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Good Times in Block Seven: A Human Ecological Approach

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ABSTRACT

We have little control over the forces that shape us, yet they play a massive role determining our position in the social structure. Race, socio-economic status, gender and other social categories and processes are powerful forces that work together and shape understandings of the world, including those who reside within Block Seven, a gated community in Durban, South Africa. Although it may look like a standard state project housing, Block Seven is far from the average housing complex. Block Seven is divided into two groups: the Corner Members and the Externals. The sub-culture of the Corner does not align with that of the Externals and this has driven a wedge between the two groups forcing them into a state of social conflict. It will be suggested that people's lifestyles are a response to their surroundings is still relevant to explain contemporary social behaviour such as that which takes place at the Block. There is, however, one important caveat: if 'social disorganization' is understood analytically as 'social complexity' (Hannerz, 1992), then there need not be any assumption as to whether society is objectively in a state of order or disorder, which is a matter of perspective. A total of seven in-depth interviews were conducted to gather a rich and detailed picture of life in Block Seven. Drawing on theory of human ecology and social disorganization this thesis will argue that disorganization

and organization are relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape,
in which individuals and communities exist.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
CHAPTER 1: Introduction.....	6
CHAPTER 2: Methodology.....	13
CHAPTER 3: Welcome to Block Seven.....	19
3.1 The Corner.....	28
3.1.1: The Externals.....	29
3.1.2: The Corner Members	37
CHAPTER 4: Social Disorganization Theory	45
4.1 Social Disorganization of Block Seven.....	53
CHAPTER 5: Block Lifestyle as a Cultural Choice	62
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion	72
APPENDICES	76
REFERENCE LIST	79

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

My actions have always been governed by rules and guidelines, to which I have always adhered and never questioned until recently. I consider myself a ‘normal’ citizen. I go to work, attend university, go to church and volunteer in my local community. Through my interactions with these institutions, among others, I have been conditioned to believe that education is the first step to progression, employment is the key to mobility, and therefore unemployment is not an option. I have absorbed the message that promiscuity, intoxication and vulgar language is not acceptable behaviour, especially for a young woman. I am appreciative for the influence of the institutions that surround me and which have shaped me into the person I have become. However, there is a side to me – hidden from many of my close friends and relatives – that is fascinated with the ‘other side’ of life, and which drew me to a den of carefree hedonism. This place is what I refer to as Block Seven; a set of public housing flats in South Africa.

Seven years ago I travelled to South Africa and met a group of friends who introduced me to their ‘normal’ world, which completely disrupted my sense of normality. I had never been in an environment like that of Block Seven so I found it utterly fascinating. I loved the high rise concrete jungle

structure, the mix of people confined in one area, the hood rats, congregating on the stairs, the drama of the occasional fight and verbal argument between residents, the lax lifestyle and especially 'The Corner'. It seemed like a lawless and unregulated society. Although my family loathed me being in Block Seven, I enjoyed my time spent in Block Seven and everything it entailed and thus my response to their disorganization was to embrace and savour it. The company of friends I kept always approved and encouraged self-indulgent and pleasure seeking activities - there was no judgment, and in any case there was really nobody around to control me. It was a case of 'once tasted, never wasted', and so every year I would take a trip to South Africa to spend time in Block Seven. The life I lead in Australia compared to the life I led in Block Seven was on the opposite ends on the scale of normality.

I was intrigued by the life in Block Seven and had spent a great deal of time attempting to figure out what it was about Block Seven that made it so different from suburban life in Australia. I sought to answer 'why do they behave the way they do?' and 'why do they think it is normal?' At the core of these anthropological questions is a deeper-level philosophical/sociological question, which is what is 'normal'? I have come to realize that normal is culturally defined. An individual's understanding of normal is based on their sense of reality and truth, which

is a collection of personal experiences and knowledge influenced by social forces.

For the residents of Block Seven, everything they experience in their environment is a normal part of everyday living. Block Seven and all it entails – people sleeping on the stairs, the loud music that echoes day and night through the complex, the free availability and consumption of drugs and alcohol, children running through the car park playing with one another and the young men congregating on the stairs during the day. Not all residents approve of this behaviour nor are they happy with such activities, but to them in their environment it is normal. Even the conflict between the two groups – who I will later introduce as the ‘Corner Members’ and the ‘Externals’ – is a normal part of their daily existence in Block Seven. The lifestyle and illegal economy of the Corner is nothing out of the ordinary for the Corner Members. The household that operates the Corner and its illegal economy, use the sale of drugs and alcohol as income and their Corner as a party place. Despite apprehension from the Externals, they view the Corner as a normal part of their environment. Prior to undertaking fieldwork through interviews and observation, I was completely oblivious to the fact Block Seven was divided and in a state of conflict.

We have little control over the forces that shape us, yet they play a massive role determining our position in the social structure. Race, socio-economic status, gender and other social categories and processes are powerful forces that work together to shape understandings of the world, including those who reside within Block Seven. For me personally, socio-economic forces have presented me with opportunities for growth and progression, which have lead me to a lifestyle I desire. I admit I felt a sense of pity towards those in Block Seven, because the structural constraints had not granted them with the same opportunities for a fulfilling lifestyle like mine. Theirs was a way of life that I temporarily ‘tasted’ as a tourist, able to return to my normal world some 8,500km away,

What I later realized was that I had been granted access to an alternative lifestyle that, from their point of view, was in some ways more enviable than the world I came from. Their structural forces worked in a different manner to mine yet still presented them with an opportunity - the opportunity to enjoy life in a carefree manner - which they seized. At times I thought Block Seven residents had been living in a doomed land of hopelessness but now I ponder my own existence from their perspective, and wonder if maybe I am living in a doomed state of ceaseless labour, while they spend their days in carefree hedonism. One participant commented on the Block Seven lifestyle, saying ‘We are young, this is

what we are supposed to do'. I dismissed his account of his reality, because I was socialized to believe that the lifestyle he led was not of righteousness nor normal. I now question whether or not my way of life is right or normal.

According to social disorganization theory, which I will explore in this thesis, Block Seven meets the criteria of being a dysfunctional society. However, in reality this is a matter of perspective. The influence and effects of organization and disorganization do play a large role in shaping our thinking and interpretation. What is important to me may not be the same things that are important to those in Block Seven. While I am aiming for a professional career, the Corner members are chasing something different - living in the moment. Not everyone in Block Seven, however, agrees with the lifestyle of Corner Members – a group who I have dubbed the Externals - which sets up an interesting dynamic in terms of tensions and divergent viewpoints that shape life in the scene.

The following chapter will outline the methodology I employed to learn about the lifestyle and social forces that shape their lived environment. Following the methodology description, I will introduce the Corner from the perspective of the two groups I have identified: the Externals and the Corner Members. In doing so, it will highlight the issues that are faced by the

Externals, which form the base of the conflict between both parties. In addition, it will provide an explanation of life on the Corner and the appeal that it has to its adherents.

Chapter four will lay the foundation of the theory of social disorganization, and will proceed to explain how the surrounding issues have shaped the environment of Block Seven. It will be followed by chapter five which will attempt to apply the systematic model of social disorganization (Sampson and Groves 1989, 783) to both parties of Block Seven: the Externals and the Corner Members.

Drawing on interviews with key Block Seven informants, in this thesis I will argue that disorganization and organization are relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape, in which individuals and communities exist. Cognitive landscapes are a set of norms pertaining to the expected behaviours within a context, specifically an urban neighbourhood. In agreement with the human ecology perspective, it is clear that people respond to the constraints and opportunities characteristic of their surrounding lived environment, including the tensions that exist between the different groups that comprise their lived environment. However, their perception of the surrounding environment varies according to their values and concepts of normality. Using the systematic model of social

disorganization (Sampson and Groves, 1989, 783) I will explain how three ecological pressures; racial and ethnic heterogeneity, resident mobility and family disruption have limited the ability of the Externals in Block Seven to form social ties. The structural dimensions; peer supervision, local friendship networks and participation in local run organizations is used as method to indicate the group dynamics of the Externals and the Corner Members. With this, I will argue that disorganization and organization are relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape in which individuals and communities exist.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

As it is best suited for capturing descriptive information and providing an in-depth understanding of lifestyles and social forces characteristic of Block Seven, a qualitative approach was taken for this study (Ritchie et al 2013, 26). Through the use of qualitative methodology participants have the opportunity to freely express their thoughts through metaphors, symbols, and definitions (Berg 2001, 3). In doing so, each participant provides a unique outlook and can elaborate on their perspective of reality and interpretations, revealing glimpses into their values, attitudes and ideas.

The data collected for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews with residents of Block Seven. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the participant. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing call for those who had the facilities available. Four interviews were conducted using cellular applications such as Black Berry Messenger and Whatsapp. Both applications are instant messaging services that provide a platform for global communication. Once downloaded on a device, users are able to connect with other users to send instant chat and voice messages. Through the use of interviews I was able to gather rich information regarding feelings, insight and experiences as well as further

understand the people, the culture and behaviour that characterises Block Seven.

A total of seven in-depth interviews were conducted. To be eligible, each participant had to be over the age of 18, have a proficient command of the English language, and had to have lived in Block Seven for a minimum of five years. The first three participants had been carefully selected from my personal network because of convenience, in order to make it possible to commence interviews and recruit further participants as soon as possible. None of the participants within this sample were directly connected to one another. The sample included two Externals, two current Corner Members and two ex-Corner Members. The remaining sample was recruited through 'snowball sampling'. This requires participants to share the contact details of other potential participants with the researcher. The process is repeated until a sufficient sample size is gathered (Noy 2008, 330). The snowballing technique was highly effective for this study as it gave me access to interview a wider scope of individuals beyond those I already knew. In addition it helped to overcome the difficulty of securing informants without being physically present in Block Seven (as I was based in Perth). The first round of participants all successfully recruited further candidates for interviewing.

However, disadvantages of the snowballing technique were apparent. All participants were recruited from within their own networks, which served to limit sample diversity. Six out of seven of the participants were Coloured. Christopher (2001, 451-542) classifies the Coloured nation as a population with a 'mixed ancestry' with ties to the 'Cape Malays, the Griquas and other indigenous peoples of the Western and Northern Cape' in Africa. The sample had one non-Coloured participant, whom was an Afrikaner. Afrikaner, also known as a 'White' is a 'descendants of immigrants from Europe' (Christopher 2001, 451). A further disadvantage was the limited opportunity to access potential participants from each block. Participants exercised caution during the recruitment process by forwarding suggestions to others whom they are closely familiar with. To further this, participants seemed to recruit informants who held similar opinions. As such the findings may be slanted somewhat by the participants who were interviewed, and should not be taken as necessarily representative of all those who reside in the Block.

An information sheet was read out to each participant prior to commencing each interview. It provided an outline entailing what the study is about, the types of questions to be asked and the topics covered. A consent form was also read out to each participant. Each informant was required to verbally agree to all propositions before the interview commenced.

A questionnaire was developed and consisted of twelve questions, through which I sought to understand the character of Block Seven Corner and the Corner to better support my argument that disorganization and organization are relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape in which individuals and communities exist.

All participants were provided with a standard set of questions and prompting verbal cues if required. By maintaining consistency throughout each interview, I was able to analyse the different perspectives by comparing and contrasting participant responses. The interview questions were opened ended and many participants took advantage of this and used the opportunity to provide rich narrative data, detailing life stories, experiences and perceptions. Some provided descriptions by means of comparing Block Seven to other complexes, detailing the effects of drugs and explaining life within the enclosed community. As a means to test the identity of the participant I engaged in a brief conversation, to break the ice, about the project and the mediating participant. Participants answered my icebreaker questions with confidence, which assured me of their identity. Furthermore the profile pictures and usernames on the instant messaging applications served as a means to confirm identity. Informants were required to agree and abide by the specified guidelines to ensure privacy and confidentiality was adhered too at all times. Thus, each participant was

required to be in a setting that would be private during the interview process, in order to ensure that no information was overheard during the video calling interview, and no persons had access to the device and application used for the instant messaging interview.

Each interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. As the interview progressed participants became more expressive and provided detailed information. As each participant became more comfortable the interview seemed to flow better and participants gained a sense of what the interviews aimed to achieve; an understanding of their insights and perspectives. On occasions were the respondent had difficulty in understanding the nature of the questions, prompting cues were used (see appendix one). All questions were answered.

Once all interviews were completed, each interview was then transcribed. The interviews underwent three rounds of manual thematic analysis to detect the themes that had arisen from the interviews (Babbie 2013, 324). Each analysis uncovered a combination of latent and manifest themes which will be discussed in the following chapters (Babbie 2013, 324). Coding was advantageous as it highlighted the differing values, attitudes and beliefs of participants in addition to exposing their fears and concerns. . As Babbie (2013, 324) explains ‘The purpose of coding serves to fragment rich data,

and the task at hand is to regain the wholeness of meaning'. In addition to conducting a thematic analysis, I documented words and phrases that were repeated throughout the interviews.

In addition to the interviews, I drew upon my own experiences and knowledge of Block Seven. Since 2009 I have been visiting Block Seven regularly. Over the years I have been fortunate to witness the changes and see how these changes have altered the dynamics within Block Seven. With this I was able to provide descriptive accounts of the character, the people, the setting, and life within the complex. My personal insight and perspective are particularly useful in this study as it has enabled me to compile a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973, 9) - a rich and detailed picture of life in Block Seven. By means of this account, I am able to provide personal insight into life on the Corner.

CHAPTER 3: Welcome to Block Seven

At the T-junction of Baychester Crescent and Edgewater Road in Durban, South Africa stands a four story high gated complex of flats commonly referred to as Block Seven. Although it may look like standard state project housing, Block Seven is far from the average housing complex. With origins dating back to the apartheid era, Block Seven has a compelling history, telling the tale of race relations and residential segregation that dominated South Africa for almost eighty years (Feinberg 1993, 66). In more recent times, it has developed a reputation characterized by poverty, risk taking behaviour and the operation of an illegal economy.

South Africa has a long history of racial segregation. The implementation of the *Natives Land Act* in 1913 was the start of apartheid that laid the foundation for segregation (Feinberg 1993, 66; Muyeba 2011, 656). The legislation ruled residential restrictions on the native South Africans, otherwise known as Zulus, by restricting their right to reside in metropolitan areas. Under the ‘Schedule of Native Areas’, a sub-section of the *Natives Lands Act*, all African natives within South Africa were forced to live in designated rural and reserves across the provinces (Klasen and Woolard 2009, 30).

In 1948 the National Party was re-elected into power and subsequently altered their policies in favor of further racial division (Christopher 2001, 244; Wilkinson 1998, 219). The National Government of Daniel Francois Malan created further division by introducing legislation to separate all races. This included Afrikaners, Asians and those who are of mixed ancestry known as Coloured people. The new legislation passed entitled the *Group Areas Act* of 1952 designated exclusive areas to each race by enforcing compulsory zoning. (Muyeba 2011, 656; Christopher 2001, 453). Built in 1976 during the apartheid era, Block Seven was one of many state housing projects provided the by National Party Government. The erection of what is now called the Old Blocks of Baychester Crescent flats on Edgewater Road was purposed to provide accommodation for low income earning Afrikaner families. The first building blocks for social disorganization had been laid: a low socio-economic population that opposed racial integration. This would soon be one of the key factors provoking the establishment of the Corner.

South Africa remained racially divided until 1991 when Nelson Mandela together with F W de Klurk ended the system of apartheid. No longer were the people of South Africa confined to designated areas. In May 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) won the election and immediately addressed the issue of inadequate housing (Eldridge and Seekings 1996,

517). Under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) framework the government pledged to provide adequate housing for the many people living in poor conditions (Huchzermeyer 2001, 305; Muyeba 2011, 657). As compensation for the injustice inflicted by the National Party Government and the inability to attain decent housing, the ANC vowed to “deliver one million houses in five years” (Huchzermeyer 2001, 306). Public housing was subsidized for low to moderate earning households. This was particularly favorable for the Coloured people. They constituted a large proportion of the beneficiaries of the RDP housing scheme program (Christopher 2001, 463).

In 1994 Block Seven was extended to include five blocks of dusty pink flats. It was erected as an addition to the Old Blocks, originally housing Afrikaners only. The construction of the five adjoining blocks, each four floors high, increased Block Seven's capacity to 202 flats. The Edgewater Crescent complex had been given to those who qualified for the RDP housing scheme. Low income earning, young Coloured families and single Coloured mothers were given preference for accommodation. As a result of racial migration, the Afrikaner population rapidly declined, not only in Block Seven but throughout South Africa (Christopher 2001, 458). Block Seven had become home to a mix of families, taking its form as an integrated community and no longer an Afrikaner only complex. The

migration of Coloured people into Block Seven flats marked the start of a new chapter in the history of Block Seven flats.

For many years Block Seven remained a Coloured dominated environment. It is only in more recent years that the complex has undergone a radical demographic shift. Native South Africans, Zulus, possess a strong presence in Block Seven in addition to foreigner Africans from Tanzania, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to the recent influx of Zulus and Foreign African are the Indian inhabitants. They are visibly the smallest group. Block Seven's Afrikaner population has drastically decreased. There are approximately ten Afrikaner households, the majority being senior citizens and apartheid supporters.

Apart from the apartheid supporters, Block Seven has grown into a close knit community. The complex comprises many families who have been loyal long-term residents, some for over twenty years. The familiarity, particularly between long-term residents, has created in many a powerful allegiance to the community of Block Seven. The first generation of Coloured children in Block Seven have lived together and also attended primary and secondary school together. Continual daily interaction at home and school helped form a powerful union, which today is still evident through their friendships, but even more so because of common interests

and a lifestyle that has branded them as different and encouraged their strong group solidarity. Together they use the Corner as a route of escape from the chaos in their community.

In part it has been these young adults that have contributed to Block Seven's current reputation. Outsiders often associate Block Seven with anti-social behaviours involving partying, drugs and alcohol. On weekends – and the odd weekday – Block Seven is transformed into a hub of activity as the Corner comes alive. The visitors to the Corner gather together engaging in recreational consumption of alcohol and drugs, fuelling fights, arguments and aggressive behaviours' of young men and women. This has raised concerns for the safety and wellbeing of residents and those who are involved in the partying scene at the Corner. The sexual activity of young women has also become an issue within the community because of the promiscuous behaviour and the high rate of young adult pregnancies.

For many of the adolescents, in particular the young Coloured males, social interaction among their peers is a large part of everyday life in Block Seven. Throughout the day, it is not uncommon to see the staircases filled with young adults, mostly Coloured males, loitering on the stairwells, sitting on the concrete stumps in the parking lot, gathering at the Corner and under the apartment block or on the side of the apartment block, smoking drugs and

consuming alcohol. The 'leisure career' (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007) of these young adults has been the cause of apprehension from other residents. Concerned parents disagree with this lifestyle and believe the unemployed youth of Block Seven should be seeking employment.

The notoriety of the Block is not constructed around the lifestyle of the young adults alone. It is not uncommon for the flats to be associated with poverty, unemployment, economic disempowerment and an expanding population of Zulus and foreign Africans, which is adding further strain to the already present racial tension. These attitudes have built barriers of isolation and have aggravated violent outbursts. Field research revealed the impact of economic strain has led to the operation of an 'underground economy' that functions within the flats. This underground enterprise is at the root of Block Seven's negative reputation among the Externals and outsiders.

Interviews were conducted with residents of Block Seven to build a picture of their environment. When asked about the economic position of Block Seven, participants claim the flats are dominated by middle to low income earners with the inclusion of some who live under strained circumstances. Some participants explicitly mentioned there are households within the complex that are known as 'battlers', these households are known to be

‘living without basic necessities such as water and no lights’ due to financial constraints. These households are without stable income. If there is incoming funds, it is often derived from the provision of government benefits or alternatively through intermittent employment.

My research revealed the reputation of Block Seven has largely contributed to the operation of the ‘underground economy’, which is a reliable source of income for those who control it. The supply and demand for drugs and alcohol makes Block Seven a known provider for internal and external customers of the surrounding areas. Irrespective of the day and the time, drugs and alcohol can be purchased on the premises.

It emerged from the interviews that parents and senior citizens are concerned about the influence the environment has on the children of Block Seven. The continual exposure to drugs, alcohol and partying and the lack of positive role models has started to influence the younger generations behavior. Children as young as twelve have begun experimenting with drugs and alcohol. This behavior has distressed parents and senior citizens as they are fearful of the damaging effects especially with regards to future pathway and outcomes for youths.

The conditions outlined above, combined with a low socio-economic demographic, has resulted in different responses from residents. Many residents are desensitized by the lifestyle and consequently choose to ignore it, while others express anger but do not take action because of the fear of social retribution. However, there are residents who are discontent and have attempted to act as agents of change. Several 'pro-active' adults revealed to me that they have gathered together to implement a different social order. However, they also indicated momentum is easily lost because their ideal of a drug free, quiet, controlled environment seems unattainable in light of the entrenched drug culture.

My research revealed the issue of racism still lives on within the complex. Racial tension has been the caused of isolation of some community members, amplifying the sense of 'otherness' and reinforcing racial boundaries. Over twenty five years after the declaration of freedom from discrimination, the old apartheid mentality still resonates with some Block Seven residents. There are those who continue to fly the apartheid flag in their homes and do not interact with non-Afrikaners. These practices display commitment to the old regime and reinforce the ideologies of supremacy and segregation. In his study about South Africa in a post-apartheid era, Christopher (2001, 463) noted that the Afrikaner population still 'remains the most highly segregated group and is being integrated at the

slowest rate'. As my research demonstrated, his observation of South Africa is reflected in Block Seven.

However, it is not only the Afrikaners that clearly express ideologies of non-acceptance. Through my research I have observed that the Coloured population have a sense of superiority over Africans, particularly non-Zulus. Irregular threats and violent acts are used to communicate authority and reinforce ownership over territory. It became apparent through the interviews that multi-racial integration is more common between the younger generations. However, the adult generations keep their interactions within their own race, as do some foreign African nationals.

3.1 The Corner

On the top floor of the flats at the intersection between Hyme block and Sparks block is the area of Block Seven known as 'The Corner'. It is a distinctive space embodying a set of norms and values that has divided Block Seven into two groups: the Corner Members and the Externals. This area is an iconic hub of activity known by many people both inside and outside of Block Seven. It is different from any other corner in the complex because of its infamous reputation as a party spot and for the presence of the illegal economy supplying drugs and alcohol. Day and night, friends, family, customers and acquaintances, congregate on the Corner. Some go to purchase drugs and alcohol, and others gather around to enjoy like minded company. It is a zone that is welcoming to friends, family, acquaintances, and customers, and is always encouraging indulgence in pleasures. It is an unrestrictive and accommodating space where the Corner members could do as they wished. Jessiah states, 'We were allowed to do what we were not allowed to do elsewhere.' It is because of the sub-culture of the Corner that Block Seven has been stigmatized by a reputation, as quoted by residents, of 'drugs addicts', 'partying', 'fighting', 'hustlers', 'the free whore', 'alcoholics', and 'rough living'.

The Corner is a space of social activity and the cause of social tension. The sub-culture of the Corner does not align with that of the Externals and this

has driven a wedge between the two groups forcing them into a state of social conflict. The Externals are unhappy with the lifestyle of the Corner and the unfavorable reputation that has tainted Block Seven. The Externals desire a complex that is free of the Corner and all it entails, including the disturbance from loud deep-house music playing repeatedly throughout the night into the early hours of the morning, the social interaction and the illegal economy. The Externals are fighting to fulfill their desire of an ideal environment, and the Corner Members are fighting to protect their lifestyle.

3.1.1: The Externals

'Not just any normal person behaves like that every weekend. Yes we experiment and yes we do different kinds of things and are influenced to doing different kinds of things but to live a lifestyle like that something has gotta be wrong. It takes away your drive to want to be anything more than you are in that very movement because all you live for is to party and for the next weekend. You can't wait to get through that week to get to the weekend. It is totally unacceptable.' – Jessiah, ex-Corner member

In Block Seven the Externals are outraged by the presence of the illegal economy and the impact that it has on their environment. The loud music, conversation and laughter that penetrates through the flats, and the disturbance from people using the stairwell to access the Corner are major concerns to residents. To the Externals, the disturbance emanating from the

Corner is inconsiderate and unpleasant element of Block Seven. The effects of the illegal economy have infuriated the Externals. One of my informants, Allazay,¹ blamed drug and alcohol abuse on the fact that these commodities are easily accessible and readily available to obtain as required. Physical and verbal encounters had been mentioned as an effect of intoxication. Another informant, Sinai, explained ‘People sleep on the stairs, people take drugs, are people that sell drugs and alcohol. It’s a whole freaken bust up [party]. And the free whore, the village bicycle’. An ex Corner Member, Jessiah, admitted that the partying and disturbance from the loud music throughout the night was very insensitive of the Corner members toward the rest of the residents. Regardless of the disruption the Corner Members continued to enjoy it. Jamerson insinuated that the Corner does not have routine days that partying takes place, it can occur on the weekdays and weekends. The close proximity between homes means that the Externals are often subjected to the associated noise and disturbance from neighbours (Gans 2002, 333). For the Externals it is a case of ‘environmental spoiling’ (Ebbesen 1976, 506). This occurs when an individual’s immediate surrounding experiences continual negative interference, disruption or disturbance from neighbours (Ebbesen 1976, 505).

Spatial ecologists have paid an increasing amount of attention to the issue and effects regarding the use of space in both public and private spheres

¹ All names used are pseudonyms.

(Zhu 1997, 6; Gans 2002, 333; Jayne et al 2006, 459). The issue surrounding the disturbance and disruption to one's environment has been raised as a major problem in not only public arenas but also public housing (McCarthy and Saegert 1978, 254). Research has addressed questions regarding the ways in which areas are utilized for activities that are unintended in that area and the associated implications that it has on users. Policy makers, local government housing authorities, law enforcement, housing tenant board and urban planners have been engaged to address the on-going issues causing apprehension and tension to those who are affected by the invasion (Chui 2009, 26; Dalton and Rowe 2004, 230). Reports have largely centred around anti-social behaviour associated with public drunkenness, congregating, fighting, drug use and selling of drugs in open areas and private residential homes (Dalton and Rowe 2004, 229; Danic 2012, 559). The complaints of disruption, disturbance, unpleasant interference and concerns for safety have led to a call by residents for stricter regulations and more action to be taken by housing authorities.

Some informants find the activities of the Corner degrading because of the reputation that has tainted Block Seven. Studies have reported a common trend of resident discontent because of the operation of illegal economies that are 'polluting' the residential environment (Dalton and Rowe 2004, 231; Gotham 2002, 279). In the United States of America, public housing

tenants are angered at one-going issues over gangs that use residential grounds for the sale and distribution of narcotics (Gotham 2002, 267; Saegert and Winkle 2004, 219). These studies have also paid attention to how the culture of the residential complex had framed its reputation. A study conducted in a high-rise resident complex in Melbourne reported the same problem. The complex had developed a reputation by police and residents for the party culture and drug sales that are problematic for residents. The culture of the Corner has given Block Seven the reputation of a 'party complex'. Sinai states, 'Everybody comes here to party and do whatever because it is allowed and people accept it. So I suppose that's why everyone gives Block Seven such a bad name'. Allazay explained that outsiders perceive Block Seven as notorious for "the goings on and drugs and alcohol'. Allazay continued, 'Everybody knows you can come to Block Seven and get what you want'.

Although the members of the Corner are the smallest group, they cause damage by creating an unfavourable reputation for the Externals. Sinai reported being embarrassed to admit that she is from Block Seven. She explained that the reputation has framed the females of Block Seven in an unflattering light. One informant, Rye, said Block Seven is perceived by outsiders as the 'Bronx' and the 'ghetto'. This was linked to the fact that Block Seven is low cost housing. She believes that Block Seven's

reputation is based on its socio-economic status. Jessiah stated that although there are Externals in Block Seven that have regular employment and have received tertiary education, those people are not acknowledged. She quotes

There also people who do lead normal lives. Some even are the parents of those who are out doing drugs and drinking on the weekend. They are actually people who go to work and do have degrees and certificates behind them. You've seen them come from nothing and what they made themselves into today so it is not all bad but I elaborate on the negative because that's what stands out so you don't see the good in the place.

The Externals are outraged at the example that is being set for children who witness the effects of intoxicated adults, and are fearful for the future of the children. Respondents indicated that the adults are acting as negative role models by encouraging and exposing youth – especially underage youth – to the consumption of drugs and alcohol. This has been a cause of concern for anxious adults, parents and elderly residents. Allazay reported she had known children as young as twelve to start experimenting with drugs and alcohol. This is not consistent with international findings that conclude that

public housing have substantially higher rates of drug use than suburban areas (Dalton and Rowe 2004, 230).

Through a combination of social processes such as ‘cultural transmission’ (Zembroski 2011, 234) and social learning, the youth of Block Seven are being taught the values and norms of the Corner and encouraged to participate. Jessiah reported:

The adults don’t lead an adult life style and the adults are no example for the younger up and-coming adults and teenagers, because the adults are smoking drugs with the teenagers and they’re bunking school [truant] and sitting with the adults smoking or drinking. Even on the weekend the adults are drinking with the teenagers. There is no age difference teenagers – they see an age difference.

Positive adult role models are particularly important as they contribute to influencing youth drug use behaviours. Research conducted by Joseph and Pearson (2002, 424) in regards to parental drug use indicates that adolescents’ drug use is influenced by parental drug use. In a study of South African youth, Brook et al (2006, 31) found that adolescents with parents that are drug users are more likely to engage in substance use.

Peer influence and perceptions of pleasure are powerful and persuasive tools, altering negative perceptions toward drugs (Rvinen and Stergaard 2011). One informant spoke of the influence of her friends on her initiation into methamphetamines:

My friends were doing it for two years and I said I'll never do it - I'll only smoke my dugga [weed]. After years of watching them - and this proves that you got to choose your friends you hang around with - because even though I wasn't taking it, they were and even though it took me two years I eventually took it because, I used to watch them having a good time. When I started taking it, I started with quarter of a tablet. It made me feel good. I wasn't too high. Then I wanted another quarter and it carried on from there.

The Externals see this behaviour as 'degrading' and 'terrible'. In light of this, the Externals joined forces with the local municipality. Jessiah, who is no longer a member of the Corner, explained one of the many reasons why the Externals are seeking change.

It is degrading. It's also difficult to bring people home to visit you because you have to walk past that big party spot where people are partying in the parking lot and drunk and drugged up from the night before. You can only imagine what they are looking like. There was a genuine care from adults who weren't happy and complained because most of us were young. So the ones that didn't like it were adults. And they saw it from a parent point of view.

Community meetings had been scheduled to address the social issues of the community. However, momentum to implement change was soon lost. Research indicates that the sense of powerlessness that is felt by neighbourhood citizens' has been linked to neighbourhood context. Residents who suffer from economic disadvantage feel less capable of being able to change the conditions of their neighbourhood (Friedrichs and Blasius 2003, 821). In line with this, respondents reported that the neighbours felt powerless and lacked collective control to close the Corner down. The lack of neighbourhood unity was another factor mentioned that contributed to the failed attempts of eliminating the Corner

3.1.2: The Corner Members

'It is what you make of it. If you are staying here for long everybody gets drawn into the life style of the flats'.

Jamerson, long standing Corner member

The previous section presented the main concerns of the Externals. In their opinion, the operation of the underground economy imposes server damage to their surroundings. The Externals are distraught over the continual disruption from the loud deep-house-music that emanates through the complex during the night. Concerns had been raised for the safety and well-being of the younger children who are exposed to and encouraged to consume drugs and alcohol. In the eyes of the Externals, the Corner and all it entails is 'not acceptable', 'not normal' and 'terrible'. However, there is another side to this story. Below I describe on the Corner from the perspective of the Corner members.

In the eyes of the Corner Members, the Corner is a place where business is mixed with pleasure and 'anything goes'. For clientele who are seeking the pleasures of intoxication, the Corner is a one-stop shop that supplies drugs and alcohol. However, for family and friends the Corner is more than a store front. It is place whereby Corner Members can go and are free of judgment, restrictions and controls that are imposed by wider society. For

some it is a 'safer place' and for others it is a place to 'chill' and 'hang out'. During the week – but particularly on the weekends – the Corner is a pleasure seeking, hub of activity. As Jessiah puts it, 'It was like a club at home kind of thing'. This arena of social activity has bound its members together through friendship and their common leisure time interests; partying and socializing with other Corner Members.

For the Corner Members, partying at the Corner during the weekend – and sometime weekdays – is their priority. Parties on the Corner are not the average backyard party, but instead they are weekend long bouts that Corner members live for. As expressed by Jessiah, 'Come Friday you buy your supply for the weekend and you get intoxicated'. The good times that Jessiah speaks of would often start on a Friday evening and continue over into Saturday morning beyond sunrise. However, a one-night party is not standard practice for the Corner, particularly on the weekend. Parties often continue into Sunday morning and sometimes even Monday morning. Jessiah explained

It's all about the weekend. Friday is here and it's drinking time.
Let buy a bottle, let's buy some pills and lets get high. Let's get drunk and lets have a good time. It happens from Friday

through to Sunday. Sometimes some of them even go through to Monday morning.

Despite work commitments for some of the Corner Members, the partying often does not stop on a Monday morning. The Corner Members party during the week to celebrate mid-week birthdays and other times depending on their 'mood'. Jamerson explained, 'We party weekends. You get week days were the people party as well, in the middle of the week. Even if they go to work they still drug it up'. He continued 'Coke [cocaine] is a big thing now. It overtook everything. It's normal to do coke, or any drug, during the week or anytime because you do it without anyone noticing it'.

For the Corner, regular drug and alcohol consumption is a norm. As Tauria told me:

Liquor is like a tradition, not only in the flats but throughout South Africa. Consumption in the flats is high. Everyone is thirsty and everybody wants to feel the sensation of getting drunk. It's not expensive. It is troublesome because it changes your personality. It makes you wild, violent, emotional and whatever. Consumption of alcohol in the flats is a big thing. In

every corner there are people drinking whether it's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday.

Santino also reiterated its popularity, saying '[Drinking is an] everyday thing. It is the nature of the people; both employed and unemployed. The unemployed people are sitting and drinking in the day and the workers will come home and have a drink'.

Although the good times are an integral part of the Corner, the company of family and friends is a key dimension that adds to the atmosphere and has created a sense of familiarity among its population. They consider each other to be 'family' because they have known each other for an extended period of time, some for over 20 years. Tauria indicated that some people do not consume drugs or alcohol yet often spend time at the Corner to be in the company of friends. He remarks 'Everybody spends their time there for different reasons. Some don't drug or drink, they go to spend time with their friends or family coz they've known each other for so many years'. Jamerson had a similar sentiment: 'You get use to hanging out even if you not drinking - you'll always be there. That's where the people sit, it is not always for what goes on there. Company is always there and the beers. We just used to sit there'.

The hospitality of Ava-Arrabelle and Henry, the Corner operators, made the Corner an exceptionally welcoming zone for all. Some members would ensure a visit to the Corner was a part of their daily routine. Jessiah reported he would stop at the Corner after work to ‘smoke zoll [marijuana], chill for a while, mingle and then go home’. He mentioned the easy nature of Ava-Arrabelle and Henry played a significant role shaping the atmosphere that allowed their visitors feel comfortable. Jessiah said ‘I think they were very accommodating as a couple. You enjoyed their company coz they were good company and they were very entertaining, so you felt comfortable going there and welcome. People spent time there, especially on the weekends, for the same reason’.

Long term friends and trusted cliental are granted access into the house of the Corner. Santino explained ‘If you [are a] well known client you can go inside the house, they will allow you to sit in both houses if you [are] respectable.’ Corner Members make use of the lounge room in the house of the Corner when consuming ecstasy pills. Some methamphetamine users would lay on the couch throughout the night listening to loud deep-house music. The environment was advantageous as it allowed for users. Jessiah explained, ‘It was a more closed environment especially if you [are] going ekkies because you don’t want people to see you in that state. So that was a more closed-in environment. It was on the top floor ducked away so it was

kind of [a] more conservative spot. You could sit indoors. It was big and we were allowed to sit inside and party and close the door. It was an intimate spot’.

However, not at all visitors to the Corner are granted the privilege of access into the house. New clientele are required to wait on the Corner until they are served. Santino and Jamerson stressed the importance of following this rule for two reasons: to avoid conflict from existing members; and to protect the operation of the ‘underground economy’. Jamerson explained large amounts of human traffic on the Corner easily triggers suspicion and sometimes visits from the local police. Despite the Externals being aware of the activity of the Corner, is it essential that the operation does not attract too much attention. To quote Jamerson:

We always stand outside no matter who you are. Even if you a person from here it’s best to stay outside. You can’t go straight directly into the house. The friends go inside coz if the carols [police] come they know we [are] from the flats. So it seems like we just visiting. Now you can’t come from the outside and come into the house, it’s gonna make it obvious.

Police raids are a regular part of the corner. Aware that police raids can take place at any time, members of the Corner sit outside acting as security guards on the lookout for the local police.

For the Corner Members the drugs, alcohol, partying and police raids are all normal aspects of their lives in Block Seven. Tauria believes that the activities of the Corner seem to emanate more because of the close proximity of neighbours. He explained:

It is normal because like every other place things happen. Same like the suburbs there are drug dealers, raids, problems, boys sitting on the corner where they are allowed to sit and drink smoke drugs. Because it's flat life, we more or less likely to do those things live [in view of the public]. The same things occur in the suburbs but they do it undercover in suburbs. In Block Seven we don't hide, we live too closely.

For the youth of Block Seven, in particular Jamerson, he believes that such behaviour is unique to the flats. 'We young this is what we do'. He continued to say 'If you staying here for long, obviously you gonna do it coz everybody gets drawn into the lifestyle. Coz you gonna make friends, you

gonna find friends who are living and partying and whatever. Its good and
its bad'.

CHAPTER 4: Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory has its roots in the so-called ‘Chicago School,’ a highly influential school of thought within sociology since the 1920s. Its contribution to human ecology greatly impacted the way in which social scientists made sense of the relationship between humans and their surrounding socio-cultural ‘environment’. While some aspects of the Chicago School’s theories are viewed as outdated (for example, its emphasis on ‘functionalism’), it will be suggested in this thesis that the central concept of the Chicago School scholars that people’s lifestyles are a response to their surroundings is still relevant to explaining contemporary social behavior such as that which takes place at the Block. There is, however, one important caveat: if ‘social disorganization’ is understood analytically as ‘social complexity’ (Hannerz, 1992), then there need not be any assumption as to whether society is objectively in a state of order or disorder, which is a matter of perspective.

The idea of human ecology began to take form in the 1920s when the rapid expansion of Chicago and immigrant influx began to change the cityscape (Groff 2015, 91). Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess, both sociologists of the Chicago School, had developed an interest in understanding human geography in Chicago and the forces within the system of human ecology.

This theory was used to explain the effects that urbanization has on citizens in the 'struggle for existence' (Park 1915, 3). Hawley (1994, 403) writes that fundamentally ecology is "concerned with the elemental problem of how growing, multiplying beings maintain themselves in a constantly changing but ever restricted environment. It is based on the fundamental assumption that life is a continuous struggle for adjustment of organism to environment." Therefore, human ecology is based on the idea that as a city expands, its inhabitants compete for natural resources. The stronger groups within society overcome ecological pressures using economic resources for upward mobility. The ability to attain land in the suburban areas further out from the central business district served as a reflection of this. A shortage of resources makes it difficult to accomplish idealized aspirations and obstructs the ability for upward mobility, leaving weaker groups stagnant and subjected to residing in less desirable areas of the city (Cullen and Agnew 2011, 103). At the crux of their argument was the idea that expansion causes humans to gravitate towards areas that are inhabited by people who possess a similar economic and social position. This process was coined 'distribution' (Park 1915, 54).

Park and Burgess developed the Concentric Zone model to illustrate their point. The model was composed of five zones that divided Chicago. The inner zone was labeled the "central business district" and the outer zone was

known as the 'zone of commuters'. Each zone differed in socio-economic status and consequently level of organization. As Shaw and McKay later discovered, the further a zone is from the city, the more "organized" the zone is. The model laid the foundation for the theory of social disorganization which was to surface in the 1940s (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003, 374; Cullen and Agnew 2011, 90). Shaw and McKay (1942) took an interest in attempting to understand the correlation between delinquency and an individual's zone of residency, focusing on the distribution throughout the city. Together they'd recognized that crime was not randomly distributed throughout the city but instead it was more prevalent within certain areas classified as 'disorganized'. With this, they sought to understand why crime rates are higher in certain areas by examining their social, cultural and economic characteristics. Their findings showed that commercial and industrial areas that incurred high rates of resident mobility, racial heterogeneity and poverty possessed higher number of delinquents (Sampson and Groves 1989, 774; Bursik 2012, 86), turning them into 'slums' and 'bad lands' (Park 1915, 54).

Their results suggested that the area in which individuals reside is the determinate factor of 'delinquent' behaviour (Cullen and Agnew 2011, 90). This theory tended to disregard personal traits but rather paid attention to the external forces of the environment, namely social, cultural and economic

factors. Shaw and McKay even went as far as describing deviance as a ‘natural response’ to such conditions (Kubrin 2009, 15). This placed the environment at the core of social disorganization.

Disorganized communities are traditionally characterized as economically stressed with a high residential turnover rate and heterogeneous population. Consequently, they suffer due to the differing belief and value systems which impact the capacity to function in a cohesive manner, establish common values and maintain control over the environment (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003, 375; Sampson and Groves 1989, 774; Shaw and McKay 1942, 34). As a result of the instability, the community is characterized by a state of ‘chaos’. Thus defined, social disorganization is the ‘inability of a community to realize common goals and solve chronic problems’ (Kubrin and Weitzer 374, 2003; Kubrin 227, 2010).

Marginalized minorities who are in poverty stricken communities, with little access to the benefits of social and economic resources, may engage in ‘alternative behaviors’. In the struggle for existence, individuals collectively seek alternative measures as a response to inadequate structural support and provisions, for example, through the operation of underground economies. In theory such activities would contribute to disorganization within the community; however for the operators it is a form of income that

is supporting economic advancement. Park (1915, 17) explained that individuals are in a continual state of competition for social mobility. Environmental pressures cause instability that force individuals to modify their approach to their surroundings accordingly. Urban neighbourhoods characterized by poverty are granted with an alternative path to access the economy of the city.

Shaw and McKay believed that unanimity was unattainable in communities characterized by racial and ethnic heterogeneity (Sampson and Groves 1989, 781). A community composed of multi-ethnic populations finds difficulty in the attempt to achieve common goals because of barriers caused by fear, distrust and cultural clashes (Sampson and Groves 1989, 781; Park 1915, 57). In his study of the Addams area in Chicago in the 1960s, Suttles provides a rich description illustrating the effects of racial and ethnic differences in his account of the lifestyle and ethnic dereference of the Italians and Negroes in the Addams area (1974, 94).

The effect of residential mobility adds further strain to a community. Neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of residential mobility find it difficult to establish and maintain 'social ties'. Burgess (1928, 56) explained that the zone of transition was a catchment area for second generation immigrants. Such immigrants would transit in this zone until

afforded with the opportunity to advance into socially desirable zones further away from the city centre. As a result, the urban neighbourhood has an ever-changing population, making it difficult for the community to develop and maintain cohesion, solidarity and integration and thus effective and consistent informal control over the environment (Kubrin 2010, 228). In the absence of control and direction, social norms are disregarded and an alternative set of contextual values develop, often passed down through generations through a process known as 'cultural transmission' (Zembroski 2011, 244).

Like all theory, social disorganization had its flaws and because of this the theory has been re-examined, tested and extended. Bursik and Grasmik (1993, 10) identified three levels of control exist within communities: 'private', 'parochial' and 'public'. Each of these are also affected by ethnic heterogeneity and resident mobility, negatively impacting on the ability of a community to self-regulate. Sampson and Groves (1989) later made amendments to the traditional model, adding two ecological factors and creating three structural dimensions. This model is known as the 'systematic model approach'. The purpose was to evaluate and place the emphasis on the strength of kinship and friendship networks to determine the level of informal control held by the community. In addition to low social-economic status, ethnic heterogeneity and residential mobility, Sampson and

Groves proposed that urbanization and family disruption are in fact core ecological contributors. Park (1915, 103) also made mention of the significance of the family unit in shaping delinquent behaviours of adolescent youth. Sampson (1987, 352) further elaborated on this idea, highlighting the negative effects of marital and family disruption on the individual and community. In addition, urbanization was included for its effects on attempting to maintain social order. Sampson and Groves (1989, 97-98) outline three dimensions to which a community can be judged in regards to the level of informal control: 'sparse local networks', 'unsupervised peer groups' and 'low organisational participation.'

In addition, Kubin and Weitzer (2003, 339) argue for additional developments. They explain that little attention had been paid to influence of neighbourhood culture, formal social control and the urban political economy. They argue that the consideration of such factors would greatly impact the dynamics of the relationship between deviancy and neighbourhood.

Presently, the theory of social disorganization is still used as a means to explain delinquent and criminal behaviour. This concept is applied to low socio-economic communities, typically ghettos and slum neighbourhoods, to detailing why such areas are prone to higher rates of domestic violence,

drug and alcohol misuse, violence and illegal operations (Benson et al 2003, 208; Leventhal and Gunn 2000, 309; Venkatesh 1997, 88; Brenner et al 2010; Bolland 2003, 146; Caputo 2004, 504).

Shaw and McKay (1942), Suttles (1968), and Whyte (1941) have paid a large amount of attention to understanding and explaining how social, cultural and economic factors impact neighbourhood dynamics and shape the behaviour of individuals. These scholars have highlighted the differences of the slums relative to wider community. In doing so, these scholars have made an assessment of what they consider to be socially 'disorganized' and 'organized' by paying a great deal of attention to recognizing what the slum is not. However, the research of these scholars has given little attention to the cultural context under which that reality exists. Each study has been consistent in proving that urban slums are in fact organized. As illustrated by Suttles (1968), Shaw and McKay (1941), and Whyte (1941), urban environments replace conventional norms and values with a system of norms and values differing from mainstream. When contrasted against traditional systems these are often interpreted as deviant and unorthodox. However, as I argue in this thesis, perceptions of disorganization and organization are relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape in which individuals and communities exist.

4.1 Social Disorganization of Block Seven

The systematic model of social disorganisation assists with pinpointing the underlying social forces that have shaped Block Seven. The five ecological factors - low socio-economic status, racial and ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, family disruption and urbanization - provide an understanding of the context in which Block Seven presently exists and is particularly useful for understanding the dynamics of interactions between residents and neighbourhood relationships. The three structural dimensions focus on the collective level of control that residents have over Block Seven. In turn, this provides an indication of the degree of cohesion and unity among the residents.

The data collected from the interviews indicate that the ecological factors outlined by Shaw and McKay (1967) and Sampson and Groves (1989) were present within Block Seven and had a notable impact on determining the opportunities and constraints characteristic of the surrounding socio-economic environment. Of these, economic status, family disruption, resident mobility and racial and ethnic heterogeneity seemed to have the strongest effects.

Low Socio-economic status

Urban slums are typically characterised by high levels of poverty because of social constraints causing barriers to labour force participation (Reingold et al 2001, 487). Exceptionally high levels of unemployment in South Africa have caused severe financial strain to households. Although welfare is available, citizens still face destitution (Klasen and Woolard 2008, 32). When asked about the general economic positioning of residents, interview respondents seemed to concur that the flats cater to a low socio-economic population. Allazay indicated that Block Seven has always been a poverty stricken environment. She explained ‘Everyone is in the same bracket because that is what the flats were built for, low income, single mothers’.

Another informant, Tauria, provides an account of the economic status of the Block Seven, in which he describes the conditions of some residents who are living in extreme poverty and struggle to afford basic utilities. He explains ‘Not everybody has got money to support needs and wants. Some can only afford the basics, which allows them to live such as water, bread and milk. They have nothing out of the ordinary or lavish. There are people living here without basic necessities like water and no lights’. Based on Tauria’s account it is clear that many residents in Block Seven live in distress.

The illegal economy has a strong presence in Block Seven. Jamerson explained that the sale of drugs and alcohol is the base for the operation of the illegal economy, 'They do it for the money not for the fame. Sometimes this is the only way your income can come'. The presence of the illegal trade has the community divided into two conflicting groups. Attempts to stop the operation of the underground economy have not been successful. Inadequate and inconsistent support of community meetings, weak social ties, differing values and underlying racial issues are to blame for hindering the possibility of positive development and fostering disorganization. Despite the disapproval by some residents, contributors to the underground economy are unconcerned and continue to be actively involved.

Racial and Ethnic Heterogeneity

In the original social disorganization model, Shaw and McKay (1942) found that residential mobility was a barrier to creating strong social ties. However, in my research, ethnic differences seemed to have a far more profound effect on social ties. Studies conducted by Suttles (1968), Shaw and McKay (1942), and Jahoda and West (1951) have concentrated on interracial slum dwelling. What remains consistent throughout their research is racial and ethnic differences are more apparent within highly populated slum areas. As a result, cultural differences and stereotypes are reinforced and reiterate positions of domination and subordination.

The ideological stance of the National Party remains in the outlook of the elderly Afrikaner residents, who still refuse to integrate due to their unwillingness to accept the abolishment of apartheid. Tauria explains that the elderly Afrikaner 'Don't involve themselves with the community or the people. They're still in the apartheid mind frame. Some of them have the old apartheid flag in their houses because they cannot adapt to this society'. Ethnic heterogeneity has obvious effects on the environment of Block Seven. It restricts the level of interactions and communications between community members, which in turn causes difficulty trying to achieve consensus and build constructive neighbourly relationships.

However, it is not only the whites who choose to remain aloof; it is the Nigerians as well. In Block Seven the Nigerians immigrants are a relatively small part of the population that distance themselves from other races in hopes of avoiding conflict with other Block Seven residents. Tauri describes the isolation of the Nigerians by explaining they tend not to interact with others and refrain from causing problems with fellow neighbours. He explains:

They came here to live. They came here to stay here. Nobody shits at their doorstep so I can't say they are doing anything wrong. I can't say they are doing any illegal activities within

the premises because they respect that's their house not their farm where they are going to grow shit, not their lab where they are going to make shit. No. That is their house where they know everybody and everybody knows them. So they keep to themselves and do what they need to do and live their life.

Young Coloured males of Galway have also contributed to the racial tension. In an interview with Santino, he recalls a racially fueled act of aggression whereby a group of young Colored males violently attacked a Zimbabwean man. Santino explained, 'It was an incident between a husband and wife, they are from Zimbabwe, they had a fight. The youth of our community, well the young adults between 18 and 22, stormed into the house and hit the man. They said because he's from Zim'. Despite the close proximity of neighbours, there had been no intervention. Such behaviours are messages reinforcing racial domination and subordination. When behaviour goes unchecked it creates the opportunity for similar behaviours to flourish (Kelling and Wilson 1997, 779).

Family Disruption

During the interviews the Externals raised issues surrounding the anti-social behaviour of the Corner Members. The consequences of marital and family disruption have been recognised by Sampson and Groves (1989) because of

its influence on adolescent behaviour and its negative ramifications affecting the capacity of a community to self-regulate. Allazay explains that from the age of twelve the children of Block Seven start experimenting with drugs and alcohol. In some cases, despite the presence of two parents, supervision and control remains an issue. There are some parents who regularly indulge in intoxication and therefore they have limited ability to control and monitor the youth of Block Seven. Although some residents are concerned about this behaviour and its effects on the community, they hesitate to act due to lack of unity and the fear of social retribution. One informant, Rye, explains ‘They don’t want to help implement change because there is no unity. We are a community but we not unified. Everyone is scared of making bad friends and having bad things said about them’.

Family and marital disruption not only affects the level of control, it also impacts the strength of social ties within the community. In the absence of effective parenting, control and monitoring is low and the opportunity for youth to participate in ‘unstructured and unsupervised’ activities increases (Bordua 1961, 123; Huges and Short 2013, 417). Adolescents interacting with peers who are encouraging of anti-social behaviours have a higher chance of partaking in delinquent activities, particularly youth in neighbourhoods of disadvantage, as they risk a higher chance of becoming

involved with drug and alcohol due to repetitive exposure (Hughes and Short 2013, 417; Furr-Holden et al 2010, 371; Shildrick and MacDonald 2007, 349; Guo et al 2002, 844). Brook et al (2006, 31) explained that youth gravitate toward peers who have similar interests and thus deviant youth seek the company of others who are the same. Thus, youth are encouraged to partake in such activities especially when they've witness their peers enjoying the effects of drug use (Joesph and Pearson 2002, 426).

For members of the Corner, being unrestricted and free of authority is a highlight of the Corner. Jessiah expressed his feelings on this matter.

I liked it. I think for me personally I was lacking something and I looked for it in my friends. And yes it [drugs] was allowed, all the drugs were allowed. There was nobody to tell me "no don't do that". Everybody I loved being around, was there. It was a free for all. You could do as you please and come and go as you please. Anything went there. It was an anything goes atmosphere. That's why I loved being there.

Jessiah explained other Corner Members share the same view. He quotes 'I think everyone else loved it [the Corner] for the same reason

- anything went. You could come with your drugs and come with your alcohol’.

Residential Mobility

Residents of Block Seven are divided by their perception of what the flats ought to be. Some view it as a party complex, others as quiet living quarters. Some will argue that the behaviours are typically ‘flat life’ and use this as a justification, insinuating it is common within high density living quarters. In opposition to this are the Externals, who believe the lifestyle is a perverted reality and in desperate need of change.

While a proportion of the Externals may endeavour to form an alliance to initiate change through an organizational base, they are faced with obstruction from the instability of the ecological pressures such as resident mobility. The fluctuating resident base alters the dynamics of cohesion and paralyses the possibility of maintaining and strengthening social bonds. Jessiah and Tauria indicated that the African and Indian populations are temporary residents, often abandoning Galway within a year. In his description, Tauria identifies Indians as a quiet and unobtrusive set of people, alluding to the fact that the Indians of Block Seven have little involvement with other residents and thus are socially isolated. The lack of

interaction of the Indians is discouraging to the Externals and adds to the strain of weak community relations.

CHAPTER 5: Block Lifestyle as a Cultural Choice

In the previous chapter I examined Block Seven's social organisation, which constitutes an important element of its socio-cultural environment. There is no doubt that low socio-economic status, residential mobility, race and ethnic heterogeneity, urbanization and family disruption, cause a disturbance to the equilibrium of the community that residents adapt to in certain ways. But the objective ecological conditions that constitute the set of opportunities and limitations that contribute to the emergence and continuity of places like the Corner are not sufficient to fully explain its manifestation. This is because lifestyle choices are not simply a matter of adaptation, but also a question of meaning. There are, after all, different coping mechanisms and survival strategies available to participants, including the normalized strategy of putting their heads down to focus on work or studies and saving their pennies. In fact, this is a strategy that many Externals pursue and define as appropriate. So the choice of some residents to opt into a hedonistic lifestyle and engage with an illegal economy needs to more fully engage with the question of why those practices are meaningful to them. This inevitably leads to an examination of norms and values that comprise the relative dimension of social behaviour, which is the focus of this chapter.

As a deviation from the dominant culture, sub-culture is a way of life that encompasses self-defined values, customs and behavioural systems distinguishable from mainstream traditions and conventions (Blackman 2005, 2; Inglis 2005, 6; Fischer 1975, 1323). It is a lifestyle that ‘violates conventional standards of behaviour’ through a different way of thinking, understanding and acting to what is considered normal in the wider society (Becker 1963; Osgood 1988, 81). Sub-cultures encompass their own set of beliefs, ideas and values, and “cultural form”, which binds the group together as a collective entity (Inglis 2006, 6).

Scholars have identified participation as a key element of sub-cultural continuity. Through participation, members engage in cultural rituals and become further engrossed in their culture, which establishes a sense of identity, belonging and unity. It has been well documented that individuals gravitate toward others who are of the same mind frame (Brook et al 2006, 31). Since friendship bonds are recognized as an important element that binds sub-cultural members together, the concept of solidarity is a means to understanding the attachment between sub-cultural members (Kavanaugh and Anderson 2008, 184; Suchman 1968, 150). The concept of solidarity has been used as a means to define the attachment of individuals to groups of people who become connected through multi-dimensional bonds: emotional, personal and social (Kavanaugh and Anderson 2008, 184).

These attachments formed through positive experiences that unite members through a common cause, as demonstrated through numerous studies. Deviant sub-cultures in particular experience high levels of connectivity that are produced by possessing similar attitudes of rebellion and anti-conformity to the dominant culture. Through participation and engagement, members feel a strong connection to one another that can only be achieved by defining themselves as an in-group separate to the wider society.

This was also found to be the case for members of the Corner. Each of the Corner Members interviewed had a long history of their life in Block Seven, most having lived there for over 20 years. During this time the Corner Members have become well acquainted with one another through the large amount of time spent at the Corner. Taurai says, 'We all go there for different reasons. Some do not drink, some do not drug. They go there to spend time with the friends or family'. There was mention of the bond between the Corner Members: 'We are family because we have known each other for so long'. Jessiah illustrates this well when he explains that it is through the Corner's sub-cultural rituals of partying, that members are connected and remain connected for long periods of time.

Yes there are friends that you can call friends that you made when you first moved in that you do still have and that you

maybe did the drinking and drugging an everything else with and you still remain friends though that. A lot of them remain friends because they tend to stay in Block Seven and keep themselves in Block Seven. Everybody tends to do the same thing: party, drinking, drugging. So everybody reminds friends.

Santino also emphasizes the close connection between Corner Members. In his description, he points to that fact that friends are considered as family, thus indicating a strong sense of commitment and solidarity. He remarks, 'If the families are having a weekend special [party] then the friends are involved as well. You just become a part of the family even if the blood doesn't run through your veins'.

Through positive experiences, Corner Members reaffirm their solidarity and their rejection of conformity to conventional social standards and norms (Rvinen and Stergaard 2011, 334). Through participation they are empowered and have increased network attachments, which result in an enhanced feeling of unity. This is a conscience awareness felt by members providing them with a sense of belonging, togetherness and importance (Cantillion et al 2003, 324). When members experience a sense of union, they feel a sense of personal identification with their respective community because of the mutually shared feeling of dependency, values and vision of

collective action (Cantillion et al 2003, 324). This sense of loyalty and belonging is an important attraction for participation in the Corner scene. These are traits that, from the perspective of Corner participants at least, are lacking amongst the Externals who are racially divided and pursuing their individualistic strategies of socially approved employment and restraint. Hence, what might seem to be a degenerate, aimless existence from the outside, is for Corner participants a meaningful social experience that provides a sense of identity and place – more so, in fact, than the lifestyle choices made by other residents.

The Corner Members have converted Henry and Ava-Arrabella's house into an arena of enjoyment and pleasure. In this zone they share similar experiences and a connection to one another and place (Kintrea 2010, 449). The family home of Henry and Ava-Arrabella, and the residential area in which it exists are assigned with a new symbolic meaning created by the Corner Members through the pursuit of their sub-cultural activities (Stedman 2002, 563). As illustrated by Tauria, 'I've sat everywhere. If I am high on zoll (marijuana) I go downstairs. If I am high on ecstasy I go upstairs'. He continues 'Maybe upstairs do more drugs and downstairs drink more, so if you are a drug addict you'll go upstairs. If you're an alcoholic, you'll go downstairs'.

Similarly other sub-cultures, such as skateboarders, experience a sense of attachment to their demographic places which they use to maximize their cultural experience (Woolley and Johns 2010, 223-225). These spaces take on new form and are guided by cultural rules, known to its members. For the sub-culture of the Corner, they are a collective group that has crafted their own meaning. They have extracted pieces of meaning from the dominant culture as a means to construct their difference and thus they are considered a sub-culture (Hannerz 1992, 90). Corner Members transmit meaning from one to another through their inactions and engagements. The member's response to the meaning that they've created is determined by their perception.

Santino explained the purchasing of drugs from the underground economy is done as discretely as possible to protect the interest of the Corner. As a long standing member, Santino knows the unspoken rules of the Corner. He explained it is best for visitors of the Corner to remain outside especially if purchasing drugs. Santino explained that although long term Corner Members are allowed access into the house of the Corner, they often sit outside to avoid suspicion been raised. Corner Members do their best to ensure the unwritten behavioural codes are adhered to. This is to avoid attracting the attention neighbours that engage the services of the local

police and as a mark of respect for the Corner and household that operate the Corner.

As explained by Hannerz (1992, 7), societies are a composition of intertwined cultures existing simultaneously. With this, individuals are afforded the ability to compare and contrast their culture against another. In doing so, cultural differences are made apparent. For some that are engrossed in their culture, they fail to see the validity of the next culture and are unable to relate to meanings and interpretations of other cultures, hence the conflict between the two parties. In the eyes of the Externals, the lifestyle and behaviour of the Corner it is not acceptable nor normal. A normal day should, in the opinion of Allazay, consist of 'People going to work, finding employment, not using drug selling as employment and the selling of alcohol as a means of income'. Rye thinks Block Seven should be 'quiet corridors, no loitering, no abuse being shared and no violent languages'. Jessiah makes a clear distinction between the Externals and the Corner Members, explaining that the latter have:

...no list for anything like getting up for work (this is majority not everybody), no interest to get a job, study or become better. The young adults are lost. They've lost it [motivation] whether they have completed school and some who have not graduated.

He compares this to the Externals:

There are those who lead a normal life, some even the parents of those who are out doing drugs and drinking on the weekend.

There are people who go to work and have degrees and certificates behind them and do work.

The culture under which the Externals reside has assigned a different meaning to life and such this has influenced their perception of normal. The meaning the Externals have assigned to the idea of normal is based around conventional work duties and education. The dominant culture the Externals exists is their idea of normal and this has influenced their adaption and interpretation. Participants of the Corner have an opposing view of 'normal'. To the Corner Members, the Corner is normal. Jamerson stated all his friends are drug users and that it is inevitable that one will be drawn into the lifestyle of the flats. Tauria had a similar stance: 'It is normal, because like every other place things happen'. The insider/outsider tension was also evident in Taurai's views on Afrikaners:

The old whites couldn't and still can't stand Coloureds and Africans smoking, drinking, sitting on the stairs, and acting up. They phone the police for no reason and for things that don't

make sense. If they wanted a quiet lifestyle they should have went to a farm or a suburb. They cannot stay in RDP housing and expect quiet.

All parties live in the same environment and are victim of the same ecological pressures, yet their views are misaligned. The question of 'Is the Corner normal or acceptable?' was asked. Jessiah provided an explanation detailing why he deems the Corner unacceptable. He believed the lifestyle of the Corner is not normal as '...it takes away the drive to be more than what you are'. From Jessiah's perspective, he values personal growth and progression in a conventional sense. The Corner Members may value the same things as Jessiah, but their understanding of growth and progression differs. Their interpretation of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' is shaped by their interpretation of life, their interpretation of life is shaped by culture, or subculture, in which they live (Hannerz 1992, 7).

The sub-culture of the Corner is not only a matter of adaption but more it is a lifestyle that the Corner Members have chosen. It provides them with a sense of belonging through binding each member together through their participation in their sub-cultural activities of gathering on the Corner. Through the sub-culture they have converted a family home into a party spot by assigning it with an alternative meaning. The Externals do not agree

with the lifestyle of the Corner Members as they are embedded in a different culture and therefore their meaning and interpretation of life varies from that of the Corner.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

Drawing from the theory of human ecology and social disorganization, and supplementing it with a cultural understanding of social process, I have presented an argument that situates disorganization and organization as relative to the cultural context and cognitive landscape in which individuals and communities exist. Social disorganization is the inability of a community to achieve common goals and maintain social order over community members (Shaw and McKay 1942; Sampson and Groves 1989). Communities build on a number of ecological factors, namely racial and ethnic heterogeneity, resident mobility, low socio-economic status, family disruption and urbanization. In combination with each other, these five ecological pressures cause high levels of instability and consequently hinder the growth of social ties. As demonstrated, Block Seven is a vivid example of this.

In particular, racial and ethnic differences, residential mobility and family disruption each play a major role affecting the level of social cohesion and the development of social ties among the Externals. Racial attitudes have isolated the Nigerians and elderly Afrikaners, and together with high levels of residential mobility among Africans and Indians, social control at the level of the community as a whole is lacking. The effects of family

disruption have also been mentioned. In the absence of effective parenting, youth have a greater chance to engage in delinquent activities as supervision and control is decreased.

Where the disorganization thesis proves limiting is in explaining the relative nature of the norms and values that characterizes life in Block Seven. The Externals express their disapproval of the Corner in the course of pursuing their own conventional activities. From their perspective, the biggest problem in Block Seven is the Corner. The Externals do not agree with the sub-cultural lifestyle of the Corner Members as it is not “normal”. The Externals are unhappy about the loud noise and continued disruption that penetrates through their environment. Issues surrounding the reputation that the Corner has created for Block Seven and exposure and access of young people to drugs and alcohol are a source of resentment.

Despite disapproval from the Externals, the Corner members insist that their life is normal and in fact their lifestyle is typical “flat life” behaviour. The weekend long parties, daily visits to the house of Henry and Ava-Arrabella, and regular consumption of drugs and alcohol are all standard conventions, and in fact traditional of the Corner. Each member has shown loyalty through continued participation and active engagement at the Corner. In doing so, each member has contributed to creating the cognitive landscape

of Block Seven. Although the Externals do not agree with the behaviour and life of the Corner, this is their reality that they have become accustomed too, and preferable existence to those who live a more conventional lifestyle.

The theory of human ecology is based on the idea that individuals are in a constant struggle for existence to maintain their position in society and thus are in a constant state of competition for social advancement. Until economic goals and desires are fulfilled, individuals are constrained to their present environment and forced to adapt accordingly (Park, 1915). As explained by Burgess, zone two, the zone of transition, is a catchment area composed of individuals who are attempting to ascend into a higher social class. Areas such as zone two are characterized by mixed populations and cultures, each with their own relative belief and values systems. Each individual's cultural biases shape the perception and serve as a strategy to determine appropriate responses, all of which is within the context of relativism. Diverse communities such as Block Seven entail a wide array of beliefs and norms (Sampson and Wilson 1994; Shaw and McKay 1942, Sampson and Groves 1989). Each individual belief is relative to the culture in which they belong (Wrong 1997, 294).

I have been involved in both cultures, that of the Corner Members and the Externals. When I am in South Africa at the Corner I enjoy it and sometimes wonder why would anybody not enjoy this life? It is free, easy and unrestricted. On the other hand, when I become an External, I sometimes ponder why would anybody desire that life and engage in such activities so often? I have finally found my answer through writing this thesis. I realize when I am in South Africa, and more so on the Corner, I adapt to the environment of Block Seven and behave accordingly. I participate and spend most of my time on the Corner, enjoy the company of friends and the lifestyle that I missed. Upon returning to Perth, I readjust to my regular life and the values and norms that attend my regular lifestyle. In Block Seven the process of differentiated adaption is similar, except that it takes place within the same environment, and is distributed between two groups who, due to the constraints imposed by their environment, do not have the luxury of dabbling in opposing lifestyles as I have. Such is the diversity that characterizes urban ecosystems and gives rise to the tensions and vitality that, for better or worse, provide locales like Block Seven with their unique character.

APPENDICES

1. Interview Questionnaire

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Good Times in Block Seven: A Human Ecological Approach

1. Age range
 - Over 18
2. Occupation
3. How long have you lived in Block Seven?
4. What is your perception of Block Seven?
5. How do you think others perceive Block Seven?
6. How would you describe Block Seven in terms of:
 - Economic status
 - Ethnic characteristics
 - Lifestyle
7. Since you've been living in Block Seven have you seen any changes regarding the following (below) and if so, please describe:
 - Shifting of friendship and friendship groups
 - Violence
 - Racism
 - Drug use and consumption
 - Alcohol use and consumption
8. Have you ever sat at Henry and Ava-Arabella's corner, and if so:
 - How often do you spend time there?
 - What days do you usually go there?
 - Why do you spend time there?
 - Why do you think others spend time there?
9. What happens / did happen at the Corner when you were there?
10. What is the relationship between the people who spend time at the Corner? (I.e. Friends, family, acquaintances, customers)

11. Would you consider the activities that take place of the Corner to be socially acceptable or normal? Why / why not?
12. From your point of view what do you think is the common attitude of the other residents toward the Corner and why?

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