**Make a neighbourhood assessment of the places in the article**

A **neighborhood assessment** focuses on neighborhood characteristics, conditions, appearances

**Glossary**

* Housing scheme: a local-authority housing plan
* Squatter: someone who lives in unused building without having a legal right to do so
* Cushioned: to cover or hide
* Job-creation scheme: a governmental scheme to increase the number of jobs in an area
* Alter: to change
* Heap: a pile
* Affirmative action. An active effort to improve employment or educational opportunities to members of a minority or suppressed group
* Redress: to right a wrong
* Jostle: push or compete
* Hawker: travelling salesman
* De rigueur: necessary
* Retrench: spend less money
* Arrears: money that you owe
* Scarce: not enough of it
* Elicit: bring to light
* Soup run: literally handing out soup (often to homeless people)

**South Africa's new underclass: poor whites**

[**Mary Braid in Cape Town**](https://www.independent.co.uk/author/mary-braid-in-cape-town)

Thursday 12 February 1998 01:02

Øverst på formularen

Nederst på formularen

KITTY VAN ZYL throws another batch of homemade sausage fritters in the frying pan. Nearing the end of another nightly cook-in for hundreds of neighbourhood children and adults, she complains bitterly in her native Afrikaans about indifference to human misery.

"I asked the local Kentucky Fried Chicken for its leftovers," says Mrs Van Zyl, 42, saviour of Sanddrift East, a dustbowl Cape Town housing scheme. "But the manager said he would rather give them to the local black squatter camp." In the new South Africa, few have been more devastated by change than the growing army of poor whites. In the old days of apartheid the weakest and least educated whites were cushioned by the National Party; Afrikaners were particularly favoured.

State-owned industries like the railways and post office operated like job-creation schemes. Today, though rich whites moan about transformation, their lives have hardly altered. But those at the bottom of the previously privileged heap are struggling as businesses are streamlined and affirmative- action programmes, designed to redress decades of racism, kick in.

On streets, whites jostle with black hawkers for begging space at road junctions. And in places like Sanddrift East, one of the last whites-only public housing schemes thrown up by the outgoing National Party, every day is a battle to survive. Most working-class whites could once rely on the bungalow, double garage and de rigueur family pool. No longer.

At Sanddrift's community soup kitchen children and mothers gather round the cooker. For many, the fritters are the only meal of the day. Some seem resigned to their place in the new South Africa; others are bitter and eager for scapegoats. "No one wants to employ a white man these days," says Ian Reid, 32, a father of two, retrenched in favour of blacks. He says he never supported the old regime but claims the new government is discriminating against whites as the Nationalists did against blacks. When jobs were plentiful in state-run concerns, whites hardly noticed the absence of a welfare state. Now they struggle to pay state school fees and medical bills. Many, like Mr Reid, are threatened with eviction for rent arrears. "The housing woman told me flat out," he says. " `Pay up or hand over the house. There are plenty of blacks waiting'." Already five Coloured (mixed-race) families have moved into Sanddrift. A Coloured woman stands in the soup-kitchen queue, apparently welcome. Mr Reid has odd opinions for a non-racist: if a white family takes over his home he says he will swallow; if a black family moves in he will burn it down.

His neighbour, Sonia Senekal, 33, is more barefaced; she is furious Sanddrift is changing colour. "I just don't like blacks," she says. "Sometimes I just cry because I cannot take all this. I was not raised for it." Despite protestations, racism is a constant background noise. As privilege seeps away, many are in no doubt as to where it is going. But when Michelle, a well-educated thirtysomething down on her luck, says she is not racist she is convincing. The old system, she says, was rotten. But that does not ease her shame at her circumstances. "Please do not take my picture," she begs. "My husband's family is in England." Her builder husband works a 16-hour day and barely keeps the wolf from the door. "Sanddrift is a hellhole," she says. "The place is full of people climbing into bottles because they cannot face sending their kids to bed hungry." She just wants to run. "If I could go tomorrow I would. We were saving up to leave South Africa but we used up every penny when my husband became unemployed last year."

Statistics about white poverty are scarce but everyone working with the poor accepts it is rising. The Ark, a church-run project, houses 1,000 homeless. Two years ago 40 per cent of its clients were white; today that has doubled. Yolande Blom, manager of the low-cost Communicare housing organisation, says poor whites are forming a larger proportion of her clients. She says they elicit little interest or sympathy. This week Anthea Jefferey, of the SA Race Relations Institute, said more affirmative action, encouraged in a new employment Bill, would increase racial tension. But Mrs Blom says that in Communicare's mixed-race housing schemes most families get along. "The good thing ... is that poor people are having to struggle together."

It remains to be seen if Mrs Van Zyl will still do the soup run when the majority of her neighbours are not white.