializing town, was also subject to change, determining access to 'respectability'. On the one hand, the pressures of industrialization created greater immorality and, in Port Elizabeth, an inordinately high rate of illegitimacy and infanticide, indicating the breakdown of social norms in this region. Greater inter-racial mixing, especially at the beginning of the study period, meant that later racial parameters of sexual morality were also initially unclear. On the other hand, the growth of the purity movement closely monitored the spread of promiscuity and prostitution, while middle class animosity to miscegenation supported state legislation to limit inter racial sex and miscegenation.

Women were also a highly significant factor in the shaping of the urban environment, particularly in terms of the improvement of health. Venereal disease in Port Elizabeth was increasing faster than in any other centre while infant mortality among whites was found to be the highest in the country in 1920. The Pact government did much to focus on 'poor white', family health and was particularly sensitive to infant mortality among whites. The local state's insistence on the registration of midwives, its establishment of venereal, maternity and birth control clinics can be seen as a response to the central state imperatives and a substantial local achievement of the period, whereafter infanticides, at least, showed a marked decrease. Similarly, changes in official attitudes to poverty hinged around the fortunes of women. Desperate social conditions brought about by industrialisation created many female-headed households which were particularly vulnerable to poverty. State provision, in terms of grants to societies and individual aid, was highly inadequate, given the social upheaval of the times and that the local council was more interested in the welfare of the labour force rather than the poor or the marginalized. Instead, the PEB, like other important welfare organisations, saw itself as some sort of a broker between the needs of the authorities on the one hand and destitute women on the other. Much effort was spent on pressurising the council for extra funding. Improved state assistance finally came with initiatives by the central state in the 1930s.

In the light of Andre Appel's suggestion that periodisation of Port Elizabeth's history should be reconsidered in terms of women's contribution, the inter war study period emerges as highly

significant.<sup>6</sup> The years 1917 and 1924 also represent the beginning of female political activity when women became eligible for municipal election and were then elected to council. This empowered middle class women to make tangible improvements in the lives of working class women. Although white working class women had begun their first large entry into Port Elizabeth at the turn of the century, their participation in the economic life of the town has perhaps never been so pronounced as it was between the wars. This was a period of heightened industrialisation and therefore employment for white women. Certainly, it was an era of continuing dependency in terms of the large proportion of housewives and domestic workers that continued to comprise the bulk of the working class; for the pattern of domestic skills were followed in industry, such as clothing. Yet, women's unionization in the city, beginning at the end of the study period, would perhaps bring this phase to an end. Nevertheless, focus on a particular race and class begs further research on related fields. Since so much remains to be done on gender history for Port Elizabeth, this suggested periodisation may well change.

In drawing the present thesis to a close, it is impossible to close the final chapter on the story of individual lives. If Virginia Woolf perceived the inherent difficulties of biographies, she also complained in her novel, *The Voyage Out*, that "It's awfully difficult to tell about women". Accordingly, the book's conclusion "swerves suddenly near the end" because the heroine was evolving in such a way that was "perhaps incompatible with the facts of existence".<sup>7</sup> Certainly, in this 'multiple biography', working class women did not form a unified or clearly defined entity. The shifting groups of individuals sometimes connected, sometimes separate, can seldom be itemized, individualized and drawn to closure. Nevertheless, within this fluid process, some certainties prevail. Perhaps contrary to assumption, white working class women were crucial role players in emerging urban development, industrial growth and social structuring. Benefiting from the racial ideology of the times, they were important to industry - especially during times of recession - fundamental as workers in supporting extended families, and crucial in the making of policies regarding urban infrastructure, work, housing, health, social welfare, child care and

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<sup>6</sup> A. Appel, 'Trying to Make Them Visible: Women in Port Elizabeth Before c 1914', South African Historical Society Conference, University of Pretoria, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> L. Gordon, *Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Life*, (Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 92.

morality legislation. Thus, although change is true for all phases of history, it is hoped this study of white women has demarcated the inter war years in Port Elizabeth as one of particular transformation.



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#### IV. ORAL INTERVIEWS

Mr. Kemsley	21 March 1994
Miss Boucher	21 March 1994
Mrs. I. D. van Soelen	21 March 1994
Mrs. Hartman	23 March 1994
Mrs. Susanna Johanna du Preez	23 March 1994
Miss Corrie Gerber	23 March 1994
Mrs. Violet Bayi	13 May 1994
Mrs. Louisa Mtimka	13 May 1994
Mrs. Betty Rose Innes	22 November 1995
Mrs. Ethel Levy,	3 March 1996.
Mrs. E. Schauder	5 March 1996
Mrs. Jantjies	14 May 1996
J. B. Nel, interviewed by M. Nel	1 September 1997
Dr. A. Kristal	6 December 1997
Dr. P. du Toit	8 December 1997