

**POOR WHITES AND THE POST-APARTHEID LABOUR
MARKET: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND
EXPERIENCES OF WORK AMONG RESIDENTS IN A
HOMELESS SHELTER IN JOHANNESBURG**

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ABSTRACT

Despite historical precedents, poverty among white people in South Africa remains an anomaly and a paradox. Likewise, the perceptions of work and employment among poor (under- and unemployed) whites in contemporary South Africa have received scant attention in the scholarly literature. Using the conceptual frameworks of critical whiteness studies and segmented labour market theory – as a way of combining subjective and objective considerations – this research seeks to describe and explain the perceptions and experiences of the labour market among poor whites living in a homeless shelter in Johannesburg. Eight respondents were chosen for extended, in-depth interviews in an effort to develop a fine-grained understanding of the pre-existing circumstances that affected their access to information and thus shaped their choices in the labour market, as well as to ascertain what they believed to be the barriers that they face in the labour market. The findings varied, with most of the interviewees seeing ‘being white’ as the reason for their poverty and unemployment, while others exhibited some awareness of the role of their lack of skills and qualifications in their capacity to compete in higher segments of the labour market. The findings were also varied in the sense that not all interviewees experienced poverty in the same manner, with some having been part of the middle class prior to becoming poor, while others having been poor their entire lives. It was also found that class or socio-economic status seemed to have a greater impact than race on the labour market prospects of the interviewees. It is argued that the perceptions of these poor whites, which are informed by their lack of information about the workings of the labour market, rather than their lack of qualifications or their race, most affected their prospects in the labour market. The mechanisms they rely on when seeking employment reveal a poor knowledge of the local labour market and the ways in which they think their skillsets match up to the types of jobs they desire. The lack of understanding of the South African labour market and the policies that are in place to redress the legacies of apartheid are among the factors influencing the lack of success these poor whites are experiencing in their search for work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since South African whites, as a population group, have historically benefitted socio-economically from colonialism, segregation and apartheid, poverty is not typically associated with the 'white norm'. There is great importance attached to poor whites in South African history, especially in light of the social construction of the 'poor white problem' that became an impetus for the implementation of Apartheid. In light of the history of whites in South Africa and the unearned labour market advantages they were allotted by the government at the expense and extortion of other races, poor whites embody a contradictory position in contemporary South Africa as there is still a powerful association between whiteness and wealth/ power. This thesis aims to explore the various facets of this contradictory position as well as associated conceptions of whiteness and poverty by assessing how poor whites interact with and perceive the labour market. Since the search for 'decent' employment is a defining feature of the lives of poor whites, this study will focus on their perceptions and experiences of the labour market in contemporary South Africa.

'Race' has played and continues to play a fundamental role in South African society. As an enduring legacy of Apartheid, the South African economy and society are characterised by high levels of inequality (Erasmus, 2015:103; Gelb, 2003:3; Hoogeveen and Ozler, 2005:2). The labour market, in particular, is an important causal factor in the perpetuation of racial and other divisions in the workplace (Gradin, 2012:11). While there is a significant body of social scientific research on the black working and middle classes, and some research on the white middle class (Bond, 2006; Gunnarsen, Manus, Nielsen, and Stolten, 2006; Mamdani, 1996; Leibbrandt, Borat and Woolard, 1999), there is comparatively little known about poor whites in the post-Apartheid period. As both a key beneficiary and vital supporter of Apartheid labour market policies, poor whites have played a significant role in South African history. Their perceptions of work and employment in post-Apartheid South Africa are therefore likely to shed light on the complex and dynamic relations between race and class. While there is a strong correlation between these factors in post-Apartheid South Africa, this research may provide insights into the factors that lead to people identifying primarily with their race or their class.

Poor whites and white squatter camps have received a substantial amount of attention over recent years, through both newspaper articles and social media platforms (Van Heerden, 23/08/2019)

A governmental concern for poor whites in South Africa emerged in the early 1900s when many began to appear in urban areas and living in multi-racial slums around Johannesburg (Bottomley, 2012:34). These poor whites were a problem because they contradicted the image of racial superiority that the government attempted to portray, and in response to the threat of social formation, the state began to intervene to secure preferential opportunities for whites in employment throughout the economy (Davies, 1976:41-42).

At the height of Apartheid in the 1960s there was almost no unemployment among white people, and they benefitted from what amounted to a (racially-exclusive) welfare state (Bottomley, 2012:136). Under Apartheid, whites enjoyed a significant advantage within the labour market, and this allowed them to secure jobs with the highest levels of authority, stability and rewards. In the post-Apartheid era, legislation dealing with (among others) the prohibition of discrimination, affirmative action and black economic empowerment has sought to address the injustices brought about by colonialism-Apartheid and to redress the imbalances in the labour market (Alexander, 2006:3-4; Rogerson, 2000:335).

This research aims to provide an explanation of the social contradiction surrounding white poverty by outlining the role the 'poor white problem' played in the consolidation of Apartheid and how poor whites were seen as being failures of their race – embodying a disease or illness of poor whiteism that was believed to be contagious. The association between whiteness and poverty seriously challenged the notion of racial superiority. Thus, the Apartheid government implemented labour market policies that restricted black people to unskilled job categories (i.e. secondary work) and reserved the skilled occupations (i.e. primary work) for whites only (Callinicos, 2014). Along with this were the suburbs and homeless shelters dedicated to the rehabilitation of poor whites that would 'reform' them and allow them to re-enter society as productive 'good' whites. The policies implemented to secure white employment had a defining impact on the development of the South African economy, and therefore studying poor whites will not only provide nuanced information about poverty in South Africa but also an understanding for the structure of the economy today. Furthermore, analysing poor whites in this context allows insights into the ways in which they are perceived and why they experience poverty the way they do.

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

The primary aim of this research is to document and analyse the perceptions and experiences of the labour market among poor whites living in a homeless shelter. As the research largely deals with perceptions, it was important to get to know the life experiences of the interviewees to develop a fine-grained understanding of the poverty they experience. An understanding of the pre-existing circumstances the interviewees were born into that affected the access to information and choices they made are key to developing an idea of the causes of the poverty as well as the type of poverty they experience. Along with understanding their perceptions, I offer an objective point of view regarding the realities of the South African labour market, so that the reader can see whether their perceptions are accurate or not, and because it can offer insight into ways their perceptions may heed them from reasonable success in the labour market. It also allows for an explanation as to why interviewees are not having success in the labour market, demonstrating that while they believe the main causes to be their race, there are other factors affecting their circumstances. In addition, I also aimed to investigate the social stigma around white poverty, as well as how it affects not only how the interviewees view their circumstances and themselves, but how they are perceived by others. The Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee has approved this research throughout.

Understanding the social stigma and the history surrounding the construction of the poor white problem is particularly important for this research because it helps maintain the idea of the distinction between whiteness as a biological reality and whiteness as a discursive construct. It is necessary to view whiteness in terms of subjective reality rather than an objective skin colour, as it is the experiences of “being white” that these interviewees have, rather than the mere fact that that they “are white” that are important to this research.

1.3 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

As the research is aimed at understanding the perceptions of the labour market among poor whites living in a (largely atypical) community. The research analyses the perceptions these poor whites have of the labour market and how these poor whites make sense of their position within it. While getting to know their subjective perceptions and experiences, I will simultaneously be providing an objective perspective of the labour market, against which their perceptions will be analysed. Important to this study is understanding the subjective perceptions of the labour market among the interviewees, that are to be assessed against a

background of segmented labour market theory that offers an objective account of the obstacles facing poor whites in the contemporary South African labour market. Both perspectives are necessary to make sense of poor whites and the job market in post-Apartheid SA. A study that prioritises subjective views runs the risk of voluntarism ('everything is possible'), while the prioritisation of objective factors runs the risk of determinism ('everything is pre-determined') (Conrad, 2004:428).

To achieve this objective, theoretical framework that will inform the analysis draws on two (largely distinct) bodies of thought. Firstly, critical whiteness studies analyse the historical and social construction of 'hegemonic whiteness' (Nichols, 2010:4). It is well suited to the study because it advances a conceptual framework that seeks to analyse the linkages between racist social science and the consolidation of Apartheid (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:480). To make sense of the subjective perceptions these poor whites have of their socioeconomic position, the following aspects of the approach will be used. Critical whiteness studies regard 'whiteness' as more than identity, but as a position of power formed and protected through slavery, colonialism, segregation and apartheid (Nichols, 2010:4). It aims to create an understanding of institutional racism as well as how whites are implicated in these systems. As such, critical whiteness studies are a necessary antidote to discourses such as White Talk, white victimhood and white guilt (Nichols, 2010:10; Steyn, 2004:143). It is able to provide a rich conceptual framework for analysing the functions and meanings associated with whiteness (Hughey, 2010:1289) and can be an analytical tool for analysing the current 'identity crisis' faced by poor Afrikaners within the 'new' South Africa (Steyn, 2004:143).

Critical whiteness studies have been subjected to critique (Blum, 2008; Bonnet, 1996; Chen, 2017; Liodakis, 2010; Satzewich, 2007). These critics argue that race (and whiteness) is not the fundamental basis of inequality and that other factors such as age, gender, education, education, occupation and experience in the labour market are also important when considering inequality. Therefore, whiteness cannot alone account for white privilege as it cannot be analysed apart from class and gender, among others (Chen, 2017:19). The notion of 'intersectionality' emphasises the simultaneity of race, gender and class (among others) in shaping people's lives (Carastathis, 2014:304). It can be used to overcome the tendency in critical whiteness studies to view all privilege in terms of race. 'Whiteness' does not confer on all the same privilege, and therefore a poor white person wields less symbolic power than that of a wealthier white person (Henry and Tator, 2006:46).

These shortcomings may be addressed by combining critical whiteness studies with segmented labour market theory, that allows for an objective analysis that goes beyond the white body and inter-race relations and accentuates wider processes of segmentation in the labour market. In this way, my research also explores the subjective and objective dimensions of poverty and analyses the perceptions of poor whites – which is the subjective lens – against a background of labour market segmentation theory – as the objective perspective – to understand the challenges poor whites are encountering in the labour market. Labour market segmentation theory is also useful for this study in that it opposes the orthodox economic account, which states that unconstrained labour market competition will invariably produce a ‘level’ playing field. The former argues that labour markets are divided into distinct segments that are distinguished by different characteristics and rules (Deakin, 2013:3). In line with critical whiteness studies, labour market segmentation theory views race in relational terms – that is, ‘whiteness’ can only be understood in relation to ‘blackness’. Segmentation theory also highlights the obstacles to occupational mobility confronting employees in secondary jobs. Analysing poor whites in these terms will deepen our understanding of how race, class and gender interact to determine challenges and opportunities in the job market.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since the proposed research is aimed at achieving a detailed understanding of the interviewees’ perceptions of the labour market and their position within it, a qualitative research design is best suited. Qualitative research reveals the processes of meaning making within a specific context (Biklen and Casella, 2007:3). Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997) define analysis as involving close engagement with the data, and interpretation as taking a step back from the immediacy of the field and the data and separating ourselves from them. By employing a qualitative research approach, the researcher can interpret and study social phenomena by considering the meanings people attach to their experiences within their natural settings (Creswell, 2009). To be precise, the strategy that will be adopted within the qualitative research is that of ethnography. Ethnography is primarily a process that attempts to describe and interpret social expressions between people and groups (Lune and Berg, 2017:108). For LeCompte and Schensul (1999), (writing specifically about ethnography), analysis involves bringing order to the data that have been collected, summarising, and looking for patterns and themes. Interpretation means ‘going beyond results [...] attaching meaning and significance to the patterns, themes, and connections that the researcher identified during analysis’ (1999:5).

Using inductive reasoning, ideas connecting the theory and the data will be generated to ensure logical connections are drawn by the researcher (Reichert, 2014:123). In addition, drawing on hermeneutic theory and the methodology of interpretivism, which may be used to analyse both verbal and non-verbal communication, the researcher aims to make sense of the motivations underlying the interviewees' perceptions (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999:59-60).

The initial plan outlined in the proposal was to interview residents at the informal settlement of Coronation Park in Pretoria. However, upon learning the settlement had moved to Munsieville; I found a smaller settlement of poor whites living informally on a property owned by the father of one of its residents. At this site, I learned of a predominantly white homeless shelter through an employee of the Human Sciences Research Council. After contacting the homeless shelter, access to the site was granted and I was able to interview 10 consenting adults in October 2018.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten residents to gain a fine-grained understanding of their perceptions of their socioeconomic context. Using convenience sampling, the interviews were conducted in a private area on the property of the homeless shelter, referred to by the pseudonym *Die Rivier*. The interviews were recorded using a recording device and were transcribed by the researcher.

Five males and five females between the ages of 27 and 57 were interviewed to assess whether and how perceptions of poor whites differ based on gender and age. I adopted the same approach as Schuermans and Visser (2005:260) in conducting the interviews: these involved a series of in-depth interviews with additional questions that began after the interviewee was asked to narrate their life story and to explain how they were led to their current position in the homeless shelter.

It is important to address the limitations of my study. This study, much like the others covered in this dissertation, does not allow for a general application to all of South Africa's poor whites as it is not meant to be statistically representative due to the number of interviewees involved and the scope of the research. The focus is on gaining insights into the meanings that the interviewees attached to particular social phenomena; work and employment, in this case. Furthermore, the aim of my research is not to demonstrate diversity within whiteness by considering the perceptions of a minority and uncommon group of poor whites. Rather, the aim is to understand their perceptions of the labour market in terms of having been a part of a privileged racial group. In light of the social contradiction poor whites embody by not

conforming to what has become socialised as ‘normal’ for whites, these individuals may possess interesting insights that may help in understanding how they rationalise their circumstances. Thus, the study does not challenge existing research on racial inequalities in South Africa, but rather attempts to deepen sociological knowledge of racial and class divisions in South Africa.

1.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The table below lists some of the biographical information of the individuals who participated in my research. This is followed by a brief outline of each participant’s history and present situation.

Table 1: Biographical information of interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Home language	Home town/ province	Period of residency
Andrietta	27	Female	Afrikaans	KwaZulu-Natal	9 Months
Tinus	30	Male	Afrikaans	Johannesburg	3 Years
Christien	29	Female	Afrikaans	Orkney	4 Years
Riaan	39	Male	Afrikaans and English	Johannesburg	3 Weeks
Amy	36	Female	English and Afrikaans	Johannesburg and East London	3 Months
Wikus	41	Male	Afrikaans	Johannesburg	25 Years
Lieve	37	Female	Afrikaans	Johannesburg	9 Months
George	54	Male	Afrikaans and English	Durban	2 Years

Andrietta and her family were brought to *Die Rivier* after her husband lost his job and they both began abusing drugs. They have since overcome their addiction while living at the homeless shelter. Growing up, Andrietta’s father was a boilermaker and her mother a housewife. She went to school at numerous places and areas because they relocated often. Andrietta attended primary schools in Witpoortjie, South Natal, Port Shepstone and went to Highschool in South Natal. She dropped out of school before finishing because she wanted a better life for her younger brother and began working as an escort. After raising her brother, she got married. She worked for her ex-fiancé’s locksmithing business and worked at a few

bars as a bartender. She has two children – three and nine years of age – who stay with her and her husband at *Die Rivier*.

Tinus is was brought to the homeless shelter by a friend after losing his job and his home because of a drug addiction. The owners of the shelter helped him overcome the addiction and he has been clean for three years. He lives with his wife and his 3 sons and works on the property for *Die Rivier*. Growing up, Tinus' mother was a housewife and his father worked on the railway. He attended Piet Van Vuuren Primary school in Brixton and Burger Highschool where he left school in grade 10 and started working.

Christien has been living at *Die Rivier* for four years since choosing to move out of her sister's home. She had no income and no place to live, so she moved into *Die Rivier* where she now works on the property in the kitchen for her bed and her meals. She lives by herself in a room with her son, who attends the creche on the property. While Christien was growing up, her father worked on the mine and her mother was a housewife. Her mother also worked a tuckshop that they owned for extra income situated near the mine. Her father went on early pension because of a debilitating accident and took all of the children out of school, leaving her unable to complete her schooling after grade 8. She then started working when she was 15 years old. She wanted to be a physiotherapist but was unable to finish school or afford to learn further. Christien experienced a lot of childhood trauma that has left her feeling like she does not fit into the world.

Riaan expressed that what brought him to *Die Rivier* were custody court battles that caused him to spend time in jail, lose money, his job and his house. This began in 2017 and lead him to living in the homeless shelter. Riaan was born in Krugersdorp and grew up on the West Rand, and he moved to Rivonia where he lived before arriving at *Die Rivier*. His mother was a single parent and worked teacher for a primary school in Helderkruin. He attended school there and thereafter attended another in Witpoortjie until grade 10 and then obtained his matric in Roodepoort. A few years later Riaan worked part time at Bimbos to fund a health and safety diploma at a Krugersdorp Technikon.

Amelia moved into the homeless shelter after she had gone on maternity leave and had her baby, during which the husband lost his job due to the company he worked for folding. She was born in Walkersville, Johannesburg and grew up in East London and thereafter lived in Durban. Growing up, Amelia's father was an IT technician and her mother was a debt tracer. She attended Boskop Primary school and matriculated at Randpark High. After finishing

school, she worked “on and off”. After matriculating, Amelia had the opportunity to study at the University of Johannesburg but became addicted to heroin, and after attending for a month someone alerted her parents and she was excluded. She has since not pursued tertiary education again but began working various jobs. Amelia, her husband and her one-year-and-four-months-old baby share a room at *Die Rivier* and are dependents of Amelia’s husband.

Wikus has lived at the shelter since he lost both of his parents at the age of 16, after which the owners of the homeless shelter adopted him. His birth parents were from Scotland and England, and his adopted parents are South African Afrikaners. Growing up, Wikus’ birthparents had jobs, his mother was a nurse and his father was a construction worker. Wikus did not finish school and stopped attending in grade 7. He has lived at *Die Rivier* since he was adopted after his parents died and said that he will stay there for the rest of his life.

Lieve arrived at the homeless shelter after the end of a turbulent relationship with a partner who abused drugs. They could no longer afford to pay rent and were evicted. Since then, Lieve lives at the homeless shelter for with two of her four children. She was born in the Helen Joseph Hospital, and has travelled around a bit to places such as Port Elizabeth, Vereeniging, Newlands and Edenvale. She attended Primary school in Newlands and High School in Edenvale but did not finish. She was pregnant at 14 and therefore was excluded from school and got married to her first husband at 15. Lieve said that she has been poor her whole life, however, while living in Vereeniging the conditions she lived under were dire.

George was born in Durban and went to boarding school in Potchefstroom where he matriculated. His mother was a hairdresser and his father an electrician. He came to *Die Rivier* after himself and his ex-wife were evicted for not paying the rent and George battled with a drinking problem that left him without a job or place to sleep. He stays in the singles quarters with seven other men but is going to be married to another woman at *Die Rivier* with two children, which he will then get to share a room with.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

Critical whiteness studies and labour market segmentation theory were used to analyse the data. As this thesis largely deals with the perceptions of poor whites, an understanding of their subjective perceptions is necessary, and the theoretical lens to deal with this part of the analysis is critical whiteness studies. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theory and highlights the most important points applicable to the data. Critiques and shortcomings of whiteness studies

are discussed as well. One limitation is highlighted by the concept of ‘intersectionality’ that argues not all privilege can be assessed in terms of whiteness and stresses the intersecting factors of age, gender and class (among others) in the assessment of privilege.

Although the thesis is geared toward understanding the subjective perceptions of these poor whites, the aim is also to provide an objective lens against which their perceptions can be checked. This is provided by labour market segmentation theory, which emphasises the structural and systemic features of the labour market. The origins of segmentation theory are outlined, followed by a discussion of pre-existing circumstances and how they affect the knowledge people have and how these in turn affect the choices they make, particularly in the labour market. This information will form the basis of the argument that it is predominantly class affecting the lives of these poor whites, despite the fact that they view race as the primary determinant of their situation.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of poverty in South Africa among different population groups as well as the segmented labour market that exists in South Africa. In this chapter, the ways in which members of the secondary segment of the labour market survive, find work and escape unemployment, are explored. Statistics of poverty and unemployment in South Africa are also provided for all population groups, demonstrating the small size of the population group that is being studied. Furthermore, I will explore how the social construction of whiteness began and where the stigma surrounding poor whites originated. This chapter aims to create an understanding of the various roles the government, the church, the poor whites, the Carnegie commission and transnational governmentality played in the construction of the poor white problem.

This chapter shows how early 1900s poor whites, who were a discomfiture to a government seeking to create an image of white superiority, became the cornerstone of the emerging Apartheid ideology. This discussion will allow us to understand the social contradiction these poor whites embody today by showing how certain standards of living were historically associated with whiteness as just rewards for the ‘superior’ race. In this chapter, the different policies and ideologies, which were developed to prioritise the economic upliftment of poor whites as a means to secure the hegemony of the whites-only government, are discussed. Included in the discussion are the different ways in which ‘white poverty’ was socialised to be ‘unnatural’. In doing so, I analyse the notion of what it means to be a ‘good white’ and a ‘failed white’ as well as the social practices and separate development policies that were put in place

to ‘rehabilitate’ the failed whites so that they could become ‘reformed’ individuals who ‘deserve’ economic success.

Using the concept of ‘liminality’, this chapter also addresses the ways in which poor whites have had to re-orient themselves in South Africa and to reappraise their expectations of the labour market. Along with this, I consider how the social contradiction that poor whites embody plays out in their survival strategies and labour market expectations. The transition to democracy entailed a political, ideological and economic shift that compelled some whites to reorient themselves and their identity. This shift from a minority government, which underplayed the differences between whites in South Africa, will be used to explain why the interviewees felt that whites no longer “stand together”.

The data analysis builds on the information gathered in the contextual chapter regarding what is known about poor whites. With the insights gained from the existing research, I explore the ways in which the poor white interviewees perceived and experienced the labour market. The first section of the data analysis involves an assessment of the ways these poor whites lived and how they perceived and experienced living at the homeless shelter, *Die Rivier*. In asking about the daily routines of the interviewees, I get to know the challenges they faced in living at the homeless shelter, what they enjoyed about living there and what they found to be difficult.

Following the above discussion, chapter 4 assesses the knowledge of job opportunities among interviewees. Herein the interviewees’ expectations of wages, working conditions and other work-related benefits are evaluated when searching for a job. I also calculate the estimated earning of the participants to discover the type of poverty they experienced. Thereafter, I sought to gauge the labour market successes and failures among participants by asking them to reflect on how often they had been successful in interviews.

Building on their engagement with the labour market, the succeeding section of the analysis turns to perceptions of the labour market and how much the interviewees knew about the South African labour market. With this discussion, I am able to explore how the poor whites at *Die Rivier* made sense of the labour market. In analysing how the interviewees made sense of the labour market I also evaluate how they experienced whiteness and poverty in contemporary South Africa. In doing so, I investigate whether they thought ‘white poverty’ was on the rise since 1994 as well as whether they perceived ‘white poverty’ differently from ‘black poverty’.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES AND LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION THEORY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the way poor whites at the homeless shelter *Die Rivier* view the post-Apartheid labour market in light of their race and socio-economic position. Therefore, it is necessary to outline the concepts surrounding race prior to discussing whiteness. Important to this research is the distinction between race as a biological fact and as a social construction, because these whites, while bearing the biological features of whiteness, do not embody what is attributed to whiteness in terms of wealth and status. Once terms such as race, racism and discrimination have been discussed, the key concepts of critical whiteness studies and labour market segmentation theory will be delineated. Key aspects of whiteness studies include the neutrality and invisibility of whiteness, white privilege and the problem of colour-blindness. Finally, some of the shortcomings of critical whiteness studies are outlined. It is then argued that these limitations can be addressed by labour market segmentation theory. Key aspects of this theory, such as its origins, its emphasis on prevailing circumstances, and its views of access to information and its influence on choices in the labour market, are discussed. Following this discussion is an analysis of the secondary segment of the labour market and the way in which the segmented labour market in South Africa takes its shape. It is then suggested that these two (largely separate) theories can be connected via the notion of intersectionality, which argues that not all privilege can be viewed in terms of race and that other factors such as gender and class also intersect in people's lives, thereby determining their life chances.

2.2 DEFINING RACE

Williams and Eberhardt (2008:1033) argue that when 'race' is cast as a biological marker of individuals, people perceive racial out-group members as unrelated to the self and therefore unworthy of attention and affiliation. Using this argument, Williams and Eberhardt (2008:1033) state that it is in this manner that biological conceptions of race provide justification for a racially unequal hierarchy and the continued social marginalisation of historically disadvantaged race groups. Williams and Eberhardt (2008:1033) argue that the traditional way

race has been viewed is through the lens of biological essentialism. ‘Race’, here, has been understood as a fundamental and stable source of division among humankind that is rooted in biological makeup. More recently, the discussion around race has become about social construction, initially created for purposes of maintaining a hierarchical social order that has now become a marker of cultural orientation, social identity and experiences with discrimination (Williams and Eberhardt, 2008:1033).

Smedley and Smedley (2005:17) argue that ethnicity and culture are related phenomena and have no intrinsic connection to variations in human biology or race. They define ethnicity as “clusters of people who have common culture traits that they distinguish from those of other people” (Smedley and Smedley, 2005:17). Therefore, people sharing a common language, geographical locale or place of origin, religion, sense of history, traditions, values, beliefs, food habits and so forth are perceived and view themselves as a part of a particular ethnic group (Smedley and Smedley, 2005:17). Essentially, since culture traits are learned, ethnicity and ethnic traits are transmissible to other people (Smedley and Smedley, 2005:17).

Individuals have different conceptions of race: some may identify with a different racial group than their appearance would indicate or they may have learned that scientists have found no genetic markers for race in the human genome, suggesting to the individual that race is imperfectly linked to human biology (Williams and Eberhardt, 2008:1033). Someone may have also travelled to a country where their own race is perceived differently than it is at home, which may suggest to them that race is impermanent and culturally variable (Williams and Eberhardt, 2008:1033). In light of these differing perceptions of race, one may draw the conclusion that racial group membership is a (partly) contingent aspect of the socio-cultural environment (Williams and Eberhardt, 2008:1033). Because of the varying conceptions of race, Braun, Wolfgang and Dickenson (2013:1365) state that researchers use different methods to identify race, such as self-identification based on appearance, surname, lineage, records, language, tribal membership, birthplace, residence and a combination of participant and observer identifications.

The distinction between race as a biological fact and race as a social construct is vitally important to my research. Davies (2009), in line with Critical Whiteness Studies, argues that ‘whiteness’ is less about objective skin colour than subjective identity. Therefore, the challenge remains to understand how the interviewees participating in this research constructed their sense of ‘being white’ in contemporary South Africa. Consequently, the race of the

interviewees matters because of how they interpret their experiences rather than just the mere fact of 'being white'. Davies (2009:5) argues that identity is both a structural and subjective condition determined by historical forces and the prevailing structure of power relations. This means that a balance must be found between the agency (or subjectivity) of the phenomenon and the structural backdrop against which it is realised (Davies, 2009:5).

According to Grosfoguel (2016:10), racism is a belief in a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority among humans that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by institutions of the “capitalist/ patriarchal/ Western-centric/ Christian-centric modern / colonial world system”. Grosfoguel (2016:10) argues that the people atop the racial hierarchy are recognised socially in their humanity as human beings, and thus enjoy access to human rights, material resources and social recognition of their subjectivities, identities, epistemologies and spiritualities. The racial categories in the lower segments of the hierarchy are considered sub-human and their humanity is both questioned and negated, and their access to the aforementioned rights is denied (Grosfoguel, 2016:10). Since race is a social construct rather than a biological fact, Grosfoguel’s definition of racism is fitting as it states that racism can be marked by colour, ethnicity, language, culture and religion (Grosfoguel, 2016:10). This definition allows us to understand that there are diverse forms of racism in different regions of the world depending on (among others) different colonial histories (Grosfoguel, 2016:10).

Racial discrimination, according to Ong and Fuller-Rowell (2009:1259), is “unfair, differential treatment on the basis of race”. Grosfoguel (2016:10) argues that “racialisation” is a process that occurs through the marking of bodies – some are racialised as superior and others as inferior. However, even when skin colour appears the same, racism can occur not only through the marker of skin, but other factors like religion. According to Taulke-Johnson (2018:543), the social construction of discrimination can also work to reinforce status-quo (hierarchy) by minimising the experience of systematic discrimination, while also encouraging people to both blame and legitimate targets for discrimination. Racial discrimination denies the individual what is due to him or her under society’s agreed standards of merit (Kennedy, 1990:710).

Berman and Paradies (2008:3) state that a common approach to understanding racism is the combination of prejudice and power. These authors draw on Essed (1990:11) in their definition of racism as “the definite attribution of inferiority to a particular ethnic/racial group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group”. Berman and

Paradies (2008:3) also refer to the definition provided by Bonilla-Silva (1997), which states that “racism is a social system involving ethnoracial categories and some form of hierarchy that produces disparities in life chances between ethnoracial groups”. However, Berman and Paradies (2008:3) note that racism does not have to depend on ideological premises, does not have to involve prejudice or promote capitalist interests and can be perpetuated by individuals from ethno-racial groups with limited social power. This applies to poor whites, who have less symbolic power than whites in a stronger economic position (Henry and Tator, 2006:46).

To unify definitions of racism and overcome the different limitations that each may have, Berman and Paradies (2008:4) define racism as “that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups”. According to this approach, racism can be expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs), prejudice (racist emotions/ affects) or discrimination (racist behaviours or practices) (Berman and Paradies, 2008:4). Thus, in addition to disadvantaging minority ethno-racial groups in society, racism also results in certain ethno-racial groups (such as whites) being privileged and accruing unfair opportunities (Berman and Paradies, 2008:40).

Berman and Paradies (2008:4) also argue that racism can occur even in instances where treatment is equal – in fact, it is unequal treatment such as affirmative action or different forms of positive discrimination, that is fair and just. Affirmative action is defined by Boylan (2002:117) as a “policy that gives a preference to individuals based upon their belonging to designated groups who are underrepresented not only in most desirable occupational classes, but also school admissions and government contracts”. Positive discrimination and affirmative action are forms of indirect anti-racism that serve to combat indirect racism, which would occur in the presence of equal treatment. These measures also seek to redress the disadvantage that is caused by a history of racism (Berman and Paradies, 2008:6).

Anti-racism, defined by Berman and Paradies (2008:5) as “the endeavour to create equality of opportunity”, includes all efforts that combat racism at any level. Boylan (2002:118) notes that individuals from a disadvantaged group refer to those from a “clearly defined socioeconomic-racial-gender group that is statistically underrepresented” in relation to the size of the group. A distinction is also made between ‘advantaged’ and ‘disadvantaged’ groups of individuals, with the former “possessing properties, work habits, general demeanor and/ or work production that is valued in the general society” (Boylan, 2002:118). The latter implies “not possessing properties, work habits, general demeanor and/ or work production habits valued by the general

public” (Boylan, 2002:118). The assumption is that individuals from these respective backgrounds will tend to be that way too (Boylan, 2002:118). Thus, we can only explain the continued existence of racism in a society like South Africa – where, since 1994, the law prohibits discrimination against people on the basis of their skin colour – by distinguishing between discrimination and disadvantage.

Learning to understand the perceptions of the labour market in terms of both critical whiteness studies and segmented labour market theory is also beneficial in this way – Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) can help the researcher understand why subjectively these poor whites will view the labour market as being discriminatory. Factually, we know that whiteness in this sense is an aspect of disadvantage rather than discrimination with anti-racist policies that seek to level the playing field of the labour market. Despite affirmative action, as Kraak (1995:679) points out, discriminatory practices in the occupational structure have persisted.

2.3 ‘SUBJECTIVE LENS’ OF CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES

Race has been defined as a biological reality and as a social construction, while racial discrimination has been studied through distinctions between racism, anti-racism and discrimination versus disadvantage. CWS, which adopts what I will refer to as a ‘subjective lens’, is concerned with the construction of ‘whiteness’ and its effects. CWS emerged out of a dissatisfaction with multiculturalism’s alleged inability to challenge Eurocentric epistemology and its associated white privileges, reinforcing the *status quo* and leaving intact racial inequality (Niemonen, 2010:53). These approaches view ‘whiteness’ from a social constructionist perspective and focus on the lived experience of ‘being white’ and how it directs, often in the background, the norms of our lifeworld. CWS aim to help address the differential workings of whiteness as it manifests within different contexts, experiences and historic moments (Pedersen and Samaluk, 2012:9-10).

Adopting CWS as a way of thinking about race is a means of questioning prevalent perspectives, privileges and interests (Pedersen and Samaluk, 2012:9). CWS seek to analyse the construction of white racial identities and white supremacy and is applicable to the South African context when we consider the linkage between racist ‘social science’ and the consolidation of Apartheid (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:480). CWS provide a tool for understanding the meanings associated with ‘whiteness’ and how it functions (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:480).

While there is considerable literature on the topic, there are two themes in particular that resonate throughout most of the CWS literature (Jeyasingham, 2012:670,671). The one concerns the invisibility and neutrality of whiteness for most white people, and the other relates to the existence of unearned and unacknowledged privileges for white people (Jeyasingham, 2012:671). The former focuses on the ways in which black people are seen to be ‘raced’ or racialised, while white people continue to be presented as the norm (Jeyasingham, 2012:671). The latter explores the range of unearned social privileges that are said to be possessed by whites but are largely invisible to them (Jeyasingham, 2012:672). The concept of ‘whiteness’ can be used to critically examine entitlement and privilege among poor whites, who cannot otherwise make sense of their socio-economic circumstances.

2.3.1 ‘Neutrality’ and ‘Invisibility’ of Whiteness

Whiteness embodies the belief that the West had a distinctive advantage through a combination of history, race and culture, which gave whites superiority over blacks and marked them as the embodiment of civilisation (Niemonen, 2010:55). Through the various practices that go unrecognised, whiteness has been bestowed with qualities such as luxury, power, authority, beauty, refinement, purity and normality (Niemonen, 2010:54). Owen (2007:206) maintains that whiteness contains structuring properties that condition social practices, cultural representations, as well as the formation of identities. Owen (2007:207) refers to ‘structure’ in terms of Anthony Giddens’ conception, which defines it as a continuous process of “structuration”. Social structures are not fixed but are (re)produced and altered through social practices that are taken for granted as norms with unacknowledged conditions of action (Giddens, 1984). These structural properties then become both the medium and the outcome of social practices (Owen, 2007: 207).

Notions of ‘whiteness’ are not guided by biological foundations as much as the meanings that are ascribed to them and thus depend on the social definitions accorded to them (Guess, 2006:653). Whiteness is analysed by Guess (2006:656) as a basic feature of social organisation in that reality is socially defined and definitions are embodied as the individuals and groups who uphold them are “definers of reality”. In this way, ‘whiteness’ structures the way in which whites know and imagine the nation (Mullaney, 2007:99). Whiteness is maintained through social processes and it is argued that the political force of whiteness lies in its quality as a “neutral maker” (Pedersen and Samaluk, 2012:9). Consequently, whiteness is often unchallenged and unarticulated and can remain as an invisible social, political and economic

norm (Pedersen and Samaluk, 2012:9). CWS argue that it is through the process of questioning what is presented as ‘the norm’ that whiteness becomes visible and tangible to white people as a racialized category, which disrupts the image of whites not being a part of a racial group (Pedersen and Samaluk, 2012:10). This is the source of the notion of the ‘invisibility’ of whiteness; it is argued to be a result of hegemonic whiteness occupying the empty space of “normality” in contemporary culture (Owen, 2007:634).

Because the norms and standards perpetuated by whiteness are intangible (although they have concrete effects), whiteness remains largely invisible to those who do not experience its effects. In post-Apartheid South Africa, as elsewhere, this ‘invisibility’ lies in the way in which whiteness is constructed and maintained: “it does not occur in overt displays, articulations and benefits of superiority, but by covert discursive and non-discursive practices that are evident in the reproduction of whiteness” (Matsebula, Sonn and Green, 2007:483). The ‘invisibility’ of whiteness stems from the fact that most white people are not in the subordinated position of most black people, which can leave these whites without the tools necessary to develop an objective understanding of the world and what they take for granted as ‘normal’ (Niemonen, 2010:56).

Not surprisingly, many whites are not inclined to perceive or understand the pervasive impact of racism because they may not possess the positionality and conceptual framework to do so. These would allow them to see beyond their whiteness and understand their contributions to institutionalised racism, which have become normalised in society (Niemonen, 2010:56). An example, which is provided by Niemonen (2010:57), relates of white people thinking they are decent, moral and non-racial citizens because they are unaware of the way they are contributing to the perpetuation of systemic injustice. Whiteness is more visible and tangible to those, such as black people in South Africa, who experience the effects of racism and discrimination, and who have a long history of resistance against it (Matsebula et al., 2007:438).

2.3.2 White Privilege

As mentioned above, whiteness is a social construction maintained through social norms and actions. These have concrete effects that are reproduced through transfers of wealth and lead to systemic inequalities that are difficult to overcome (Nichols, 2010:4). In this regard, CWS attempt to create an understanding of institutionalised racism and how whites are implicated in these systems (Nichols, 2010:4). As the privileged position atop the racial hierarchy, whiteness can have an effect on life chances that shapes access to resources such as housing, education

and employment. Even if they derive very little, if anything, from their class position, economically, poor whites cling to white identity because the latter is their only – and therefore their most precious – property. “Whiteness is the consolation prize for those who have nothing else” (Niemonen, 2010:55).

2.3.3 A ‘Colour-Blind’ Ideology

Whiteness can also manifest itself in ‘colour-blind’ claims that race has declined in significance and that racism is only the fault of individuals (Niemonen, 2010:56). According to CWS, such colour-blindness is the most pervasive and problematic ideology of the post-Civil Rights era in the United States of America (Niemonen, 2010:57). Colour-blindness is “the assertion that racial groups are essentially all alike despite distinctive histories and unequal social locations, and that disparities in socioeconomic attainment are a consequence of meritocratic processes” (Niemonen, 2010:57). This is a vital part of racism and it correlates strongly with capitalist ideology. Hence, the anti-racist mechanisms mentioned above have been put into place so ensure equality for groups that are discriminated against and/or suffered historical disadvantage.

This ‘invisibility’ and ‘neutrality’ of whiteness represents the largest problem of colour-blindness as it stems from a lack of acknowledgment of the causes and effects of racial ordering (Lewis, 2004:624). It is guised as an ideology against racism but prevents whites from seeing the effects of institutionalised racism (disadvantage) and reinforces whiteness as an unquestioned norm (Niemonen, 2010:57).

The end of Apartheid disrupted the normative order and invited opposing discourses from the white community, including “defensive positioning” (Matsebula et al., 2007:483). Some whites equate the absence of overt or institutionalised racial discrimination with equality of opportunity and believe that this has ‘levelled the playing field’. As such, these whites tend to believe that efforts to reverse discrimination, such as affirmative action, are unnecessary because socio-economic success is attributed to those who study and work hard (i.e. meritocracy prevails). It is therefore important to note that even poor white people still have privilege, and that social mobility among people of the same gender and class would be different if they were not of the same race (Howard, 2004:70). It is therefore important to study class and gender, in addition to race, as they also exert their own constraints on people’s life chances and opportunities (Howard, 2004:71).

2.3.4 Applicability of Critical Whiteness Studies

CWS is strong on the subjective aspects of racism and the taken-for-granted assumptions about being white, making it very useful for understanding, in light of the broader construction of whiteness in South Africa, the subjective perceptions of the poor whites at *Die Rivier* of the post-Apartheid labour market. However, CWS has been subjected to wide-ranging critique (see, for example: Blum, 2008; Bonnet, 1996; Chen, 2017; and Satzewich, 2007), who all argue that race (and whiteness) is not the fundamental basis of inequality and that other factors such as socio-economic status, age, gender, education, occupation, and experience in the labour market are equally, if not more, important when considering inequality. Therefore, whiteness alone cannot account for white privilege as it cannot be analysed apart from class and gender, among others (Chen, 2017:19). CWS have also been criticised for suggesting that biological explanations of race have disappeared and that they exist only to disparage the ‘non-white’ body (Willoughby-Herard, 2007; Nichols, 2010). Finally, being ‘white’ is not only about subjective beliefs and values, but also about objective biological markers and features associated with whiteness.

It is my argument that, in light of the criticisms of its subjective lens, the objectivist lens of labour market segmentation (LMS) theory can deepen our understanding by enabling an analysis that goes beyond the white body and inter-race relations to accentuate wider, systemic processes of segmentation and disadvantage in the labour market. The post-Apartheid labour market remains an important area in which white South Africans have to confront their conceptions of race and socio-economic advantage (Steyn and Foster, 2008:25). Having been deprived of the political advantages of Apartheid, many Afrikaners have sought to find a place within in the ‘new’ labour market (preferably) without letting go of their socio-economic privileges (Steyn, 2004:162).

2.4 ‘OBJECTIVE LENS’ OF LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION THEORY

LMS theory is a part of a larger body of literature in economic sociology and heterodox economics – including theories of regulation, varieties of capitalism and embeddedness – which challenges the orthodox or neo-classical model of labour markets (Boyer, 1990; Ghezzi and Mingione, 2007; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Jessop, 1997; Peck, 2005). A common theme in this literature is a rejection of the account of orthodox economics and an emphasis on the

various features of the labour market that cannot be explained by recourse to the ‘laws’ of supply and demand. LMS theory highlights the fragmented nature of labour markets as well the effects that social and institutional factors have on employment opportunities (Leontaridi, 1998:63). Since LMS theory is largely a reaction to the orthodox account, it is necessary to outline the basic tenets of the latter before proceeding with an outline of the former.

2.4.1 Orthodox Account of the Labour Market

The basic principle of the orthodox labour market account is that wage rates and the quantities of labour demanded and supplied are functionally related (Fleetwood, 2006:61). Labour markets are thought of as ‘economic’ phenomena consisting of the forces of supply and demand, which override ‘non-economic’ phenomena such as social structures (Fleetwood, 2006:61). This view ignores the influence that social structures have on employment and wages (Fleetwood, 2008:2). Fundamentally, orthodox economists argue that the labour market is characterised by a singular, perfectly-competitive market and they assume that all individuals have perfect knowledge, and therefore that firms and workers are always matched optimally (Lang and Dickens, 1987:8).

Key to the orthodox account is the profit maximising behaviour of employers and the utility maximisation of the workers (Leontaridi, 1998:63). Orthodox economists regard humans as rational utility-maximisers, who exert forward-looking behaviour in trying to anticipate uncertain consequences of their actions by assessing what occurred in the past (Becker, 1993:386). Building on this concept is the idea that the labour supplied by the individual is determined by their productivity and investments in their human capital (Leontaridi, 1998:24). Human capital analysis assumes that individuals get to decide on their education, training, medical care, and other additions to knowledge and health by (rationally) weighing the benefits and costs (Becker, 1993:392). In addition, it assumes that status or position in the job market is a direct reflection of levels of investment in human capital – in other words, the workplace is a perfect meritocracy.

If the orthodox claims – that individuals exercising freedom of choice and preferences in the labour market are the decisive elements in job allocation – are true, then the following six conditions must be met:

- the labour market must contain a variety of employment types,
- these must be available to all workers,

- information about these alternatives are made available to all workers,
- workers must possess this information,
- workers must have different preferences, and
- there must be a matching number of jobs for each preference overall and for those jobs and workers to be present in the market at all times (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:8).

Because of these unrealistic assumptions, the orthodox approach cannot explain the impact of factors such as age, gender, race and class (among others) on an individual's labour market mobility. Nor can it account for the influence of institutions: real labour markets are not self-equilibrating or self-regulating entities in which there is free competition and individual actors freely pursue their rational self-interest (Peck, 2005:134).

2.4.2 Origins of Labour Market Segmentation Theory

Dual labour market theory (first-generation LMS theory) emerged through key writings of authors such as Harrison (1972), Averitt (1968) and Bluestone (1970) to explain the persistence of urban poverty and unemployment in the United States of America (USA). This occurred despite the introduction of training programmes to increase the human capital of disadvantaged workers, as proposed by orthodox economists (Leontaridi, 1998:71). The first-generation LMS theory considers the difficulties people face in attaining work beyond the 'ghetto' labour market and develops the idea that the suburbanization of jobs and involuntary housing markets have acted together to create a surplus of workers relative to the number of available jobs in inner-city neighbourhoods, where blacks tend to be concentrated. It was also argued that this may result in joblessness, lower wages, and/or longer commutes for black workers (Peck, 1989:119) These arguments gave prominence to wider questions of social inequality. When considering the assumption that all people are born equal, the empirical fact that they do not always treat each other as equals and that their conditions of life and success tend to be allocated unequally requires sociological investigation and explanation (Kreckel, 1980:527).

Labour market segmentation is defined by Reich, Gordon and Edwards (1973:359) as "the historical process whereby political and economic forces encourage the division of the labour market into separate sub-markets or segments, distinguished by different labour market characteristics and rules". The simplest expression of labour market segmentation theory is found in the dual labour market model that argues that the labour markets of advanced

economies can be viewed comprising two distinct sectors with limited intersectoral mobility (Anderson, 1987:150). Second-generation LMS theorists agree that the labour market can be described as ‘dualistic’; however, the difference between first- and second-generation theories is how they interpret the causes of labour market segmentation. Dual labour market theory maintains that jobs can be roughly divided into two groups: those with low wages, bad working conditions, unstable employment and little opportunity for advancement (secondary segment) and those with relatively high wages, good working conditions and opportunities for advancement (primary segment). The problem that confronts researchers is that within each of these two segments, further segmentation is possible (Uys and Blaauw, 2006:248).

Third-generation LMS theorists agree that the labour market is segmented, but they argue that the problem is that there is no simple, dualistic division and that multiple, contingent segments exist in real labour markets (Deakin, 2013:3; Lang and Dickens, 1985:12). It is argued that any segmentation that occurs is historically and spatially contingent – that is, the labour market will segment differently, depending on its wider context. Therefore, the contemporary LMS literature is highly varied as the analyses differ with respect to the delineation of segments as well as the sources of segmentation (Leontaridi, 1998:69). Unifying the various stages of LMS theory is the claim that occupational mobility between the various segments is constrained, and that each segment has different characteristics and is governed by distinct rules and conventions (Deakin, 2013:3; Lang and Dickens, 1985:12). LMS segmentation theories are particularly useful in explaining the effects of objective features of the labour market such as discrimination in job prospects, the role of stereotypes and the institutional variability of social reproduction.

2.4.3 Effects of Pre-Existing Conditions

LMS theory states that prior to exposure to the labour market, the population is divided by class, gender, race, disability, family type, longevity, nationality, political persuasion, religion, sexual orientation, national residency status, looks, as well as what recreational activities they partake in (Fleetwood, 2008:17). Individuals are exposed to a range of different social and cultural, economic, political and ideological, organisational and social-psychological phenomena, actions and social processes depending on what categories they find themselves in (Fleetwood, 2008:17). Membership of these categories influence many aspects of a person’s life ranging from wages, workplace security, employment conditions, health benefits, vulnerability, autonomy and self-expression (Fleetwood, 2008:18). The essential point here is that *diverse sources of labour* interact with a *differentiated demand for labour*, which produce

complex, contingent, and variegated outcomes in terms of employment. These claims are fundamentally at odds with orthodox economic approaches.

The emphasis on a wider conception of disadvantage – as opposed to a narrow focus on individual prejudice and discrimination – means that socio-economic position (i.e. class) is regarded as a key determinant of how individuals navigate the labour market; their neighbourhood, housing, education, health, longevity, finances, etc. profoundly affect their chances of acquiring a job in certain firms and jobs (Fleetwood, 2008:28). In order to obtain certain jobs and successfully supply their labour, individuals must engage with a range of social, economic, cultural, political, ideological and psychological phenomena, actions and processes (Fleetwood, 2008:30). Employment outcomes therefore represent a long and complicated causal process (Fleetwood, 2008:26). This is referred to by Piore (1975) as a “mobility chain”. The events, paths and processes that make up the chain include not only jobs, but also other points of social and economic significance based on what pre-existing circumstances the poor whites, who were the subjects of my research, were born into and which they cannot change. This means that people in a given job will tend to be drawn from a limited range of schools, neighbourhoods, and types of family backgrounds (Piore, 1975:128).

2.4.4 Imperfect Knowledge and Choice

Orthodox economic assumptions of ‘perfect’ knowledge are fundamentally at odds with the way real labour markets operate. A person’s ethnicity, family, nationality and religion shape their circumstances and therefore rationality in a way that is rarely elected themselves (Archer, 2000:50). The cognitive processes developed prior to employment, particularly in schools where training may depend on the social stratum from which the student is drawn, and affect the initial placement of workers (Lang and Dickens, 1985:10). Given the relation between job placement and social and cognitive processes, there are aspects beyond an individual’s control that will shape his or her potential opportunities once he or she enters the labour market. These factors demonstrate the ways in which psychological and social structures influence how the individual comes to understand his or her place in society (Lang and Dickens, 1985:10). The family has an enormous influence on the beliefs that individuals come to hold about whether they should enter the labour market or not, and decisions about where to work, what work is sought out and what employment conditions are considered ‘fair’ and ‘acceptable’ (Fleetwood, 2008:25).

The importance of these issues is that the potential workforce will become prepared for the labour market in terms of the environment into which they were born. This, in turn, will affect how an individual will navigate the labour market based on his or her subjective beliefs and values as instilled in the community, family, school, workplace, places of worship, etc. (Fleetwood, 2008:22). It will also impact his or her mobility in the labour market as it affects the knowledge he or she is exposed to and the ways in which he or she effectively utilises competitive, intangible assets such as knowledge, skills and innovative potential (Gunay and Kazazoglu, 2016:11). These claims are clearly incompatible with the notion of *homo economicus* that underlies orthodox approaches to the labour market. For example, a worker is only able to choose his or her position if he or she has knowledge of the organisational structure and if the individual can determine in which job he or she will be placed (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:7). This knowledge is wide-ranging and goes beyond the characteristics of the jobs available to the individual. In addition, the individual is not guaranteed to get the position for two reasons: first, the worker may not have the knowledge on which a choice must be based; and second, he or she, despite having the knowledge, does not control the processes of job allocation (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:7).

It is not surprising that workers have crude and fragmented knowledge of the labour market, given the complexity of the labour market and the poor information services that are available (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:139). Workers' sources of information are indirect and approximate; they obtain information through family and friends who ultimately find the source within the company of question (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:139). Along with the uncontrollable factors such as race, class and gender, information access will differ depending on an individual's circumstances, which in turn also affect the choices he or she make in the labour market.

In line with LMS theory, Archer (2000:36) rejects the premise of *homo economicus* in that it does not approximate with how human agency and reflexivity actually work. Archer also rejects Becker's concept of 'human capital' as an individual's stock of capital depends not primarily on his or her own choices, but rather on the choices of those in his or her relevant network of interaction (Archer, 2000:50). The image of *homo economicus* is based on the idea that the essence of capitalism is the 'freedom' to sell labour. Blackburn and Mann (1979) challenge the orthodox notion of 'choice' in the labour market as well as the extent to which individuals are claimed to possess it. Choice, according to Blackburn and Mann (1979:2), is based on whether the labour market objectively allows the worker a meaningful degree of

choice over his or her economic life, as well as whether he or she subjectively perceives this as a choice. Choices occur against a background of economic constraints and individuals may judge the attractions and opportunities of the jobs open to them against very different standards (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:4).

2.4.5 Secondary Segment of the Labour Market

LMS theory, as noted above, is closely identified with the distinction between primary and secondary segments in the labour market. In the primary segment, employment and working conditions are relatively stable, wages are higher and job rationing is present, which means the real wage rate is above the full-employment equilibrium (Altman, Falk, Grunewald and Huffman, 2014:32). Conversely, the secondary segment is characterised by less favourable conditions, lower wages, and less job rationing, which makes for a surplus of available labour (Altman et al., 2014:32). In other words, the secondary sector represents the ‘bad’, less attractive jobs and the primary sector represents the ‘good’, more attractive jobs. The ‘bad’ jobs are occupied by non-professional, self-employed, domestic and temporary/casual workers (Fields, 2009:5). The ‘good’ jobs are occupied by workers who have job security and employment that entitles them to various benefits and advantages as well as being protected by labour laws and collective bargaining (Fields, 2009:5). The resulting placement in either category follows two principles. First, jobs for individuals of a given skill level differ in terms of wages and other characteristics (Fields, 2009:1). Second, access to more attractive jobs is limited and not everyone who wants a better job can obtain one (Fields, 2009:1).

There is no perfect congruence between the distribution of preferences in the labour force and the supply of available jobs, thereby optimising the corresponding rewards. This lack of congruence results in competition for the most popular jobs in a hierarchical market (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:6). This means that good jobs are only available to a fraction of the labour force, and those who do not get good jobs are compelled to accept a bad job or remain unemployed (Fields, 2009:1). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines the secondary labour market – the province of bad jobs – by parameters such as ease of access, reliance on connections, family ownership of enterprises, small-scale operations, skills acquired outside the school system and finally an unregulated and competitive market (Fields, 2009:17). A disproportionate number of people occupy the secondary labour market. For instance, when displaced workers exit the primary segment and are crowded into the secondary

segment, then employment would increase in the secondary labour market, but wages would be driven down (Millea, Rezek, Shoup and Pitts, 2017:336).

At one extreme, secondary jobs include ‘informal’ work such as handing out pamphlets at traffic lights, pushing trolleys, shining shoes, washing cars, and so on. These secondary jobs are the last resort for many workers who are pushed out of the protected and better paid jobs in the primary labour market (Cano-Urbina, 2016:25). Individuals who do informal or casual work are usually engaged in multiple, precarious jobs for small amounts of money (Lang and Dickens, 1985:22).

2.4.6 Segmentation of the South African Labour Market

Despite the efforts of the ANC, the secondary segment in the South African labour market continues to be characterised by racial segregation and high levels of unemployment, which contribute to the low wages and intense competition in the bottom layers of the job market (Millea, et. al, 2017:339). Bonacich (1972:547) argues that a source of antagonism (intergroup conflict based on ideologies, behaviours, racist beliefs, etc.) between groups is the “split” labour market, which produces a “three-way conflict between business and the two labour groups, with business seeking to displace higher paid with cheaper labour” (Bonacich, 1972:547). In other words, LMS is not only an outcome of the struggle between capital and labour, but also the result of competition between different segments of the working class. South Africa is a prime example of an ethnically-divided labour market in which different groups compete for jobs on the basis of (among others) racial and ethnic characteristics.

Kraak (1995:659) also argues that South Africa’s segmented labour market was shaped historically by the struggles between capital, labour and the state through the “institutional and other mechanisms of social control” that manipulated access to jobs and working conditions between race groups. According to Kraak (1995:663), the relations between social institutions such as the capitalist labour process, the racial division of labour, statutory job reservation and the industrial council system allowed for special preference for white workers in the primary labour market, trapping black workers (urban and migratory) into secondary market employment. It is this interaction between the development of a capitalist labour process and the stator interventions in the labour market that created a racially-exclusive state and the acute social divisions of Apartheid (Kraak, 1995:663, 670).

2.5 INTERSECTIONALITY: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN WHITENESS STUDIES AND SEGMENTATION THEORY?

The observation that privilege is unevenly distributed among whites is not new (Howard, 2004:71). Race, ethnicity, gender, ability and class interact in highly complex ways and are all important to understanding the dynamics of power relations and social equality (Howard, 2004:65). Though race matters for all whites, saying a person is white does not specifically predict anything about how they will take up their social positioning (Lewis, 2004:268). What it does predict are the relative constraints and expectations a person will encounter in their lives (Lewis, 2004:268). In other words, 'whiteness' does not confer on all white people the same privilege. For example, a poor white person wields less symbolic power than a wealthy white person (Henry and Tator, 2006:46). This underscores the importance of socio-economic status.

Theories of race that are sensitive to class dynamics explain divisions between people in a society in ways that incorporate, yet go beyond, racial divisions (Bonacich, 1980:13). The notion of 'intersectionality' emphasises the simultaneity of race, gender and class (among others) in shaping people's lives (Carastathis, 2014:304). It can be used to overcome the tendency in CWS to view all privilege in terms of race. Like the notion of intersectionality, LMS theory also claims that not all privilege and disadvantage can be understood or explained in terms of race. A combination of the two theoretical frameworks will additionally aid in analysing divisions in the post-Apartheid labour market outlined by Hoogeveen and Ozler (2005:4). This will be done by analysing the interviewees subjective perceptions of the labour market and how they rationalise their current socioeconomic circumstances through the lens of CWS. Furthermore, these subjective perceptions will be evaluated labour market segmentation theory that provides an objective point of view on the labour market and can objectively explain the obstacles these poor whites are encountering in looking for work.

Analysing poor whites in these terms will deepen our understanding of how race, age, class and gender (among others) interact to determine challenges and opportunities in the job market. Applying the theories in this way can allow for a better understanding of the experiences poor whites have while living and working in contemporary South Africa, along with how they may perceive and rationalise these experiences themselves.

CHAPTER 3

POVERTY AND RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since this study is about poor whites, it is necessary to begin by clarifying what is meant by ‘poverty’. This chapter will provide definitions of absolute and relative poverty, followed by a discussion of poverty statistics and unemployment. The history of the ‘poor white problem’ is briefly outlined in order to assess what gave rise to the policies that prioritised white employment during segregation and Apartheid, as well as to provide a basis to better understand contemporary white poverty. Next, we analyse the ideologies surrounding the implementation of race-based policies in South Africa, including the ‘reforming’ of poor white people. Many of the ‘rehabilitation’ practices took place in designated white suburbs – one of which was Epping Garden Village – with the goal of turning ‘failed’ whites into ‘good’ whites so that they may re-enter the labour market with a higher chance of success.

In light of the processes involved in constructing the ‘poor white’ as unnatural and abnormal, the moral legitimacy of whites is assessed, with reference to whites displaying poverty by begging. In an attempt to provide a detailed understanding of the circumstances of the interviewees, the research also explored the notions of ‘failed whites’, ‘respectability’ and the involvement of the church in constructing narratives around ‘white poverty’. Finally, I investigate the concept of liminality experienced by poor whites with the changing of the political, economic and social landscape of South Africa. In addition, I assess how the history of poor whites plays out in contemporary South Africa in the light of notions of moral legitimacy and begging among poor whites.

3.2 DEFINING POVERTY

Poverty lines are important tools that allow for the statistical reporting of poverty levels and provide a constant benchmark against which poverty can be monitored (Statistics South Africa, 2018:3). Statistics South Africa constructed national poverty lines using the cost-of-basic-needs approach that links welfare to the consumption of goods and services (Statistics South Africa, 2018:3).

Table 2: Inflation-adjusted national poverty lines for 2018 (per person per month in Rands)

Poverty Line	2018 Line Values
Food Poverty Line (FPL)	R547
Lower-bound Poverty Line (LBPL)	R785
Upper-bound poverty line (UBPL)	R1183

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2018:3)

The type of poverty experienced by individuals may vary depending on their income, how consistently they receive income and whether they are employed (Statistics South Africa, 2018:3). There are varying degrees of poverty that range from not being able to afford enough food to sustain per-capita-per-day energy requirements (Food Poverty Line), to being in a slightly better position where individuals sacrifice buying non-food necessities in order to buy food (LBPL), to circumstances where food and non-food needs can be met (UBPL) – all of which still amount to an experience of poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2018:3).

Poverty lines are used to ascertain whether someone is ‘poor’ (Notten and De Neuberg, 2011:249). Financial poverty indicators provide insights into the situation of people whose resources are so low that they are unable and/ or unlikely to ensure an acceptable minimum level of well-being for themselves (Notten and De Neuberg, 2011:247). The poverty line separates acceptable from unacceptable levels of well-being and thus essentially reflects a “value judgement” (Notten and Neuberg, 2011:249). Absolute and relative poverty are defined by Notten and De Neuberg (2011:247) as indicators reflecting different perceptions of poverty: “people in absolute poverty have not enough financial means to achieve a basic living standard, while people in relative poverty have much less financial means to achieve what is considered a normal living standard” (Notten and De Neuberg, 2011:248) in a particular community, country and/ or region. Thus, absolute poverty is an objective line and relative poverty is how one compares themselves to other people.

The distinction between absolute and relative poverty means that there are certain demands on income that are socially determined and that a person is absolutely deprived if those demands cannot be met in a specific context (Ravallion and Chen, 2011:1254). These authors go on to argue that in measuring global poverty, two capabilities need to be postulated: physical survival and social inclusion (Ravallion and Chen, 2011:1254). The former is “the capability of being adequately nourished and clothed for meeting the physical needs of survival and normal activities” (Ravallion and Chen, 2011:1254). The latter refers to the fact that, along with the

former needs, “a person must also satisfy social inclusion needs, which are assumed to be directly proportional to mean consumption in the country of residence” (Ravallion and Chen, 2011:1254). Even though absolute and relative poverty partially overlap, there are groups of people who are poor in relative terms but not in absolute terms (Notten and De Neuberg, 2011:248). That is, while many people are simultaneously affected by relative and absolute poverty, there are also people who are poor according to one poverty concept and not the other (Notten and De Neuberg, 2011:245).

The interviewees in the study by Schuermans and Visser (2005) indicated that white poverty is a relative problem in that poor whites find it difficult to adopt the standard of living expected of them in the *white* community (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:267). The whites that were interviewed compared their present-day situation with their own situation in the past, or with that of other whites – yet, rarely with that of their fellow black citizens (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:267). Schuermans and Visser’s (2005:266) research findings show that the “basic needs” of whites and blacks are difficult to compare because of their vastly different backgrounds. Not surprisingly, given South Africa’s history, whites generally have a higher standard of what it means to be ‘poor’, which ties in with the claims in CWS about the social construction of whiteness and its association with being middle class (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:266). It is noted that this divide is rooted in history: blacks and whites lived in ‘separate worlds’ during and after Apartheid with each fostering their own customs regarding socially-acceptable wages, jobs, living spaces and norms (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:266). Hence, whites have different ideas of what constitutes ‘basic needs’ because of the norm that whites are ‘supposed’ to be middle class. This affects how they make sense of their experience of ‘being poor’.

Along with this idea about the types of poverty that is experienced by people and poor whites in particular, research gathered by Mashau (2012:58), draws on a report compiled in 2008 by Solidarity Helping Hand, which states that affirmative action, unemployment and the poor socio-economic situation that has developed in post-Apartheid South Africa can be cited as reasons why white poverty has been on the increase. Mashau (2012:58) goes on to attribute white poverty to a combination of three kinds of poor: the unfortunate poor, who are subjected to this condition because of job losses, the oppressed poor or the marginalised poor, and those who are poor as a result of their own bad choices.

3.3 HISTORY OF THE ‘POOR WHITE PROBLEM’

Bottomley (2016:78) shows how the development of the ‘poor white problem’ occurred during the end of the nineteenth century when South Africa was plagued by drought, disease and wars, which combined to forced urbanisation and widespread poverty among the farm-oriented Afrikaners or Boers. It was during this time that white South Africa became increasingly more concerned about poor whites – mostly over their presence in the multiracial slums of the newly-established mining city of Johannesburg (Bottomley, 2016:78).

Table 3: The Size of the Poor White Population, 1908-1932

Year	Estimate	Proportion of White Population (%)	Proportion of Afrikaner Population (%)
1908	35 000	2.8	5.2 (in South Africa) 8.0 (in Transvaal)
1916	106 518	7.7	14.3
1921	120 000	7.7	14.4
1923	160 000	12.5	20.0
1924	223 000	13.8	25.0
1932	300 000 poor whites	16.1	28.8
1932	300 000 extremely poor	32.2	57.7

(Source: adapted from Bottomley, 2012:14).

The urbanising Afrikaners were unable to compete in the labour market against the more educated and experienced English, and at the same time were outcompeted by blacks who were ‘willing’ to work for lower wages (Bottomley, 2016:78). This sudden appearance of a large group of impoverished whites threatened the white government’s image of racial prestige and therefore became a threat to their minority rule (Davies, 1976:41). In response to the threat to the overall stability of the social formation, the state began intervening, from about 1906, in an attempt to secure preferential opportunities for whites in employment in different industries throughout the economy (Davies, 1976:42).

The ‘poor white problem’ has been recognised as having had a defining impact on the formation of modern South Africa (Bottomley, 2016:78). The search for a solution to the putative problem and the struggle for the political loyalty of the disparate group of poor whites would profoundly shape the racial politics of South Africa, to the extent that the entire Apartheid system has been described as an anti-poverty programme for whites (Bottomley, 2016:79).

Willoughby-Herard (2007) considers the linkages between racist social science and the consolidation of grand Apartheid that occurred through the production of whiteness and the racial typing of 'poor whites' (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:480). Drawing on CWS, Willoughby-Herard (2007) tracks the institutional and professional investments in the creation of white supremacy and white nationalism in South Africa. Willoughby-Herard (2007:480) describes the Carnegie Corporation's Poor White Study from 1927-1932 as a cornerstone of the political consolidation of Apartheid from 1948 onwards. Willoughby-Herard (2007:481) uses the case of poor whites in South Africa to talk about how the antidote to white supremacy entails bearing witness to suppressed histories of violence toward blacks, and that attention to the process and policies through which some white identities were constructed under Apartheid.

Like the research carried out by Willoughby-Herard (2007), Ndlovu (2016:128) argues that the sequence of events that led authorities to commission the poor white study, undertaken by the Carnegie Commission, included the growing population of poor whites that were begging on the streets of Johannesburg in 1932. The recommendations from this study laid the foundations of Apartheid in that they suggested blacks be replaced by whites in certain jobs and advocated job reservation and the segregation of residential areas (Ndlovu, 2016:129). The Carnegie Report was released at the height of the Eugenics movement – a racist social science that had the goals of protecting 'white civilisation' using genetic monitoring, sterilisation, mental testing, forced removals and detentions as well as a host of interventions into poor white communities to increase cultural capital with the intention ultimately to 'civilise' poor whites (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:485). This constant interplay between economic facts and political solutions was to be the backdrop to the evolution of Apartheid after 1948 (Kenney, 2016:119). These events are important to understanding how the National Party came to endorse Apartheid as a 'legitimate' political order (Willoughby-Herard, 2007:485).

3.3.1 Policies Prioritising White Employment

A range of policy responses aimed at solving the 'problem' of poor whites. The 'civilised labour policy' ensured that black, unskilled workers on the railways and in other fields of state employment were replaced (as far as possible) by poor whites, preferably at a 'civilised' wage level (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:261). The white labour preference policy was part of a package of racially-discriminatory measures launched in 1924 by the new Pact government to alleviate white poverty and unemployment and uplift unskilled white workers – largely at the expense of their African contemporaries (Phillips, 2005:113). White miners were unable to

compete for jobs as the mine-owners preferred to employ the ‘cheap’ labour of blacks as far as possible (Callinicos, 2014:123). This gave rise to job reservation – also known as the job colour-bar – which reserved certain jobs for whites only. The first job colour-bar was implemented on the Rand in 1893 and extended over time to other sectors of the economy (Callinicos, 2014:123). These policies were also accompanied by wage discrimination that allowed for the absorption of poor whites into relatively well-paid industrial and commercial occupations, at the expense of blacks (Phillips 1984:5).

Social welfare measures were also introduced to provide many South African poor whites with old-age pensions, and/or illness and disability grants (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:261). The mission of the state was to eliminate the slums where whites were prone to the worst offence imaginable by the Apartheid government: miscegenation and inter-racial relationships were as bad, if not worse, than demonstrating white poverty (Bottomley, 2012:36). This led to increased state intervention to eradicate these displays and the ‘mixing of races’ (Ndlovu, 2016:129). Housing companies blossomed all over South Africa on a mission to build new sub-economic suburbs that would be a key part of uplifting and educating poor whites in an effort to transform them into “good whites” (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:261).

The policies outlined above (among others) ensured that the interests of poor whites were prioritised. The high rate of unemployment, cheap labour policies, job reservation and other discriminatory laws trapped black people in poverty (Mashau, 2012:55). Under colonialism and increasingly under Apartheid, the domestic realm was the site of extensive state control over black labour (Ross, 2015:97). Before the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950, areas such as Cape Town – South Africa’s oldest colonial city – were the most integrated in the country (Ross, 2015:97). By contrast, in the post-Apartheid area, it is the most segregated and racialized city in South Africa (Ross, 2015:97). Over a period of approximately 50 years, as the extent of white poverty was uncovered, the poor whites went from a “despised group of liminal troublemakers to a cornerstone of nationalist propaganda and Afrikaner myth-making” (Bottomley, 2016:78). In spite of the attempts to eradicate poverty among whites, it has not only persisted but also deepened during the post-Apartheid era (Ndlovu, 2016:129).

3.3.2 ‘Reforming’ the Poor Whites

As seen above, the type of welfare state that existed in South Africa under Apartheid was built on the upliftment of poor whites and the establishment of distinct racial hierarchies (Seekings, 2007:375). Seekings (2007) argues that welfare reform was a response to the *swartgevaar*,

which is defined by Kenney (2016:201) as “the menace of black physical, occupational and social mobility”. This notion clearly illustrates the point that the measures taken to help poor whites were done in the interest of securing the racial superiority of white people in South Africa.

Seekings (2007:378) examines how and why the state began to assume substantial responsibility for the ‘deserving’ poor in the 1920s through social assistance. A major factor was the imperative for the National Party to raise its poor white supporters out of poverty and the attendant risks of becoming subordinate to or intermingling with blacks (Seekings, 2007:378). Unlike the ‘undeserving’ poor, the ‘deserving’ poor are those who cannot be blamed for their poverty in that it is not caused by their individual behaviour or character flaws, but rather by structural or macro forces beyond the control of the individual (Bridges, 2017:1049). As Arneson (1997:328) points out, the notions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor raise questions concerning responsibility and deservingness. According to Arneson (1997:344), the argument for the ‘undeserving’ poor claims that these people live under special obstacles that make it more difficult for them to meet acceptable standards.

One of the most significant interventions aimed at uplifting poor whites was introduced during the Apartheid era when the National Party actively promoted “separate development” for each racial group. Du Plessis (2004:883) notes that the nationalist government incorporated the so-called poor whites into different social institutions and regulations aimed at ‘bettering’ their situation and ‘reforming’ them into productive, urban members of society. One of the most burning issues on the political agenda at the time was the existence of a white ‘underclass’, constituted mainly by Afrikaners (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:261). In 1932 (when, as we saw above in table 3.3.1, the number of poor whites was at its highest), Malherbe (1981:119), a South African educationalist, principal and vice chancellor of the University of Natal, declared the existence poor whites “a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of the white people”. In the 1930s, as the Depression crept across the country, poor white suburbs were created with the express aim of uplifting their inhabitants (Bottomley, 2012:141). Although those who lived in these suburbs were poor, they were not expected to remain poor and were encouraged to aspire to a middle-class status (Bottomley, 2012:142).

3.3.3 ‘Failed’ Whites and ‘Good’ Whites

The first of these suburbs was Jan Hofmeyr, established in 1936 in central Johannesburg. Two years later, Epping Garden Village was established on the Cape Flats (Bottomley, 2012:142).

In an analysis of Epping Garden Village, Teppo (2004:17) outlines the execution of the rehabilitation of these poor whites as a “civilising process” for lower-class whites that outlined the boundaries of white identity. Rehabilitation occurred within these suburbs and shelters and was realised through a process of introducing a complete set of bodily values and a “white way of life” for the residents (Teppo, 2004:17). These values and norms helped the elite to exert bio-power effectively while accomplishing the process of re-forming its citizens’ bodies (Teppo, 2004:17). Professionals in these poor white suburbs (such as social workers, teachers and medical doctors) guided the residents through all aspects of their life such as work and use of free time, cleanliness and health, morals and sexuality, bodily appearance and behaviour, family life, social and racial relations and finally the correct use of space and spatiality (Teppo, 2004:16). The end product of the rehabilitation conducted in these types of suburbs was supposed to be a successful and respectable citizen, who moved out to live in a middle-class area (Teppo, 2004:17).

A few examples of the sites of rehabilitation are provided, as well as the role they played in the social and cultural development of poor white communities. The aim is to provide a perspective on the social stigma confronting poor whites as well as the social contradictions a poor white person in South Africa embodies. The aim is to better understand how the interviewees interpreted their circumstances. An important aspect of the argument in this chapter is the idea of the body as a symbol and metaphor for social cohesion and differentiation. This argument, which draws on Foucauldian biopolitics and the notion of governmentality, is key to the analysis of the treatment of the poor white body (Teppo, 2004:20). The poor white body was viewed as a warning of racial decline, prompting external interference to treat the perceived illness in ways studies such as the Carnegie Commission stipulated.

3.3.4 Sites for the ‘Rehabilitation’ of Poor Whites

Teppo (2004) conducted a historical ethnography of the social construction of white identity and the notion of whiteness in the working-class suburb of Epping Garden Village/Ruyterwacht in Cape Town. The study is centred on the processes, discourses and methods of turning a group of people regarded as poor whites into socially-acceptable or ‘good’ whites (Teppo, 2004:13). It explores what happened to the lives and identity of the residents in the course of becoming ‘good’ whites. The study also investigates the racial and social categories involved in defining and imposing ‘white South African’ identities on the residents of the suburb from the 1930s to the 1990s and how these categories are being contested and re-

negotiated in post-Apartheid South Africa (Teppo, 2004:13). In line with the present study and others conducted on poor whites in South Africa, Teppo (2004) analyses the history of whites in South Africa, poor whiteism, Eugenics and what led to the construction of poor whites as a political ‘problem’. Teppo (2004) also draws on elements of CWS in dealing with the prescription and proscription of both the construction and roles of whiteness given and upheld by whites themselves.

A poor white did not fit into a society built on the presumed supremacy of the white person over the black person (Teppo, 2004:15). The ideas of ‘racial upliftment’ coincided with the development of industrial capitalism in South Africa. The poor whites originated from farms and had to be trained to adapt to an industrial capitalist society, and to become hard working, obedient citizens (Teppo, 2004:15). The aim was to separate working-class whites from blacks to ensure that there were no class-based alliances. It was to these ends that suburbs were established for poor whites – in this case, Epping Garden Village which was established in 1938 on the Cape Flats near Cape Town (Teppo, 2004:15).

During Apartheid, poor white suburbs became places where those who were unable to comply with the ideals of being a ‘good white’ were placed, or into which they drifted (Teppo, 2004:18). Teppo (2004:18) notes that even while the fieldwork was conducted in Epping between 1997-2001, the residents were still keen to present their commitment to being ‘good whites’ by dissociating themselves from the stigma of being a ‘bad white’. Teppo shows that the processes of rehabilitating the poor whites in Epping were not always smooth and states that the history of the suburb indicates that residents of Epping Garden Village were constantly monitored and disciplined (Teppo, 2004:19).

In the case of poor whites, the (white) elite used the medium of the social body – that is, the perceived norms for whites to suppress racial and cultural hybridity that was seen as abnormal and threatening to the prevailing order (Teppo, 2004:20). Teppo (2004:20) argues that the different areas of social life – such as the capitalist institutions of wage labour, the nuclear family and ideals of home ownership – tended to reinforce these racial ideals. According to Teppo (2004:20), the forms of bodily control to which elites subjected poor whites in return for accommodation and jobs were “undoubtedly governed by a capitalist ethos”. Thus, arguing that social engineering and the production of White identity in South Africa were processes influenced by “the conglomeration and interaction of intellectual and economic forces” with

the subjects being the poor whites who lived in designated suburbs such as Epping Garden Village (Teppo, 2004:20).

Peens and Dubbeld (2013:13) investigate three welfare organisations in Newcastle: the *Christelike Maatskaplike Diens* (Christian Social Services), *Morester* (Morning Star) Children's Home and Rapha, which serves as a halfway house. The researchers discuss the poor white as a figure around whom ideologies were crafted and institutions designed; a figure who was not only poor but immoral, and a figure to be empowered through – or rescued by – a range of government institutions that took poor whites from welfare to work and reformed them, lest their poverty be a sign that they were not a part of God's chosen people (Peens and Dubbeld, 2013:7).

The importance of the church becomes apparent throughout the literature available on the aforementioned 'rehabilitation centres' and homeless shelters that supported poor whites through the provision of clothes and food. Ritner (1967) studied the role of the Dutch Reformed Church, the dominant religious institution of the Afrikaner people. According to Ritner (1967), the Afrikaners remain one of the few western peoples of the modern era whose values and customs are established by, and expressed through, their church. The Dutch Reformed Church led actions against white poverty from the beginning (Teppo, 2004:40). Between the 1880s and the 1930s, the church established settlements for the upliftment of poor whites (Teppo, 2004:41). The growth of Afrikaner Nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century, in reaction to increasing British intervention in South Africa and to the threat of Anglicisation, strengthened the bonds between Church and Afrikaners (Ritner, 1967:20). Moodie (1976:16) argues that the civil faith became a "guaranteed effective ideological agency of social, political and economic mobilisation".

Mashau (2012) conducted research on white poverty and religion in South Africa. It is a descriptive study undertaken in the qualitative paradigm to describe living conditions at the Bethlehem Mission Centre in Pretoria. The greater implications of this study indicate that churches play an integral role in the lives of poor white communities (Mashau, 2012:66). The Bethlehem Mission Centre is similar to the site chosen for this research and operates on very similar principles, and although the *Die Rivier* is a part of a different church, it is also at the core of the poor white community. The case of Bethlehem Mission Centre allows insight into how my chosen site *Die Rivier* operates and what values lie at the core of the facility.

In the study by Teppo (2004:33), the concern of the church is also present, and played a role in the creation of poor whites as an ‘other’ among whites and seen as a “festering wound in the social body”. The church plays a vital role in the construction of an Afrikaner identity that was instrumental to the formation of the ideology that informed Apartheid structures and policies. Peens and Dubbeld (2013:20) argue that, for white people in the town of Newcastle, political and economic change has called the naturalisation of racial privilege into question. Welfare organisations in the town still preach a Calvinist belief system in which self-discipline will lead to successful and morally superior beneficiaries. However, Peens and Dubbeld (2013:20) argue that, for their white informants – even if they are compliant with what they are told to do by these organisations – economic security cannot be achieved solely by behaving in a certain way. A person also needs expertise, skills and qualifications to succeed in the labour market.

The outcome of the ‘rehabilitation’ conducted in these suburbs was supposed to be a successful and respectable citizen, who eventually moved out to live in a middle-class area and adopted middle-class values appropriate to the ideals of whiteness (Teppo, 2004:18). This outcome rested on the possibility of those whites, who had been ‘rehabilitated’ and taught the ‘correct’ virtues of what it meant to be a ‘good’ white, finding permanent positions at work that would guarantee their privileged social position (Peens and Dubbeld, 2013:20). It is a process resting on the foundation of the idea that was produced by the Apartheid government, which had cast being white and economically secure as a ‘natural’ phenomenon and being white and poor as ‘abnormal’ (Peens and Dubbeld, 2013:19). This, in turn, means that once these poor whites were rehabilitated, they were ‘cured’ of their abnormality and could live up to the standards of a ‘good white’.

Sibanda (2018) analyses poor whites in the post-Apartheid context and argues that they have been bruised and wounded by the post-colonial city. Sibanda (2018:15) shows how neo-liberalism, as well as political changes associated with the transition to a democratic and non-racial society, have confronted poor whites with new and hostile environment, which led to experiences of rejection, shame and uncertainty. Parallel and important to my research is Sibanda’s (2018:15) claim that the paradox of these experiences is that, while poor whites bear the historical shame of being part of the initial “wounders”, they also carry the identity of the “wounded” in contemporary South Africa.

This dichotomy between ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’ can be linked to the ideas of white privilege outlined in chapter 2. The privileges of whites are linked to them being the perpetrators of

systemic racism. However, although Apartheid provided whites with distinct labour market advantages, now many interpret the anti-discrimination policies designed to deal with disadvantage in the labour market as ‘reverse racism’ (Howard 2004:70). This notion provides a foundation for the assertions of ‘victimhood’ among whites that amount to what can be likened to despair.

Sibanda (2018) documents the experiences of neglect and stigmatisation that poor whites have endured as changes in the socio-economic and political fabric of society have ushered in new realities and new challenges. Given these new realities and challenges, Sibanda (2018:15) argues that poor whites believe that transformation has given them little room to manoeuvre, with some concluding that they are now “forgotten or on wrong side of history” and that their fate as a marginalised under-class is effectively sealed. Sibanda (2018:15) also argues that not all white people partake in a privileged citizenship and shows that stigmatised poor whites endure a form of alienation in the post-colonial city that translates into a “wounded citizenship”. As the findings of my study also show, the ‘alienation’ associated with this ‘wounded citizenship’ manifested itself in a variety of ways. To explain the concept of “wounded citizenship”, Sibanda (2018:20) refers to the writings of Myers (2011) on the post-colonial city. In these writings it is observed that, after independence, African cities have not overcome their colonial wounds and that the transition from second-class to first-class urban citizenship has not yet been realised (Sibanda, 2018:20).

Sibanda’s (2018:17) research explored an area mainly occupied by poor whites with no alternative place to reside, named Cocobana and located in East London. The site is described as an old, abandoned factory site. The occupants have various housing units formed out of buildings and former warehouses that have been converted into ‘apartments’ with curtains serving as room dividers. Sibanda (2018:18) states that the poor whites occupying the area rely on part-time and contract employment as general labourers in the local industries. Their employment is described as typically short in nature, lasting a single day, a few weeks and, sometimes, a few months. Part-time and temporary work is very common, while permanent employment is said to be very difficult to secure (Sibanda, 2018:18). For those who cannot secure jobs, even temporary ones, begging became a common form of raising money and acquiring food (Sibanda, 2018:18).

As discussed above, Teppo (2004) shows how a number of the programmes that ran in the established poor white suburbs aimed to turn poor whites into ‘good whites’, while various

policy interventions were intended to reintegrate whites who have ‘strayed’ from the path of ‘normal’ whiteness. However, with the demise of Apartheid in the 1990s, poor whites were no longer privileged in the government’s social and economic interventions (Sibanda, 2018:16). Although Cocobana embodies the shame of their present condition, residents found some solidarity within their community in various ways such as sharing small amounts of money in the form of ‘soft loans’, which were paid from the paltry old-age grants received from the state (Sibanda, 2018:21). Aside from the practical forms of assistance, Sibanda (2018:21) adds that residents of Cocobana turned to nostalgia as a way of coping: being able to live in the memory of things that were once ‘right’ consoled some of them.

The role of the church is also important at Cocobana and many of those who spoke to Sibanda (2018) indicated that the church played a central role in their lives. This commitment to the church is an additional coping mechanism. Not only did their religion uplift them morally in that it promises a perfect afterlife to those who suffer in this lifetime, but they also received help in the form of food and clothes donated by the members of the relevant congregation (Sibanda, 2018:21).

Unlike their forebears, poor whites in the post-Apartheid context do not have the resources and commitment of the state to protect their special interests and uplift their material conditions. Apartheid was, in effect, a system of social welfare and affirmative action writ large for white people. The very history of white privilege during Apartheid, according to Sibanda (2018), has become their Achilles heel as the (official) privileged treatment of whites has been abolished in the new South Africa. This fall from grace, according to Sibanda (2018), has been the source of their collective shame as whites. Now they are compelled to make do without relying on the state and dominant political formations, while making a living within the crevices of a ruthless, neoliberal capitalism (Sibanda, 2018:22). In this way, the most difficult aspect of being poor and white in the new South Africa is the struggle to survive the indignity of shame (Sibanda, 2018:22).

3.4 POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

As seen above, historically poor whites have played a significant role in the economic structure of South Africa. It is important to make sense of these issues to aid in understanding how they translate into contemporary South Africa – which will be discussed in the following section. In order to contextualise my study and its research subjects, this chapter outlines the statistics on

poverty in South Africa among different racial groups. The aim of presenting the statistics provided below is to show, firstly, that the black population make up the overwhelming majority of poor people in South Africa and, secondly, that poor whites are a minority within the white population.

Table 4: Number of people living under the National Poverty Line by population group

Population Group	Number	Percentage of Population
African / Black	25,311,744	63.2
Coloured	1,676,144	37.0
Indian / Asian	87,969	6.9
White	42,115	0.9
South Africa	27,117,973	53.8

(Source: Wilkinson, 14/06/2016).

While the interviewees in my study believed that they are worse off than other population groups in South Africa, in reality whites constitute a minute percentage of national poverty. Despite the policies implemented to improve the lives of black people in South Africa, they are still the predominant category among the unemployed and poor (Statistics South Africa, 2013). This research does not intend to present white poverty as new or dramatically increased, but rather to show the interpretations of its liminality. Prashantham and Floyd (2019:513) define liminality as describing the “betwixt-and-between” condition that is experienced when people no longer hold their previous status but have not yet begun the transition to a new status. The novelty of the condition can be cognitively confounding and liberating, as people are located at a threshold between their previous way of being and their new ways, which confronts people with feelings of both vulnerability and opportunity (Prashantham and Floyd, 2019:513).

Feldman (1990:809-810) states that liminality develops when previous structural arrangements have terminated, but new ones have not yet been established. The dissolution of order during liminality creates a fluid, malleable situation that enables new institutions and cultural constructs to be established (Feldman, 1990:814). During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain and future outcomes once taken for granted may be thrown into doubt (Feldman, 1990:814).

Research on the dynamics of South African labour markets suggests that those occupying positions in the secondary labour market are particularly vulnerable to under- and unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2015:5). The findings show that the secondary sector does not provide stable employment and that those employed in the secondary segment have a low transition rate into primary sector employment (Statistics South Africa, 2015:5-7). The findings indicate that unemployment is still most acute amongst black Africans and amongst those with less than a matric, the youth and women (Statistics South Africa, 2015:5-5). Those who managed to move out of unemployment did so through various methods such as enquiring at workplaces, seeking assistance from relatives and/or friends, searching for jobs through job advertisements and the Internet, waiting and/or registering at an employment agency as well as waiting at the street side for casual jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2016:5-5).

Statistics South Africa (2002:55) indicates that people are unemployed mostly as a result of a lack of skills, followed a lack of suitable work, being a homemaker, a seasonal/contract worker, a scholar or student, being ill, invalid or disabled, and finally being too young or old. State assistance for the unemployed is limited in post-Apartheid South Africa. Only those who have worked before and who have earned below a certain minimum may receive money from the Unemployment Insurance Fund, and then only for a limited period of time (Statistics South Africa, 2002:65). Some people occupying work in the secondary sector are particularly vulnerable as they are not formally employed and therefore not included in the coverage of the insurance fund (Statistics South Africa, 2002:65). There are, however, other grants provided through the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) that can be accessed by those who meet the minimum requirements (which will be discussed in the data analysis chapter).

3.5 LIMINALITY AND NOSTALGIA IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

The fact that race is not a perfect marker for economic success is important to any study of poor whites in contemporary South Africa. In some cases, socio-economic class is more pertinent to a person's access to the amenities of life and the decisions they will make. While there is no doubt the interviewees of this study are poor, the way in which they may see their lack of economic success in different ways – one being the (above-mentioned) idea that whites should not be poor in South Africa. As noted, the concept of liminality can be applied to poor whites in post-Apartheid South Africa and the ways in which their labour market expectations were re-appraised.

The notions of an idealised past and an imperfect present are central to the liminality of these poor whites. The poor white interviewees used nostalgia – the sense of yearning for an idealised and/or romanticised past (Adams and Larkham, 2016:2004) – to cope with an imperfect present. The key characteristic of nostalgia, as a sentimental longing for the past, is to reminisce about positive events in the past that are unlikely to recur (Huang, Huang and Wyer, 2016:372). Although nostalgia can be the result of loneliness and longing, people who feel good about the present can experience nostalgia as well (Huang, Huang and Wyer Jr, 2016:373). Nostalgia serves different functions in an individual’s life, including inducing feelings of being loved and protected, counteracting loneliness (Huang, Huang and Wyer Jr, 2016:372). Additionally, nostalgia can also increase pro-social behaviour and decrease anti-social behaviour (Huang, Huang and Wyer Jr, 2016:373). In addition, Huang et al. (2016:373) argue that the increase in social connectedness induced by nostalgia can provide optimism about the future and promote a sense of meaning in life. I will argue that this is a coping mechanism exhibited by interviewees living at *Die Rivier*.

According to Adams and Larkham (2016:2005), longing for the past may help people maintain a sense of emotional continuity in a “rapidly shifting landscape of their personal and social lives”. This would make sense for poor whites who are experiencing the liminality of the changing political, economic and social landscape of South Africa (Davies, 2009:3) One of the symptoms of idealising the past is imagining their lives as having been better under Apartheid, even if they had not actually experienced it. One of the pertinent issues the interviewees expressed in the data is that whites do not “stand together” in the way they did under Apartheid. However, the poor whites whom I interviewed have idealised the past to cope with their imperfect present, and in doing so ‘remember’ certain aspects of life that do not necessarily equate with reality.

It may be that the reason these poor whites insisted that “whites stood together” under Apartheid is because, as Teppo (2004:16) argues, in the process of constructing ‘good whites’, any ethnic differences between whites were underplayed: no separate areas were established for English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites and they were also treated similarly (Teppo, 2004:16). According to Davies, (2009), the white community was most coherent during the years of Apartheid when the National Party offered this minority systematic access to the ear, agency and largesse of the state (Davies, 2009:9). A distinctive Afrikaner social identity, which was deliberately cultivated by the regime, state and other organisations, shaped both private and public spheres of life during the Apartheid era (Davies, 2009:18).

Davies (2009:8) offers three different definitions of Afrikaner identity. First, as the ascriptive category of Afrikaner that denotes all individuals with Afrikaans as their mother tongue (Davies, 2009:18). Second, as the auxiliary ascriptive definition that comprises all whites who use Afrikaans as their mother tongue. Third, as the more bounded experience of identity entailing a self-definition that describes an Afrikaner as “someone who identifies himself/herself as belonging to a distinct group, defined in terms of (a) an identification with cultural homogeneity converging on the Afrikaans language, and (b) in terms of a self-consciousness at being a political minority in South Africa” (Davies, 2009:8). The erosion of the National Party’s rule resulted in the fracturing of Afrikaner political identity, and those who believed in its race policies, now face a deep existential crisis (Gerhart, 1996:170).

3.5.1 ‘Failed’ Whites and Respectability

The notion of the ‘failed white’ aids in understanding the idea of ‘reforming’ white people, which informed many of the policies geared toward securing white employment. *Good White People* by Sullivan (2014) forms part of a burgeoning body of literature on the subject of whiteness, its social construction, and its impact on whites as well as black minorities in the USA. Sullivan (2014:26) argues that labelling poor whites as ‘bad’ is a part of an othering of white people in the lower classes that ultimately serves the interests of white domination. Sullivan (2014:26) uses the term “etiquette” to explain the regulation of relationships between individuals by imposing specific forms of conduct on one another. Etiquette develops through social actions that are embodied, repeated and supported socially by those it is prescribed to and leads to the regulation of behaviours (Sullivan, 2014:26). A breach of etiquette produces a rupture in the social order.

Applying this conception to South Africa at the onset of Apartheid, the breach was white poverty embodied in the formation of slums, begging, inter-racial relationships and other demonstrations that ultimately caused the state to intervene to restore and maintain the image of white superiority. Together, these forces of socialisation framed white poverty as ‘unnatural’ – to the extent that being a poor white was considered an illness, an unhealthy and unnatural state of being (Teppo, 2004:36).

In a similar fashion to the othering outlined above, ‘respectability’ became a central structuring principle in demarcating social status and shaping interpersonal relationships under Dutch and British colonial rule (Ross, 2015:98). Residents of the poor, predominantly Afrikaans-speaking community frequently used powerful metaphors to describe their everyday lives. One of these

terms was *rou*, which may be translated as crude, raw, rough, indecent and vulgar. This term was used to describe people considered as “uncultured, undisciplined, not fully incorporated into appropriate modes of comportment and behaviour” (Ross, 2015:98). The term *rou* is juxtaposed with *oordentlik* – a term that has “connotations of decency, respectability, reasonability, and proper conformity to the social norms of the elite” (Ross, 2015:98). The terms *rou* and *oordentlik* are used in the same way the term ‘white trash’ serves to other non-conforming poor whites from the wealthy, which is essentially an example of class demarcation. ‘Rawness’ and ‘decency’ are examples of social modes that are shaped by different political regimes, historical processes, cultural models, and the everyday social interactions they make possible (Ross, 2015:105).

To be designated as part of the *oordentlike mense* (decent people) meant that the persons concerned “know their place” (Ross, 2015:99). This was the command embedded in Apartheid society: adhere to the implicit rules of ‘respectability’. It insists on forms of respect that border on subservience to those in charge (Ross, 2015:99). Sibanda (2018) describes how those categorised as ‘poor whites’ suffer “social pain and death” as both blacks and wealthier whites view them with disgust and laugh at the predicament that stripped them of a sense of worth and personhood (Sibanda, 2018:18). The notion of ‘othering’ is central to these processes: Sibanda (2018:18) argues that it strips poor whites of their status as citizens because it licences forms of ridicule that compromise their identity and lead to them not being considered as belonging to the community. In the early years of Apartheid, state intervention was able to largely eliminate white unemployment (Kenney, 2016:120). In turn, as the Afrikaner *volk* was imagined into being and its members moved into the middle class, the poor white ‘problem’ vanished from public discourse. Those who remained poor while the *volk* grew richer were seen as shameful and lazy (Bottomley, 2012:141).

Bottomley (2012:36) notes that a witness told the Carnegie Commission of 1932: “the educated Afrikaner feels with resentment and impatience that the poor white is a disgrace to their own people. ‘You feel, in a way, that they have let you down’”. According to the Commission, poor whites were ‘failed’ whites because white people

were at once products and advocates of modernism, their confidence in the natural and social sciences melded into the grand themes of their times: the British Imperial Mission, American Expansionism, and shared Anglo-Saxon racial identity (Bottomley, 2016:79).

A network of doctors, experts and policy makers located in governments, charities, churches and supra-national organisations viewed poor whites as a concern that went well beyond national borders (Bottomley, 2016:86). This concern formed part of a racial anxiety that bled across and disregarded national boundaries. The notion of ‘the waste of a white skin’ is also apposite here, in that its use (along with others) expresses fear of white racial degeneration (Willoughby-Herard, 2015:8). The notion of the ‘failed white’ relates to failure in living up to the image of what whites ‘should be like’ and is associated with feelings of deep shame (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:267).

3.5.2 Moral Legitimacy and Begging among Poor Whites

Ndlovu (2016) conducted a study that observed the begging strategies employed by placard bearing, able-bodied black and white adults at traffic lights in Johannesburg. The main purpose of the study was to consider how ideas of ‘race’ shape the performances of begging and patterns of giving (Ndlovu, 2016:126). The study reflects on white privilege, begging and non-racism, and was concerned with exploring to what extent begging by and giving to black and white beggars could be read as “performances of race”. Ndlovu (2016) analyses the social contradiction poor whites embody in post-Apartheid South Africa and how it affects their “moral legitimacy” through the ways that others perceive them as being poor. This analysis developed an explanation of how poor whites believed they were perceived by others.

As with CWS, Ndlovu (2016) uses the concept of ‘whiteness’ as a socially-constructed phenomenon. ‘Whiteness’ is defined as “being tied to a skin colour labelled as white and elevated through forms of white domination such as Apartheid, slavery and segregation” (Ndlovu, 2016:128). Through its construction, according to this approach, whiteness became synonymous with power, intelligence, wealth, ingenuity and civilisation (Ndlovu, 2016:128). Ndlovu’s research shows that when whites display poverty, their behaviour contradicts that which is normally associated with ‘whiteness’. Ndlovu (2016:129) argues that white poverty allows for the deconstruction of whiteness and its dominance in that poverty is associated with marginalisation and powerlessness, which do not conform to what is expected of whiteness in South Africa (Howard, 2004:68).

This research also explores the social stigma surrounding poor whites and the social contradiction that white poverty embodies. It will be argued that this social contradiction influences the way poor whites perceive the labour market and the survival strategies that they adopt. It may be that in light of white privilege and because of what whiteness has been

associated with in South Africa (and elsewhere) that poor whites think that they are entitled to ‘good’ jobs in the primary segment of the labour market, despite not having any qualifications or job experience that would entitle them to such a position.

Ndlovu (2016:133) considers the idea of poor whites and their ‘legitimacy’ to engage in begging and explores the idea with interviewees who donated to beggars. This moral legitimacy, according to Ndlovu, is revealed in the ways that others perceive poor whites, given South Africa’s history. Many of the interviewees, who do not donate to white beggars, were of the opinion that whites should not be begging because they lived through Apartheid, which provided them with an advantage and a chance to make something of their lives. Black people did not receive the same benefits as whites under Apartheid, and whites that are poor in contemporary South Africa are seen by some as not having taken “advantage of a poverty-free future” (Ndlovu, 2016:133). According to Ndlovu (2016:134), there was a sense that the history of South Africa and the role whites played during Segregation and Apartheid “disqualifies them from begging”.

The findings of Ndlovu’s study indicate that some people view whites as having no moral legitimacy to beg, that there is more to donating to them than simply compassion, and that begging whites denaturalise ‘whiteness’, which is usually associated with being middle class. These whites are a reminder of how institutionalised racism and its mechanisms created a lie: that whites could not be so poor as to beg (Ndlovu, 2016:139). Importantly, this view of whiteness tends to conflate race and class. The theory of intersectionality convincingly shows that social cleavages are much more complex than a simple black versus white divide (Roberts, 2004:1169). It will be argued that the perceptions poor whites have of themselves and their positionality shape the decisions they make in the labour market. Not only do they not wish to compete in the secondary segment where qualifications matter less, but they also do not possess the skills and expertise to qualify for many positions in the primary segment.

The notion of liminality is particularly pertinent to the systematic processes, which were informed by political ideologies and practices, designed to ensure the labour market success of whites (Teppo, 2004:16). Poor whites represent the white “other” (Ndlovu, 2016:129) and show the intimate connections between race and class. The term ‘white trash’, for example, is a classist designation of those who are white and poor, which is racist in that it serves to distinguish the people it targets from other kinds of ‘trash’, who are implicitly assumed to be black (Howard, 2004:69).

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the distinctions between absolute and relative poverty were highlighted, as well as the extent to which poverty and unemployment affect the different racial groups in South Africa. Building on what was learned about the history of the ‘poor white problem’ and the policies that prioritised white employment during Segregation and Apartheid, an outline of white poverty in contemporary South Africa was provided. By discussing the ideologies surrounding the implementation of race-based policies and the ‘reforming’ of poor white people, an understanding of the social stigma around poor whites being both the “wounders” and “wounded” in contemporary South Africa was analysed. Highlighting the role poor whites played in history helps to situate them in the post-Apartheid society and to appreciate their ‘contradictory’ social position. The concept of liminality experienced by poor whites, which is outlined in this chapter, aids in an understanding of the perceived social contradiction confronted by poor whites with the changing of the political, economic and social landscape of South Africa. In addition, I assessed how the history of poor whites plays out in contemporary South Africa by highlighting the issues of moral legitimacy and begging among poor whites. The next chapter seeks to gain an understanding of how these issues and themes come into play through the perceptions and experiences that the selected poor whites had of the post-Apartheid labour market.

CHAPTER 4

POOR WHITES AND LABOUR MARKET PERCEPTIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The first section of the data analysis revolves around an account of the ways in which the poor whites at *Die Rivier* live, drawing on insights into how they perceive and experience life at the homeless shelter. Next, I consider the community relationship dynamics – discovering that, by ensuring adherence to the rules and obligation that come with living at the shelter, the owner and management have a big influence on how the interviewees spend their time as well as how they behave. These reflections show that the tasks and obligations the residents have to complete each day may well be impeding their ability to find work.

After assessing the different obligations that the interviewees have to meet every day, I explore the employment and livelihood strategies among these residents. In doing so, it becomes clear that the interviewees are heavily dependent on the resources made available by both *Die Rivier* and the government, to the extent that this may lower their motivation to find a job. Here, I consider what the interviewees do when they are in need of money: Most of them rely on their friends and family members to send them some money, while a few of them go out and look for jobs. The aim here is to assess the extent to which they are motivated to change their circumstance or if they are passive about their situation and do not see much point in altering them.

Despite being resentful toward the government, the interviewees indicated that they are heavily reliant on the services that it provides. In exploring the livelihood strategies of the interviewees, I also assess their incomes and the cost of living at *Die Rivier* to gain an understanding of the amount of money they need in order to live a functioning life at the homeless shelter. It became apparent that not much money is needed to survive if the interviewees are not externally employed because it means that they do not have to pay rent. However, most of the interviewees also do not have jobs outside the homeless shelter, meaning that they are forced to work the shifts required by the homeless shelter.

The next section analyses the labour market experiences of the interviewees. In getting to know how the interviewees have engaged with the labour market, I am able to ascertain their attitudes toward finding work. Most of the participants had a lack of dedication to finding work

throughout their lives and drifted in and out of jobs, which could be contributing to their attitudes to finding work while living at a shelter where all their basic needs are taken care of. Following this, I explore the knowledge of job opportunities among the residents of the shelter and their various modes of finding work in the secondary segment of the labour market, with word-of-mouth being their primary strategy for finding a job.

Their expectations of wages, working conditions and work-related benefits are also taken into account to assess whether their expectations of work match the types of jobs that they are seeking. Most of the interviewees said that they would put up with any working conditions as long as they had a job, while a few would like to receive a specific wage and have turned down jobs that offer less. In inquiring about their labour market successes and failures, it was clear that some interviewees regarded their lack of education and qualifications as the biggest challenge to finding a job, while others believed that their race was the biggest factor because of the policies that were introduced to undo the unfair treatment of blacks in the labour market under Apartheid.

Building on what was learned about the interactions these poor whites have had with the labour market, I discuss their perceptions of the labour market in the 'new' South Africa. In gaining these insights into their perception of the contemporary South African labour market, it is shown that the interviewees felt threatened by competing with skilled black people (especially) in the labour market. They yearn for a time when their employment was prioritised by the government. In their opposition to affirmative action, in particular, the interviewees voiced their discontent with having to compete on the basis of skills they do not possess any. Their vehement opposition to affirmative action was based on the belief that it was unfair and that it should be based on 'need' rather than race.

Despite the surface-level acknowledgment by these poor whites that Apartheid provided advantages to whites in the labour market at the expense of black people, they still hanker for the time when their needs were prioritised. This absence of moral responsibility reflects (among others) a lack of understanding of the structures of the labour market in South Africa today, as the policies that have been put in place not to disadvantage white people but rather attempt to eradicate the legacies of racial discrimination. In sharing what they believed to be true about the policies that seek equal representation in the workplace, the interviewees' overriding sense of the contemporary labour market was that it was systematically stacked against them.

The final section deals with how the interviewees experienced their whiteness in light of having been a part of a historically-privileged racial group. I investigate their views on whiteness and poverty in contemporary South Africa and find that their immediate environment reinforces a belief that there are more poor whites today than there were before 1994. Being surrounded by other poor whites, who view the changing economic, social and political landscape with distrust and disapproval, I argue, reinforces their racist worldviews as they are in a space where these may be perpetuated without censure. Along with these factors, I also investigate how and why these poor whites viewed ‘black poverty’ as being different to ‘white poverty’. In doing so, I assess the extent to which the social construction of white poverty in South Africa plays a profound role in how ‘being white’ is viewed.

4.2 COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

The community is reproduced by its residents, with all the maintenance, cooking and cleaning undertaken by the men and women who live at the shelter, which is overseen by the owners and management of *Die Rivier*. The manager, who is also the pastor of the AGS church on the property, is a very influential person in the centre and is likely to have a key role in determining the internal dynamics and rules at *Die Rivier*. “We got the big bosses [...] that are the owners of the place. Then in management there is [Names]. They’re the higher management here. Then you have [the person] who runs the reception work” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Residents had various responsibilities such as cooking and serving food for residents, fetching and sorting donations that come in, and cleaning and maintaining the grounds. If a resident had a job outside *Die Rivier* and earns a living wage, they were required to pay rent that consisted of R200 for water and R1500 for electricity. “Here we pay monthly which is 1700 a month, the rent is 1500 but we pay 200 rand for water and electricity” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). They thus have no other responsibilities delegated to them. If a resident does not have a job outside *Die Rivier* (called “working out”), they must work on the property for their meals and their accommodation. Work on the property is undertaken in half-day shifts, and the designated jobs are a part of the rules as well. Failing to carry out a particular job or refusing to complete a shift can result in the termination of an individual’s residency at the shelter. Management will however accept cash in exchange for missing shifts, or an individual will be forced to make up their missed shift on their weekend off.

The designated jobs are a part of the rules too:

The kitchen rules [describing kitchen shifts] are that you have to be there from 8 until 2, or 2 until 8 and sometimes you can only get out at like 10 or 11 depending on when the donations come. Those are the stricter rules, but there are also some smaller ones (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Consistent donations of food are made by Woolworths, while other donations may come from willing stores around the area or other churches.

No, the only place we receive food from is Woolworths. Basically no one else, most of the times when someone donates things over December with Christmas then people come and drop a few toys for the little ones but that's it (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

Lieve noted that stores from around the area would also make donations every now and then. "Just Woolworths but every now and then, like during winter, some Indian place gave us blankets that was quite nice as well" (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

The responses by interviewees paint a picture of a having all their needs met, with free education, healthcare, food, etc. Although it may not be up to the standard that they would like, the residents are able to survive. Because all the basic needs of the residents are met, it may remove the urgency of finding a job. As noted above, the duration of the shifts that are required to be worked at *Die Rivier* also prevented the residents from going out and looking for a job.

There is a strong Christian ethic at *Die Rivier*, but the workload is not spread evenly. "You need to work for your food and your room; it's like the bible says you must work for your bread" (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Based on the evidence gathered from the interviewees, the tasks were delegated to them based on their gender. Women did their work shifts in the kitchen by cooking and cleaning for the residents, while men were given the tasks that involve maintaining the gardens and manual labour.

So, if you're a woman and you don't have work outside, you work in the kitchen. If you're a man and you don't have work outside, you work on the land. So, they have to cut the grass, etc. (Amy, 30/10/2018).

The duties of the men were outlined by George: "If you're not working for instance, you need to work for your place to sleep and your food. So, we need to look after the complex, clean the place, cut the grass, and make it look neat" (George, 30/10/2018).

Residents have different shifts they need to work as well as fulfil their hygiene practices like showering. The shower shifts are differently assigned for women, men and children. Some residents did not enjoy having to shower at a specified time and complained about the hours that are allocated to it:

The shower shifts sucks because they want to save water and electricity. You know, it's like 4 o'clock in the morning, 6 o'clock in the morning, and the two in the afternoon for guys, I think 12 o'clock for the ladies in the kitchen, 4 o'clock for the kids and then 8 o'clock and then 10 o'clock in the night (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Residents receive time off every second weekend when they can spend the time as they wish: "On the weekend when I'm off, I clean my room. It's how I relax" (Christien, 30/10/2018). Aside from the aforementioned obligations, *Die Rivier* also has rules in place to maintain order at the shelter.

There are a lot of rules. No *skinnering* [gossiping], no smoking anywhere except in the designated smoking areas, kids are only allowed to play within certain hours, you have to be in at night – weekdays is 10pm and weekends is 11pm. No drinking is allowed. No fighting (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Tinus mentioned additional rules:

There are a lot of rules. You can't drink ... Say you go out to family and you have a braai and you have a drink you must stay there. You can't come back drunk. You can't use drugs. You must go to church three times a week – on Wednesday, Sunday mornings and Sunday night. You *must* go to church (Tinus, 31/10//2018).

The church played a big role in the community dynamics, with the manager being the pastor of the church and attendance being a part of the obligations imposed on the residents of *Die Rivier*. Church involved worship as well as the provision of counselling:

I think what they use as counselling is that you go to church. Because I needed to go back on my medication, I'm bipolar, so I've been written a referral letter from here, and it said I will get spiritual counselling on a weekly basis. But I go to church on a Wednesday and twice on a Sunday. That's what I assume they meant ... So, I don't know if you actually need to go and ask for it or enforce it (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Failure to adhere to all of the rules and obligations will result in the termination of an individual's residency at the shelter. Fulfilling the obligations and adhering to the rules is found to be difficult for some of the interviewees for different reasons, such as the length of the shifts interfering in their prospects for moving out as they have very little time to find a job outside the shelter.

4.2.1 Challenges of living at *Die Rivier*

A challenge predominantly faced by the women of *Die Rivier* (who are not aided as much in comparison to the men by management to find work) is finding time in between their shifts to find work. Comments by Amy and Lieve explain what is experienced by the female interviewees and state that it is because of the shifts that they cannot find the time to look for a job or take care of their other responsibilities.

There's not enough time to go and find proper work. You've got to be in the kitchen certain times. So, like today you have to work a double shift, you have to work until 10 – so you get tired, you get really, really tired ... especially since I have a small baby and I'm still breast feeding. And you've got to do washing, so there's never enough personal time to go out and look for work. Because if you take time out, you've got to work it back in. Even if you've got to go to the clinic, you've got to work that time in, and you *have* to go to the clinic. So that's a bit hectic. Unless you've got money – you can buy your time back, but I don't have R50 for every time I have to go do something, and if I do, I'd rather go buy nappies and things (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Lieve has various issues with living in the shelter:

That's one thing I really don't like – if you have to go to the clinic or SASSA you have to work in your hours back in the kitchen and that's not fair ... And they want us to pay but we can't go look for a job. Because if you go look for a job you need to work in your hours (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

For male residents, the quote below by Tinus can be used to explain the biggest challenges of living at *Die Rivier*. Tinus notes the biggest issue to be the lack of personal space that comes with sharing a room with seven other male residents:

The biggest challenge is space – what they did is take one big room, a classroom and divide it into four so one classroom has four rooms inside, there's four families that live

inside one room. But then single men go to single quarters, there's I think eight single men in one single quarters. And the single women they share two by two.

He also adds that it is because it is meant to be a temporary living arrangement– and is therefore not meant to be comfortable – thereby exhibiting an understanding of why the conditions are the way they are. This may be why it is easier for him to tolerate the difficulties: “The rule basically is you need to stay here for six months, get a job, get on your feet and move out, but sometimes they stay a little longer” (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

4.2.2 Incomes and cost of living at *Die Rivier*

The interviewees said that they pay a monthly rent (if they have a job) that includes both water and electricity. As summarised by Andrietta: “Here we pay monthly which is R1700 a month. The rent is R1500, but we pay R200 for water and electricity” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). The interviewees estimated different amounts of money needed to cover their living costs. This is an indication of the important distinction made between absolute and relative poverty explained in chapter 3.2 by Notten and De Neuberg (2011:248). By living at *Die Rivier*, residents have their basic needs met, they do not experience the severity of absolute poverty (defined by Ravallion and Chen 2011:1254) in that their needs for physical survival are met because residents are “adequately nourished and clothed for meeting the physical needs of survival and normal activities”; but still experience relative poverty because their social inclusion needs are not being met. Ravallion and Chen (2011:1254) state that the relativity stems from the differences in value attached to the cost of social inclusion needs a person may have. In this sense, interviewees may be experiencing that their social inclusion needs are not being met because they are not meeting the living standards of what is considered to be ‘normal’ within the white community in South Africa – a concept highlighted in the study by Schuermans and Visser (2005:267).

Amy, who lives with her husband and baby, estimated their living costs monthly at “about R3/400”. Her father-in-law “helps out, [my husband] does odd jobs. He used to work with [the owner's son] until last week; so, then every week he'd get paid from that” (Amy, 30/10/2018). George estimates the money that covers his living costs to include rent, school fees and basic needs:

The rent is R1800. It depends on how you're going to spend your money ... I'd say like two-and-a-half to three grand. Put her money and my money together. I'd say six grand will look after us, paying our school fees and all of that (George, 30/10/2018).

Christien did not pay rent as she lost her job and therefore needed less money to cover living costs. “I don’t have the money. I don’t work at the moment. So, I pay R140 per month for water and electricity” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Wikus stated that what he earns goes to the mother of his son. “I stay here for free [because I work on the grounds], so when I work out the money will go to the mom so she can buy the kid what he needs” (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Riaan does not have a job and therefore does not earn any money He relies on his mother to send him money to cover his expenses, which include toiletries and snacks: “my mom is actually helping me with that now, but I take the minimal stuff. My mom is 72 years old now [and] on a pension ... So, I try to not make it no more than R500 a month” (Riaan, 31/10/2018). Lieve did not give an estimate but explained that she did not pay rent and only needed to cover certain commodities:

Well, if you’re smoking, then you need to pay for cigarettes and stuff. But, if you don’t smoke, then you can go to the office and ask for soap and stuff. Because if you can buy cigarettes then you can buy soap. Irrespective of whether the cigarettes were sponsored to you, they don’t care (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Those who do not have a job or earn a stable income can make a deal with management to pay what they can toward their stay. Wikus, who does not pay *Die Rivier* rent, only has to make sure that he has enough money to send to the mother of his child. “When I go work out, I get 100 rand that I can give every 2-3 weeks to the mom so that she can buy stuff for the kid, whatever he needs” (Wikus, 30/10/2018). Lieve makes very little money doing car-guarding every Sunday and has two children to take care of and therefore has an agreement with management whereby she makes a smaller contribution, and they also take half of what she receives in government grants. “I pay 150 a month for me and my kids. Once I get SASSA, they take half the SASSA. I think its 400 per child” (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Provided that residents have a job, they will be expected to pay R1500 a month for their room and their meals, and an additional R200, which contributes to payments for water and electricity. Aside from rent, residents need to buy items such as toiletries and other consumables. These items are provided by *Die Rivier* only to those with no income, who have no money and work on the property for their bed and their meals, provided the requesting resident does not smoke. It appears that the rationale behind this rule is that if individuals have money for cigarettes (which are not necessary for survival), *Die Rivier* will not provide them with toiletries.

As seen in the research conducted by Mashau (2012:64), places that accommodate poor people, who cannot afford their own housing, make allowances for what rent is accepted and allow residents to pay what they can toward helping the organisation. In the literature, it is evident that organisations such as *Die Rivier* are rooted in a Calvinistic tradition: it ensures that residents 'work for their bread' and 'obey the rules'.

As seen above, interviewees who are employed need R1700 for rent and some money for toiletries and other consumables, which differ from person to person. A resident without employment will work on the property for his or her meals and rent, and therefore will need a lower figure to pay for their toiletries and other needs. It is however possible to live without money at *Die Rivier* since all basic needs can be covered, provided the resident does not smoke. However, what is also important to consider is the question about what constitutes 'basic needs' for whites and whether the social environment is more demanding for whites because they have a higher standard of what it means to live a 'decent life' (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:267). The study refers to the basic needs provided to whites who were allocated to suburbs – like Epping Garden Village (Teppo, 2004:15) – where they were 'rehabilitated' and taught to be middle class (Bottomley, 2012:142). Schuermans and Visser (2005:266) refer to this as whites and blacks living in separate worlds, both during and after Apartheid, and argue that it influences their respective customs regarding subsistence.

It is for this reason that the poor whites in this study may have different estimates of what they 'need' to cover their 'basic' living costs in comparison to poor black people. Furthermore, this will also influence what they conceive as 'essential' or 'must-have' items. Overall, it appears that aside from shelter, meals, water and electricity (which are all provided by *Die Rivier*), interviewees suggested that what is most important for them to have are toiletries, cigarettes and snack items – which are not very extravagant demands.

4.3 EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AMONG RESIDENTS AT *DIE RIVIER*

The information received from interviewees shows that not many people living at *Die Rivier* have a job. This is evident in several responses. For instance, Andrietta noted: "I don't know ... There are a few people that do work out [outside of *Die Rivier*], mostly men and there are a few women that do that as well – but I'm not sure in total how many people there are" (Andrietta, 30/10/2010). Tinus also noted: "If I need to guess I'd say about 10% [have a job];

so not many” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Amy referred to the types of jobs that people at the *Die Rivier* tend to do: “Mostly ... the men do electrical type work. Some of the women do sales and reception and that type of thing” (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Since the interviewees all lived in a homeless shelter, it is not surprising that most were unemployed as they lacked the skills and expertise necessary to succeed in a labour market characterised by extremely high levels of unemployment, especially among the less skilled. The responses above support the claim by labour market segmentation theorists that workers, who cannot get good jobs, need to accept a bad job or remain unemployed (Fields, 2009:1). It was noted by Andrietta that it is “mostly men” who had jobs, which is most likely due to the men’s easier access to work as they were not required to work in the kitchen for eight hours a day, and they were regularly approached by the owner to work for the elevator company operated by the owner. This was beneficial to both parties as the resident fulfilled the owner’s need for casual labour while earning the resident some money. The sexual division of labour therefore had a significant impact on the job opportunities that were available for the women at *Die Rivier*.

The women of *Die Rivier* pointed out that the government grants administered by SASSA were the main sources of income for residents (provided that they qualified for them). “The people that live in [*Die Rivier*] that don’t work out, don’t get money. Your way of paying [for staying here] is by working” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Lieve agreed: “The main sources are SASSA and like [the pastor] takes a couple of people to work at church doing car guarding and stuff like that” (Lieve, 30/10/2018). Most of the interviewees have no source of income other than their government grants.

SASSA is mandated by the South African Social Security Agency Act of 2004 to “ensure the provision of comprehensive social security services against vulnerability and poverty within the constitutional legislative framework” (Kelly, 2019/05/20). SASSA provides a variety of different grants for those in need, including child support grants, disability grants and grants for older persons (South African Social Security Agency, 2019/05/20). If applicants meet the minimum requirements, they will receive monthly financial support depending on what grant they applied for. The value of the Child Support Grant was R420 per month from April 2019. The maximum value of the Disability Grant is R1,780 per month from April 2019. The maximum value of the Older Person’s Grant was R1,780 per month from April 2019. If you are over the age of 75 you will receive R1,790 per month (Kelly, 2019/05/20). These amounts

fall well below the National Minimum Wage and are not sufficient to meet the most basic human needs of a family.

Three interviewees – Christien, Lieve and Amy – managed to access government grants because they have children. Half of the money they received in grants was taken by *Die Rivier* to cover some of the cost of their stay.

Ja, I get SASSA for my kid. They give R400 and *Die Rivier* takes SASSA money depending on how many kids you have. I just have one. If you have two kids, then you pay R90 per child (Christien, 31/10/2018).

The interviewees were aware of the child support grant but not of any other of grants offered by SASSA. “Ja, SASSA. None other, that I know of, I’m not disabled or anything like that” (Amy, 30/10/2018).

The rest of the interviewees did not receive government grants for different reasons. In the case of Andrietta, she was not motivated to apply: “I haven’t tried either. Because I didn’t have to. I’ve got to do it when I move out, but I didn’t need it because my husband had a good salary” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Andrietta – who has two children – had never applied for a grant with her reasoning being that she had not needed to apply because her husband had a job that could support them all. However, she noted that her reason for coming to the homeless shelter was because her husband lost his job and both of them could not find work for a considerable period of time. It also became clear from the interview that she had not done any formal work and spent most of her adult years as a housewife. Because Andrietta grew up taking care of her little brother due to her mother not being around, her life was shaped by having to be a caretaker from a young age. It is evident that an individual’s background and socialisation strongly affect how they perceive and experience the labour market.

Riaan, who has not yet explored the option of accessing a grant, said the following:

You know, I’ve never tried it because I’m not vain or anything ... I know I’m not going to be stuck here. So, that money that I can get can go to someone else that really needs it. That’s how I see it (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

The same goes for Wikus, who believes he makes enough to support himself and his baby, who lives with his mother outside *Die Rivier*:

when I go out and do like part-time jobs, and then get some money ... I give it to her to buy food for the child because I have enough food in here. So, I give money to her for the kid for nappies and stuff. Then I am appeased. Then she's appeased, and then we don't fight with each other (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Lang and Dickens (1985:10) explain that there are various factors that influence an individual's cognitive processes that are developed prior to employment, which in turn influence an individual's opportunities in the labour market. This is the way in which social structures influence how an individual comes to understand his or her place in society. Andrietta's responses reveal the effects of a gendered socialisation in which she has been brought up to believe that, given her gender, her role in the family is to stay home, look after the children and do her 'duty' as a housewife. This is possibly why she is of the view that she does not need to do anything else to contribute to their livelihood as she has a husband whose gender entails being the breadwinner of the household.

Even though he lived in a homeless shelter, Riaan stated that he should not apply for a grant as he was not going to be unemployed much longer. By saying that he is "not vain or anything", he is qualifying his claims because he knows it sounds vain and reflects a sense of superiority and essentially amounts to saying: "I am too good for a grant" and not like those (mostly black) people who depend on grants for their livelihoods.

The interviewees also revealed knowledge of disability grants. Tinus stated that he might apply for one in the future: "I lost my eye in January, so I need to go for a disability grant. I qualify; I just need to go to the hospital and get a certificate" (Tinus, 31/10/2018). He might not have applied for it because of an issue many interviewees faced while living at *Die Rivier*: rarely having enough time to do such activities to help better their lives because of the shift working hours that were required of everyone who was not employed externally. It is unclear as to why the owner/ management had such strict rules in place for the working shifts to be done, which seemed to be disadvantaging the residents rather than benefitting them. Because of the duration of the shifts as well as that they needed to be completed every day of the working week, Saturdays and Sundays (except every two weeks residents are allowed a day off), it was very difficult to find the time to seek external employment. In light of these factors, it can be questioned what would happen to the shelter if everyone got a job and if keeping a certain number of people 'captive' at the shelter is the intention of management or the owner.

George investigated the idea of applying for a disability grant and said he was turned down as his epilepsy was under control: “I did apply once because I’m an epileptic, but they turned me down. They said that I’m controlled, which I am ... So, they said: ‘no’, I won’t get it” (George, 30/10/2018).

It can be observed that many interviewees are dependent on the state in various ways. Thus, interviewees also contradict their opposition to the state while being hugely reliant on public services such as government hospitals and schools as well. Other interviewees, such as Andrietta, Riaan, Amy and Lieve, ask relatives for money or have a system whereby their family members or friends send them money each month or whenever they can. Andrietta receives monetary from her mother, her aunt and her husband’s family. “Got to make a plan. My parents – well, my mother – helps when she can and my aunt and my husband’s family help. Mostly my husband’s family will help” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Riaan receives help from his mother and explains what he did to survive prior to entering *Die Rivier*, when he slept on the street and how he handled it in light of being used to a more affluent lifestyle:

Ja, I have my mom but she’s not always there. I don’t ask her for unnecessary things. Well, before I got here, I was on the street for a week and I had to survive. I had to sell some of the clothes that I had. I slept on the street. It’s not nice, especially if you come from Rivonia, and I’m used to a different lifestyle. Luckily, I adapt quickly. I’ve also got friends that will help me sometimes. They’ll give me 100 Bucks, so I can buy toiletries or buy cigarettes or whatever (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Amy’s father-in-law helped them when they needed money and she explained what she used it for and how much money was sometimes given to them:

The dad helps us. He gives us like a R100, then you like budget. You get eight nappies and a box of cigarettes and a cooldrink, but the thing is you adapt to it. How far you can make R100 go if you have to stretch it out (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Lieve has a daughter that she sometimes asks for money who helps when she is able to afford it “You become a real *boemellaar*. A real hobo ... Well I’m blessed because every now and then I ask my daughter to help me. So, thank God for that. She can’t always help me but when she can, she does” (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Tinus has a different strategy from other interviewees in that he does not ask for money but looks for additional work. “Then I look for private jobs. I walk around and ask people for private jobs, any jobs, anything” (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

It is noted by Jhabvala, Sudarshan and Unni (2003) that informal work is a survival strategy of the poor and relates to the different strategies that individuals with no steady income resort to in order to earn some money each day or week (Fields, 2009:16). Tinus’ response is evidence of this in that he walks around the neighbourhood and asks to do jobs in exchange for money. Most of these people, like poor blacks generally, rely on a range of different sources of income. However, as seen with many of the other interviewees, because their basic needs are met, there is less of a need to employ these types of survival strategies. Not only is there less of a need, but the obligations that come with living at *Die Rivier* also impede their ability to regain self-sufficiency and independence. The struggle interviewees face in regaining self-sufficiency and independence echoes what is argued by segmentation theory that mobility between the primary and secondary segment of the labour market being challenging.

4.4 EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE LABOUR MARKET AMONG RESIDENTS AT *DIE RIVIER*

4.4.1 Labour Market Experiences

Andrietta’s first job was at a young age and was acquired through her fiancé, who owned his own business. “My first job – I was 14 and I was engaged to this guy and he had a locksmith business – so I did all his buying of stock and cutting keys and things like that” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Andrietta has done mainly low-wage and low-skill jobs, and does not have much work experience. “Normally just cashier jobs or filing jobs, admin jobs ... I’ve bartended in Port Shepstone and the locksmith thing, but that’s it” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Tinus was a domestic worker in a factory. “I cleaned toilets at a factory in Industria. After that, I started on the mine as a semi-skilled boilermaker. On the mine, I learned to do a lot of things” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Tinus has also done mostly low-wage, low-skilled work. “Handywork mostly – actually boiler making – that’s my trade” (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

Christien also started to work at a young age. “When I started to work, I was 15 years old. My first job was for Mr. Price Home in Westgate. I was just standing in for someone when they were on maternity leave” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Christien has had casual and seasonal work.

I always helped my mom in the Tuck shops. And when [Mr. Price Home] let me go, I started fixing shoes. So, I know how to clean and polish shoes. Then I got a job at Pick ‘n Pay, and I worked there for a year. Then myself and the boss came into trouble because he wanted to appoint black people in my place. So, he said I stole but I didn’t steal anything. So, then I left the job at Pick ‘n Pay [and] I went to stay in Pinetown. And there I worked at Checkers. And now I’m struggling to find work (Christien, 31/10/2018).

Stealing seems to be a common thread throughout her work history, but she denies that it was the real reason why she was let go – which is likely to be the reason she argues she was let go because black people were appointed in her place.

The work I did in the meantime ... was cleaning someone’s house. Because we’re poor they think we steal. She fired me on the 26th of October [2018]. I was working there while living here to pay for my room (Christien, 31/10/2018).

Riaan worked overseas after he matriculated. “I was in England. I worked there for three years. I was a dispatch controller for Tesco’s or something” (Riaan, 31/10/2018). Riaan returned to South Africa and was self-employed with a friend:

Then when I came back and had enough money saved, I asked my one friend if he wants to come into business with me ... You know those guys who sell clothes out of the boots of their cars to like the domestic workers that can’t get Truworths accounts? We did that. And then I sold my half to him and then messed around a bit. I had four or five jobs after that (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

He named some of the jobs that he did before deciding to become certified in “health and safety”:

I was a supervisor for this other guy and then I was a stock controller for another guy, then I was an account executive for a corporate gifts company and Pick ‘n Pay. I had good jobs, and then I did health and safety because I wanted more money. I was greedy ... But anything that makes over 25K and is legal. I’m looking for health and safety jobs with security for my kids (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Amy’s first job was when she was 15. “My first job was at Spur, waitressing, a very long time ago. Like 22 years ago. The Spur is not even there anymore. I waitressed most of my teenage years and early 20s” (Amy, 30/10/2018). Amy worked various types of jobs after waitressing:

“Reception, secretary, that kind of thing ... [After school] I studied my arse off ... I wanted to be a vet” (Amy, 30/10/2018). She explains that she went to study at university for a few months after matriculating but that it did not go according to plan:

I was at UJ [University of Johannesburg] for a while. I did biology and that kind of thing, but I only made it for a month. I was heavy, *heavy* on the drugs then. I couldn't concentrate and the nights partying all the time and then the partying became more important at the time ... I was on heroin – I wasted a [lot] of my parent's money, and then they only found out a while later, because they were still sending me cash (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Wikus entered the job market knowing that he would be doing building work. These ideas, he said, were transferred to him by his parents and what he learned in school:

Building. It is one of my good work things that I had all my years. I wanted to be a builder all my years. That came from my dad and my mom and then in school. I also did woodwork and plastic containers and all of that stuff I did in school” (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Wikus' first job was at *Die Rivier* doing the maintenance work shifts. “My first job was here to do gardens and whatever they told me to do, I just did” (Wikus, 30/10/2018). He mostly did jobs related to the experience he acquired in the job market: that is,

Building work, plastering, painting, paving. Any work I can do with my hands because I can do everything ... I've only ever done building, and sometimes you go to someone's house or any place where there is a job to do, so I do it on the weekend or anytime I get a chance ... So, then I do jobs for three to five days at a time (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Lieve was married and had children at a very young age and did not think about jobs or work prospects:

I got married at 15 and then my ex-husband and I got a flat together. I went to work at a creche. The flat was in Edenvale and I worked at the creche for a mere 600 rand a month. That was my first salary and first job. I just went with the flow ... I was working at the creche looking after toddlers – 38 of them – that was 1996/7. I was 15 ... Thereafter ... I went from the first creche to another one and then I was a bar lady. Then I was a prostitute and then I was a stripper and then back to a prostitute and then I

became a manageress at a pub and a car wash and then worked for Vodacom, MTN (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

To earn an income, she became involved in sex work around Johannesburg. “I was in the industry for 13 years – the prostitution industry” (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

George worked his first job but did not keep it. “My first job was as a trade as panel beater. And then after that one I hit the pipe fitting [for] a company installing sprinklers for fire protection for 11 years” (George, 30/10/2018).

The evidence above shows that Lieve, Wikus, Christien, Tinus, Andrietta and George have spent most of their working lives in the secondary segment of the labour market occupying low-skilled jobs with low and inconsistent wages. In addition to the low-wage and low-skill jobs, they also drifted in and out of jobs. Working sporadically and drifting in and out of jobs speak volumes about their attitude towards work: they were either not motivated to work or gave up work when they thought their needs were not being met. Several interviewees started working at a very young age and did not matriculate. Unemployment and a lack of marketable skills are predominant among all interviewees and many came from poor households characterised by joblessness. This clearly demonstrates a pattern of inter-generational poverty, which is likely to have had a profound effect on the interviewees’ perceptions of the job market.

Amy and Riaan, despite coming from a more advantaged background, show that background is not everything and that the choices made in the labour market are also important when it comes to chances for success. They too have drifted in and out of jobs throughout their lives, indicating a lack of commitment to long-term employment or an inability to find work that they deemed ‘suitable’ or ‘appropriate’. Either way, regular changes in jobs are based on decisions that are enabled and/ or constrained by the prevailing conditions. As Fleetwood (2008:22) argues, pre-existing circumstances are an important factor in the choices that people make in the labour market.

4.4.2 Knowledge of Job Opportunities among Residents of *Die Rivier*

The interviewees shared various mechanisms for finding work, such as different online platforms and newspapers, among themselves: “I look for jobs in the newspaper. Got the WhatsApp links as well and Facebook” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). “On WhatsApp and Facebook and Google” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Participants also use other sites like PNet. “Well, I’m

registered on PNet and all those other sites, but also mostly through friend referrals” (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Several interviewees looked for work via word-of-mouth: “I look through people and I send CVs out, but you know, you send your CV to 10 people and no one phones you. Out of 100, one phones you” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Amy agreed: “Mainly newspapers for now, and by ear” (Amy, 30/10/2018); “I search for jobs via ear” (Lieve, 30/10/2018). Finally, George shared similar sentiments by noting that he accessed jobs through word of mouth and then secures them by ‘proving himself’ on the job:

For me, you can talk, somebody can guide you to go and see, or they’ll say I made a phone call but it’s up to you now to do the rest. You can’t give me a phone call and tell me about this job I’ve got to go prove myself (George, 30/10/2018).

The preferred ways of getting jobs among the interviewees in this study is through word of mouth and online platforms. Word of mouth recruitment, in particular, presupposes some social networking skills and contradicts orthodox ideas about the ‘laws’ of supply and demand (Fleetwood, 2006:61) as well as those concerning ‘perfect knowledge’ (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:7; Fleetwood, 2008:22). LMS theorists, by contrast, emphasise the fact that labour markets are not exclusively economic phenomena and that they are deeply embedded in a social, political and historical context.

4.4.3 Expectations of Wages, Working Conditions and Benefits among Residents at *Die Rivier*

Andrietta, Tinus, Christien and Lieve had no expectations when it came to working. They said that they would work for anything and under any conditions – exhibiting no pressure to uphold what is expected of them in the white community. “I don’t mind anything as long as I can get through what I need to do” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Tinus also stated he is “basically used to everything” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Likewise, Christien noted: “I would work for anything to put me back on my feet” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Finally, Lieve also agreed: “I would like a pension and a medical aid that would be nice, but I’m not picky. There’s no space for pickiness; that’s for sure” (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

The quotes above show that the interviewees are desperate for work and that they are prepared to do any work, which is different from the situation for most whites under Apartheid. There is a sense that the interviewees did not mean what they said as their practices to find work

would suggest that they are not desperate to find a job. There is also a sense that the interviewees say want a job since they would like to stop living at *Die Rivier* because of the rules and obligations that they are compelled to follow. The irony is that these obligations may also be interfering in their ability to find a job as they take up most of the time the residents have to find work.

The statements made by the interviewees in my study also support the findings of Schuermans and Visser (2005). While some of the interviewees remarked that they would work for any wage, under any conditions, Riaan and Amy, who come from a different class background, have higher expectations in their search for work. Riaan was looking for work associated with higher earnings and benefits, as he was used to a high-wage lifestyle. He alluded to turning down a lower-earning job because of how he aims to spend his money:

I'm used to 25K and I don't want to struggle anymore 'cause I've been struggling for a few months. It's not nice. So, the mainly thing is I need to sort out my kids 'cause, like I said, this country is going down the drain But if I can, I would like to take them overseas, but that's why with R4500 you can't do that. Not even with 25K a month. Well, with 25K you can but you have to like stay in a shack and save up money, don't drive nice cars anymore (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

This emphasises the point that the dependency these poor whites have on *Die Rivier* and their family and friends may be impeding them from finding a job because of the reduced urgency to find work. If Riaan had no other means to get by, he would have accepted the job, even though the salary is not as high as he would want it to be for the moment. However, it is also suspected that saying he turned down the job was an attempt to make himself look better than the other residents and to impress the interviewer. On a similar note, Amy explained her expectations in terms of what she was earning at Express Mowers (her most recent job) and outlined what pay she is willing to work for:

This is what I don't understand – they started me off on R6000 a month, and then we get commission ... and then I left and went back and then the staff had changed and everything, and they started me on R5000, with less commission (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Amy then went on to outline what pay is too low for her and why: “But everywhere you go the salaries are ridiculous – like R3000 a month, how do you live on that? You can't pay rent, you can't buy groceries” (Amy, 30/10/2018).

The points made by Riaan and Amy also emphasise what scholars in CWS argue about white privilege and how, through various practices that go unrecognised, whiteness has been bestowed with qualities such as luxury and wealth (Niemonen, 2010:54). In turning down a job with what he deemed to be too low earnings, Riaan exhibited an entitlement that is similar to that displayed by white workers under Apartheid when they demanded the higher positions be reserved exclusively for them, thereby restricting blacks from upward mobility and higher earnings (Callinicos, 2014:124).

4.4.4 Estimated Earnings of Residents at *Die Rivier*

As seen above, the interviewees' income was derived predominantly from SASSA grants and small amounts of money received from family members. None of the interviewees earned any money for the work they do at *Die Rivier*; they only work for boarding and meals. "I don't earn from it. It just pays for board and food" (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Likewise: "I don't earn anything, I just work for my roof and my food" (Tinus, 30/10/2018). Amy earned small amounts of money when she was able to sell clothes: "I make and sell clothes if I can't get clothes. You work for your plate of food and such" (Amy, 30/10/2018). Sometimes residents earn money when they do odd jobs externally from *Die Rivier*.

I work for my food and to have a place to sleep, but if people come and fetch me to go do work out, then I go do whatever they want me to ... I come back and pay for what I can, and then if I go out the next day and come back in the afternoon or the evening. Then I go pay for my rent and my water and lights and stuff. That's all (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Lieve earned some money when she guarded cars:

You don't earn anything; you just pay for board and food. With the car guarding, I earn R18 an hour. I've been doing that for four months now every Sunday. Then when payday comes, they take, I'm not sure how much, and give me the peanuts (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

George may be earning a stable wage but was unwilling to share what he earns:

I don't give out my confidential [information] ... No offence, but that's very private. You never know there might be someone whose standing behind the wall there and you never know it runs to this person and that person, because I get paid by the hour ... and

then they say: 'Oh, he earns this much. He must find his own place to stay (George, 30/10/2018).

According to the Statistics South Africa National Poverty Lines, the interviewees that divulged information about their income fall under the Food Poverty Line, meaning they would be unable to purchase or consume enough food to supply themselves with the minimum per-capita-per-day energy requirement for adequate health (Statistics South Africa 2018:3). If they did not stay at a homeless shelter that provided them with three meals a day, their health and well-being would be compromised. In other words, none of the interviewees could survive over the medium to long-term without assistance, be that from the family, the shelter, charities, benefactors or the state.

When asked how much money is needed to cover his living costs, George said both him and his wife's earnings added together would be R6000. "I'd say like two-and-half to three grand. Put her money and my money together I'd say six grand will look after us, paying our school fees and all of that" (George, 30/10/2018). Therefore, it can be estimated that he earns between R2000-R3000 a month. This may be why he was insecure about revealing what he earns given the possibility that someone might overhear the conversation and then lay a complaint that he has enough money to move out. By staying at *Die Rivier*, George might have all his needs met in a way that he would not be able to afford if he had to pay for accommodation, which is why he would oppose any suggestion that he should move out.

4.4.5 Labour Market 'Success' and 'Failure' among Residents of *Die Rivier*

While some interviewees believe that they have had success in the labour market in different ways, some interviewees believe that they were mostly unsuccessful in their labour market pursuits. Lieve, Andrietta and Christien attributed their lack of success in the labour market to their lack of experience and qualifications. "I suppose other people have more qualifications or experience. I don't know" (Lieve, 30/10/2018). "Probably because I am underqualified. It was a management job at a garage" (Andrietta, 30/10/2018); "That was in Randfontein. As a manager. I didn't have the qualifications for it" (Christien, 31/1/2018). The fact that these interviewees apply for jobs that require skills and expertise that they do not possess suggests that they still believe – even if they do not acknowledge it or are conscious of it – that being white entitles one to a certain type of employment. In other words, the interviewees' actions, rather than their words alone, revealed the types of jobs (such as managers) they regarded as worthy of white people.

Amy noted that she had usually been successful in her interviews in the past but not at the moment: “Mostly, like recently, I haven’t been called back for an interview, but mostly if I go for an interview, I get the job. It’s only now, I’d say the last 6 months”. She could not identify the reasons why this might be the case (Amy, 30/10/2018). Riaan viewed the cause of his lack of success in various ways, including his race:

Of course, everybody [has] ... I don’t know, maybe because I’m overeducated or my skin colour or it’s my age. There is a [lot], they never actually tell you the real answer; ‘cause I would like to know ‘cause then I could work on that (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

The way Riaan reasons his lack of success demonstrates lack of insight into other factors that may have caused him to be turned down, as all of his reasons are unchangeable factors that are not attributed to his performance in the interview. As we saw above, Riaan emphasised that he “is not vain or anything”; in this way he let the interviewer know that he is, in fact, vain. Riaan’s vanity would explain why he attributed his lack of success in job interviews to the prospective employers being dishonest and/ or not entirely forthright: “they never actually tell you the real answer”. This, in turn, allows Riaan to frame himself as a victim of the new dispensation. Furthermore, it is also vain to assume that he was ‘over-educated’ for a particular job without having been told why he did not succeed in the interview.

Tinus, Wikus and George did not think they had ever been unsuccessful in an interview:

I just went the other day and got a job and I didn’t wait or anything. There was never a time where I was without money for the day or the week or whatever. There is always a time when I can go out and do any job. Even if it’s a five-minute or six-minute job, then there’s no worries (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Wikus, Tinus and George mentioned that they predominantly pursued work and jobs where they can use their hands and/ or apply their handywork skills. Since these jobs are characterised by ease of access (Fields, 2009:17), these interviewees did not experience much difficulty in finding work. As they are largely looking for work in the lower segments of the labour market, it may be that what they interpret as an ‘interview’ was simply asking someone for a job and then being allowed to work on a casual or temporary basis.

The jobs that Wikus secured were not permanent. As he explained: “There’s always a time when I can go out and do any job. Even if it’s a five-minute or six-minute job”. He used these

types of jobs to earn some money to get him by every week. Such informal work, as seen above, is a generalised survival strategy among the poor.

George had some degree of job stability through his work at the elevator company belonging to the owner of the *Die Rivier*. It is therefore because of a personal connection that George had access to a job with the elevator company. Furthermore, many of the men at *Die Rivier* had access to jobs external to the shelter because of their connection with the owner. The owner is contacted by outsiders in need of people to do forms of labour that relate to handywork. The owner then acted as an intermediary and facilitated access to these jobs for the male residents. These favours, however, are not extended to the women of *Die Rivier* and external jobs are not as prevalent among them. The only similar case among the women is Lieve, who is taken by the pastor (manager) of the homeless shelter to do car guarding at a nearby church every second weekend. In these ways, much of the interviewees' experiences with the labour market are mediated through personal relationships and intermediation.

The skills among interviewees varied. One admitted to not having any skills at all: "I really don't have any skills" (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). The other interviewees mostly learned their skills through their various jobs that they had done. "I got my skills working on the mine with boiler-making. So, they taught me everything there" (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Christien said that she acquired various skills during her time working different jobs: "I can pack bags, I worked in the deli, I made shoes... that's basically it. I have experience from here and there" (Christien, 31/20/2018). Riaan said he learned all his skills while on the job, despite having a diploma in health and safety. Amy noted: "I got experience and skills from when I was working" (Amy, 30/10/2018). Wikus said that he was encouraged and taught how to do handywork by his parents: "I learned everything from my parents. I learned [about] nursing and building from both parents" (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

George noted that throughout his life he learned to work with his hands:

I work with my hands mostly. Through boarding school, all the trades everything. So, my hands are always damaged and everything. I'm like that. And being on the construction sites and all that also (George, 30/10/2018).

Lieve indicated that the skills she possessed were learned throughout her life and she claimed that her broad skillset enabled her to undertake most jobs. In a statement that clearly revealed her parochial conception of the jobs on offer in the labour market, Lieve noted:

I can do anything, everything. Mechanical work I got from my stepdad. I can look after kids – I’m passionate about kids and animals. I love gardening. I’ve got green fingers in fact. I can cook. I can clean. I don’t like ironing, but I can do it (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Since the interviewees seemed unhappy with the low-income and low-skill jobs that they were able to access, I investigated whether they experienced a mismatch or discrepancy between the skills demanded by the labour market and the skills that they possessed. This discussion provides insight into how the interviewees perceived their position within the labour market and how it was rationalised by them.

Andrietta is the only participant who believed there was a mismatch between the skills that she possessed and what the labour market demanded: “I learn very fast, but they don’t give you a chance to learn” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Andrietta is aware that her lack of skills was the cause of her lack of success in the job market. However, as we saw above, she did not care much about finding a job as she thought it unnecessary as she had a husband to provide for her. Andrietta’s apathetic view of the labour market stemmed from having all her basic needs met by living at *Die Rivier* and by her husband having a job that provided an ‘adequate’ income. Her lack of skills and experience in the labour market (especially in light of not having worked for 12 years) could also be linked to her lack of motivation to find a job. Although Andrietta’s “social inclusion needs” (Ravallion and Chen, 2011:1254) are not being met and her child is having trouble at school because she was required to work her shifts in the kitchen and could not help him with his homework, Andrietta did not make any real effort to get a job and move out of the shelter. In part, therefore, her perception of the job market is the outcome of the social relations in which her life is embedded.

Tinus was of the view that the problem did not lie with him, but with the labour market: “Basically, the thing is nowadays people have companies they’d rather take blacks and pay them less than to take whites and pay much more” (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

Under Apartheid, high-wage jobs were reserved for whites; hence, whites did not compete with blacks for jobs. In chapter 3, we saw that there were several policies in place dedicated to ensuring the labour market success of white people in South Africa. This is evidence of Tinus being aware of the time outlined by Kraak (1995:663) where discriminatory policies make it possible for whites to obtain work in the primary sector with ease. Now, with special measures and positive discrimination (as outlined by Berman and Paradies, 2008:6), people need to compete with real skills and other necessary attributes not associated with race. Tinus

rationalised his experiences by referring to a process of ‘wage discrimination’ that happened in South Africa under Apartheid, whereby whites were not being hired because of the wages they had to be paid.

Christien believed that she had the ability but not the qualifications: “I have the skills but I don’t have the degree. They’re looking for people with qualifications. They can’t do the work but they have the papers for it” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Lieve also believed she could do most jobs just as well or better than someone with a qualification:

I think it’s a paper-shortage or something because if you don’t have the papers, you don’t have the job, even though you can do the job. Who’s doing the job: me or the paper? I’ve got a grade 8 (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

She clearly saw a skills mismatch because she was dishonest on the CV that she gave to potential employers: “I lie on my CV, though please don’t tell anyone, but I’ve been getting away with it. And I’m a very honest person. I don’t like telling lies” (Lieve, 30/10/2018). Since whites no longer live in a country where the government prioritised their employment with policies like job reservation, their race is no longer a guarantee of a good job. They are now compelled to stand in the same queue for jobs as black people who possess the necessary skills and work experience.

The interviewees believed that qualifications do not mean anything beyond permission to do a job, and that they can do the job just as well as someone with qualifications. This is clearly not true with regard to *all* jobs and shows that the interviewees did not regard the labour market as a unified entity but rather focused on those segments in which they are likely to compete for jobs. For example, while the skills required of many secondary jobs can be learned on-the-job, technical and professional skills need to be learned and can rarely be attained simply through experience. The belief that a range of jobs are potentially at their disposal is perhaps based on their historical privilege as whites. Because they are white, they believe that they can do any work despite not having the necessary qualifications.

Riaan did not see a skills mismatch but indicated that he would like to become more qualified. “I would love to go higher [in levels of health and safety]. There’s like three more levels that I can go. It’s just like money at this moment that I can’t” (Riaan, 31/10/2018). Amy did not see a skills mismatch either because of the expertise she had with maintaining pets and given the fact that, according to her, this work is more applicable today than it was a few years ago:

I think especially where I come from, people are realising that your animal isn't just an animal. So, they are starting to wake up like: if you eat healthy, you're gonna live longer, and animals are exactly the same (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Wikus and George did not see a mismatch between the skills they had to offer and those the labour market demanded, and they argued that anything can be done with practice and thought. Wikus (30/10/2018) noted that "there's no difference" between his skills and those in demand on the job market. Likewise, George (30/10/2018) noted: "it depends what you want to do, otherwise I'll do any work. As long as I can use my hands".

While the interviewees believed that there was no skills mismatch, the reality is that they would have had jobs if this was the case. Their perceptions of the labour market were formed through the practices that they undertook in finding work, whenever they were so inclined. The tendency to drift in and out of work would not have been feasible outside of the homeless shelter where the interviewees would have had to pay for rent, water, electricity and food. The perceived lack of 'suitable' jobs the interviewees experience is likely due to the high competition that characterises the secondary labour market. The surplus of labour that increases with unemployment drives down the demand while increasing the supply.

4.4.6 Perceptions of the Labour Market in the 'New' South Africa

All interviewees insisted the labour market had changed in terms of job accessibility for whites, which is not surprising since whiteness was a guarantee of a (decent) job under Apartheid. As Andrietta said: "Well, mostly I heard that the white people had more jobs. Now the white people don't have jobs because they [employers] always hire the blacks" (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Tinus found it difficult to earn money because he had no qualifications. During Apartheid, when Tinus left school, "it was still fine and then you could've gone to a workshop and they would've helped you. Now you have to go and clean streets to get something" (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Christien, by contrast, did not experience the Apartheid labour market:

If I lived during that time, I would have been a millionaire. Because, that time you could get work with a standard five. Now, if you have high school, you still won't get a job. You can't get a job with that. Now they are looking for people that have a matric and have experience (31/10/2018).

Sharing a similar idealisation of the era before 1994, Lieve noted that qualifications were not as important under Apartheid. This shows that less-skilled white people face much stiffer

competition for work in contemporary South Africa compared to the past when their race would have guaranteed them a job.

Those days the paper didn't mean [as much]. It wasn't that necessary as it is today. For example, if a black person come in to apply for a job now, I have the experience, but he's got the papers, so he will get the job because he is black as well. I have the experience but I'm white (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Lieve, who has not worked in seven years and prior to being at *Die Rivier* did not have much involvement with the labour market, drifting in and out of jobs from when she first began working at a kindergarten. She seemed to believe that, because she is white, she would not find a job even if she looked for one. This, in turn, served to justify not trying very hard to find work.

Along with Lieve, Amy perceived it as having been easier to find a job under Apartheid as a white person and that white people were paid better wages, and that there was less poverty among whites. Oddly, Amy's views both glorified the past and condemned the ill treatment suffered by black people:

Well, I know that it was a lot easier for a white person to get a job [and] the salaries were better. I feel that what they did was wrong. The way they enforced everything was wrong, but the poverty and things now compared to then is more (Amy, 30/10/2018).

While Amy perceived the job market as difficult to navigate because of her race, in practice she did not make that much of an effort to find work. Between having a one-year-old baby to take care of, needing to undertake her shifts at *Die Rivier*, Amy had many obligations that constrain her from going out and looking for a job. Yu (2013:704) outlines a large category of people called "discouraged workseekers" who have stopped looking for a job, not because they are lazy or lack motivation, but rather because they have tried to get a job and failed so many times that they have simply given up on looking for work. However, this says more about the availability of jobs (demand) than the personality traits or habits of the unemployed (supply) and opposes what is argued by the orthodox account that says there are a matching number of jobs for each person based on their preference (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:8).

Riaan was of the view that the Apartheid labour market was extremely buoyant. "All I know is that there was jobs for everybody, hey. 90 per cent of South Africa had jobs; I read it in the

newspapers ... You see it on the TV, people post it on Facebook” (Riaan, 31/10/2018). George said that it was easier for whites to get work under Apartheid:

Well, in those days in Apartheid, if you wanted to go for work, you would get the job. Today, if you go for a job, it’s: ‘sorry, colour’. That’s what it basically is. If you go to a company, 95 per cent of a company is black (George, 30/10/2018).

Wikus said that jobs were better under Apartheid and although it is not impossible to get work now, it is more difficult without qualifications:

The Apartheid jobs are more better than what the jobs are now, but to get a job now. You can get a job and stuff but you’re going to struggle if you don’t have papers or standard 10 or anything. In Apartheid, you didn’t need it (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Under Apartheid, whites enjoyed a significant advantage within the labour market, and this allowed them to secure jobs with the highest levels of authority, stability and rewards. An implicit theme in the quotes above is a yearning for and a romanticising of the ‘good old days’ of Apartheid, which are (in some cases) condemned as ‘wrong’ and praised as ‘better’ in the same breath. These poor whites have contradictory views of Apartheid in both glorifying it and recognising that it was wrong. It seems that while these poor whites tend to yearn for a time when the government ensured their economic security (even at the expense of black people), they also seemed morally obligated to mention that they are in fact not racist and felt the need to remind the interviewer that they know why Apartheid was wrong – even if they may not fully believe that to be true. This could possibly be explained in terms of the ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’ dichotomy discussed in section 3.3.4, whereby poor whites contradict their own beliefs by knowing the advantage they were given under Apartheid was at the expense of other races, but yearning for a ‘better’ time and feeling ‘victimised’ by the labour market policies that exist to undo what happened in the past.

Along with the perpetrator-victim dichotomy, which can be used to understand what these poor whites experience when looking back on Apartheid, the concept of moral responsibility for past violations as elucidated by Verwoerd (2001:235) is also useful. Verwoerd (2001) analyses the moral responsibility whites face when reflecting on Apartheid and how they attained an unearned advantage that was sustained at the expense of other races. It is argued that the kind of moral answering for actions to which one might be indirectly connected – both in terms of causality and motivation – is important for the sake of the victims and descendants of those actions and injustices (Verwoerd, 2001:235). Verwoerd (2001:235) argues that having real

sympathy and moral answering for the victims of Apartheid will allow whites to take injustice seriously and may contribute to overcoming the experiences of the past, even though “the journey cannot be made good”. These poor whites seem to put their self-preservation above their moral duty (Verwoerd, 2001:231) in squaring their yearning for a past (when their life chances were secured at the expense and suffering of others) with their sense that they benefitted unfairly the labour market policies of the past.

These dilemmas are particularly acute among poor whites who are competing directly with black workers, many of whom are better qualified and more experienced, for jobs in the secondary segment of the labour market in South Africa. There is an excess labour supply for these segments of the job market, which is clearly reflected in the high rate and social composition of unemployment, making these segments highly competitive (Millea, et. al, 2017:339). Therefore, the structure of the labour market, rather than simply their race, is key to explaining their current status because these poor whites are battling to get work in small firms, not because of affirmative action, but because they have the same or less skills and experience than black people and may expect a higher wage.

4.5 KNOWLEDGE OF THE LABOUR MARKET

Andrietta was uninterested in the labour market: “I’ve never been interested because I have a husband to look after me. So, I’m not worried about going out to work” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Lieve did not know much about the labour market either and was of the opinion that the only important aspect of competing is an individual’s race: “I haven’t been in the job market for seven years ... Just [know] that you need to be black [to get a job]” (Lieve, 30/10/2018). Lieve’s indifference to the labour market may be a result of her lack of involvement in it as well as the difficulty residents of *Die Rivier* encounter with their daily obligations interfering with their ability to seek work.

Tinus claimed that cheap labour is key to the labour market today: “Nowadays people are looking for someone that’s the cheapest” (Tinus,31/10/2018). Christien believed that the most important factor to navigate the labour market is that one will not be employed without having certain behavioural characteristics: “You must have manners, respect. If you aren’t going to have respect and manners for that person, then they’re not going to help you” (Christien, 31/10/2018). Riaan argued that qualifications do not matter as much as connections do: “What you need to know is who you know these days. Like, you can have a Master’s degree and

whatever behind your name, if you don't know anyone, you're screwed" (Riaan, 31/10/2018). This statement captures a pervasive aspect of the interviewees' experiences in the job market. In many small firms (which are the most common employers of low-skilled labour), job opportunities are routinely filled through word of mouth (Edwards and Ram, 2006:897). Such informal recruitment processes benefitted some of the residents but worked to the disadvantage of others.

Amy stated that education and skills, such as language and computer literacy, as well as how someone presents themselves, are important in acquiring work:

You have to have your matric; that's a big thing. I think speaking more than one language is definitely an advantage ... Computer skills. You've got to be presentable, that kind of thing (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Wikus believed that the most important thing to know about the job market is that it has changed since Apartheid in that it is more difficult for whites to find work now:

During Apartheid, the work was good. And the Afrikaans government and the Apartheid people knew everything, and the Afrikaans work was very good for all the whites, and all the work that you did, everyone else saw. And now people say that since the Apartheid government is gone that work is very scarce and it's hard to find jobs (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

George stated that it is important to make sure that you fulfil the basic work requirements of your job: "It depends what you're gonna talk about, if it's trade or if it's sales. But, for me for instance, if you listen to what you must do and you do it, you'll be alright" (George, 30/10/2018).

Secondary employment jobs are characterised by low wages due to intense competition (Millea et al., 2017:336-9), which explains why Tinus believed that employers would be looking for the job to be done at the lowest possible cost. Wikus was in the secondary segment of the labour market and was intimidated by the high levels of competition for jobs. People in the secondary segment strongly rely on connections, particularly in small firms – as also shown in the research of (among others) Edwards, Ram, Gupta and Tsai (2016:705) – to acquire work. This explains why Riaan believed that it is important to have connections to find work. Likewise, Wikus experienced the competition in the labour market as unfair because it is no longer in his favour. In addition, the interviewees implicitly believed that whites should only do certain types of

jobs (because others are ‘beneath’ them). This means that race is still a prominent factor in their views of and expectations of the labour market.

George also based his views in terms of his experiences in secondary employment and thought that the most important thing was following instructions and orders given by the employer once a job had been secured, rather than discussing how to navigate it. While being able to successfully carry out tasks at work is important, his answer does not refer to navigating the job market.

In gauging interviewee’s knowledge of the labour market and how they navigate it, it was of interest to ascertain what jobs they thought to be currently in demand. Doing so also revealed more information about whether interviewees believe they have the right skills to pursue the jobs they want. The table below outlines the job respective interviewees think are most in demand.

Table 5: Jobs thought to be in demand by the interviewees

Interviewee	Type of work in demand
Andrietta	Boilermaker, mining jobs
Riaan	Boilermaker, police, nursing, teaching
Tinus	Boilermaker
Christien	Hospital, Lawyer
Amy	Plumbing, electrical, infrastructure
Wikus	Construction workers
Lieve	Domestic work (“cook and clean”)
George	Does not know

These responses indicate the imperfect information most working-class people have of the labour market, as the seminal study by Blackburn and Mann (1979:30) shows. Interviewees gave their answers based on the types of jobs in demand in secondary employment in which they or people they know are located. This is clearly evident in the limited range of skills thought to be in demand as well as focus on boiler-making as a skill in demand. Unlike boiler-making, which is an artisanal trade, jobs in the secondary segment of the labour market, such as domestic work and unskilled construction work, are characterised by low-skill levels and ease of access.

The jobs mentioned by Amy indicate that, in comparison with other interviewees, she had had better access to information regarding the job market. Although she could be completely wrong and only mentioned a few of the many scarce skills, Amy's knowledge of the job market is better than that of the other interviewees. As we saw above, Amy matriculated and had various jobs throughout her school career that would have provided her with wider experience and expertise. Not only did she gain work experience while at school, but was also able to attend university (before dropping out). This means that Amy could have been exposed to people that encouraged her to gain qualifications to increase her potential in the job market. As Gunay and Kazazoglu (2016:11) argue, background and sources of information have a profound impact on the way an individual takes up his or her positioning in the job market.

4.5.1 Making sense of the labour market

As noted above, people's sources of information on the labour market are indirect and approximate (Blackburn and Mann, 1979:139). In this section, I will explore the ways in which uncontrollable or prescribed identity factors such as race, gender and class determined access to information which, in turn, affects the choices the interviewees made in the labour market. This involves investigating the ways in which social structures influence how the individual comes to understand his or her place in society (Lang and Dickens, 1985:10). Furthermore, by exploring the ways in which the poor white interviewees rationalised their circumstances, I hope to shed light on the manner in which they perceived their socio-economic position.

Tinus was of the opinion that he was active in the sequence of events that led him to being homeless and unemployed and taking refuge in a homeless shelter. He stated that he made poor life decisions, which along with his socialisation while growing up, set him on a particular course of life. Tinus did not share much about what he was exposed to while growing up, but we know that he dropped out of school at an early age and began working as a toilet cleaner at a factory. Later in life, Tinus developed a drug habit that ultimately led him to lose his job and his home and brought him to *Die Rivier*: "It's just bad life decisions. And the way you grow up; so, family life" (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Likewise, Amy noted that it was her decisions and social circumstances that led her to where she ended up in life:

You could say financial limitations, but I also went onto the drugs so that stuffed up everything for me. So, it's also peer pressure [and] that type of thing, but I would say your financial situation and your home life [play a role] (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Amy remarked that she believed “financial limitations” and “home life” can affect the quality of life a person will experience as they grow up. However, she had access to tertiary education – that her parents were paying for – while she was waitressing part-time at Spur. This means that she was possibly speaking in general terms rather than what she thinks affected her in her life. She alluded to “peer pressure” and linked it to the time in her life when she became addicted to heroin while studying at the University of Johannesburg. Amy believed that the decision she made (due to peer pressure) to use heroin was a key event that led to her current state of homelessness and joblessness, living at a shelter.

Riaan said the key issues that led him to his present situation were

stress and also background ... And your daily routines and your daily [things] in your life. I was in like normal schools. I wasn't in private schools and I was very successful, but it also depends on your determination in life. Skills, and what you've learned and what you didn't learn, especially who you surround yourself with ... *She* is the biggest problem, my ex-wife (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Riaan recently divorced his wife and believed her to be the reason he was homeless and unemployed. Again, as with Amy, Riaan spoke in general terms regarding the things that could impact a person's success in the labour market before he discussed what he believed to be the key event that landed him at *Die Rivier*. Riaan blamed his wife for his current circumstances. He would not go into further detail as to how his divorce unfolded, but he saw it as the instance when his life began to change.

Christien claimed that the problems she had at the time were already in play a long time ago:

My family, my parents didn't even help me once in school. The one who helped me was my sister and my mom worked in the tuckshop, so they never had time. We lived day to day. My dad was also on pension and not working (Christien, 31/10/2018).

Andrietta had a similar take on the matter in that she believed her life was the product of the way she grew up:

Not really having parents when I grew up. I was a parent to my brother, so I think that brought me to where I am now. My dad left when I was three and my mom was never there. She was always drinking with her boyfriend. So, I was basically my brother's mother. He's three years younger than me. When I was younger, I was an escort to look after him. So, I left school early to do this job to look after him and make sure he gets

somewhere in life. Because he's going to marry a wife and have to look after her someday, but I can just marry a husband and he will look after me. So, I thought of his future before my own (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

The effects of the processes of gender socialisation that happen in the home, are particularly evident in this statement by Andrietta. Andrietta's parents were not present in her life as she and her younger brother were growing up, resulting in her taking up the responsibility of raising her brother. Gender roles that were likely transmitted to Andrietta while growing up – through observation of others, her parents or through schooling – had an impact on the way in which she put her brother's well-being before her own. She risked her health and safety by becoming an escort as a way to raise money to look after him. She thought it was more important to invest in her brother than in herself. While she had some degree of choice in the decision to become an escort, poverty and a lack of skills meant she only had her body to sell. In looking back on these events, Andrietta regarded this decision to place her brother's security before her own as one of the key instances leading to her current socio-economic position.

Lieve said that she gets by with a positive attitude: "You need to concentrate more on the positive and see the bright in every situation" (Lieve, 30/10/2018). She viewed the main causes of her being homeless as: "No money, no food. Got kids to support" (Lieve, 30/10/2018). Lieve did not trace the events of her life back to the root causes of her dire situation, most likely because the conversation overwhelmed her with emotion as she was revisiting past traumas in her mind.

Wikus did not view his situation negatively:

[The course life can take is] not always in a person's control. It's not always. I like it where I'm staying and the jobs I like and stuff. And I'll always keep my work and stuff and I won't go and work ... I don't want to go out and work where they want to keep the job and not me. Even if I go work somewhere and I'm not earning so well with money, then at least I know I have a place to go work every day (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

George possibly did not understand the question ("What do you think to be the key circumstances that led you to living at *Die Rivier*?") and referred instead to meritocracy in the labour market:

If you prove to them that you can do the person's job, I'll be happy. If I had a company and someone can prove to me, I can do this, I'll be a happy man. If a person can't do it,

I don't want them there, doesn't matter if he's white, black, green. It doesn't matter. If a black man can prove to me, I can do it better than a white guy, I'll keep the black guy. Whoever does a better job I will keep (George, 30/10/2018).

George seemed to be supporting meritocracy in the labour market in saying “whoever does a better job I will keep” (i.e. ‘the best man for the job’). People who oppose affirmative action often claim that it undermines ‘merit’ as a criterion for appointment (Howard, 2004:70). These same people (we see this tendency in responses by Wikus) then conveniently overlook the fact that Apartheid was fundamentally opposed to meritocracy, because through policies such as job reservation, whites got jobs no matter their performance or whether they had the necessary skills or experience (Kraak, 1995:663).

Most of the interviewees did not go into any great detail regarding what they thought to be the key events that led them to their current circumstances. It could be that they felt uncomfortable sharing their whole life story with a stranger, or that people generally do not want to be reminded of their failures in life – it is likely to be very emotionally charged and possibly traumatic for interviewees to recall and explain such events in detail. The mere fact that they were in a homeless shelter is ample evidence that things did not go the way they would have liked.

All the interviewees, aside from George, Amy and Riaan, did not finish school and started work at a young age. Andrietta, most likely because of her family background, believed that a husband should be the breadwinner. This belief highlights the effects of pre-market segmentation on (in this case) a woman's perception of the labour market (Fleetwood, 2008:35-36). These factors are also applicable to Lieve, who fell pregnant and got married at 15, most likely because of her absent parents. Background is also important to the case of Christien because she was taken out of school because her father suffered an injury that forced him to take early pension and consequently not having enough money at his disposal for putting her and her sister through school.

Most of the interviewees experienced extreme poverty all of their lives, and may not have had the know-how to overcome it due to their social backgrounds, deprived upbringing and lack of access to information. Therefore, it may be that it is difficult for these poor whites to know how to make better life decisions in order to attain greater success in the labour market and in life generally.

4.5.2 Perceptions of Affirmative Action among Residents of *Die Rivier*

None of the interviewees knew exactly what affirmative action entailed. Most came from a disadvantaged background in that their families were poor and could possibly not afford to educate them beyond a certain level (usually high school). It is therefore also likely that these families did not instil the value of further education and the advantage it can give in the labour market, resulting in many of the interviewees dropping out of school.

The only interviewees to whom this concept would not be applicable are Riaan and Amy. Because they come from a more advantaged background in that their parents could afford their education and instil in them the value of studying further (Riaan with health and safety diploma and Amy with pursuit of a degree at the University of Johannesburg), it is likely that their parents highlighted the advantage of education for success in the labour market. However, these differences in background and levels of information of the labour market did not account for any successes in the labour market since Riaan and Amy also ended up homeless and unemployed at *Die Rivier*.

Because none of the interviewees ostensibly knew what affirmative action was, I provided them with the following definition: a policy that gives preference to people who are underrepresented in jobs, tertiary admissions and government contracts (Boylan 2002:117). Basically, it is a system of preferential employment that tries to undo inequalities of the past by offering disadvantaged groups priority access to jobs, provided they meet the minimum requirements. Once they heard that affirmative action aims to create equal opportunity by providing preference for disadvantaged racial groups, the interviewees argued that it should be based on socio-economic status rather than race: “Need, not race because we are all equal” (Christien, 31/10/2018). These views can be summarised by the view that affirmative action is unnecessary and unfair. Lieve noted: “It is the most wrong thing the government could have ever designed because it’s not fair” (30/10/2018).

On the one hand, this opposition is understandable: poor whites are likely to have less opportunities than rich black people. On the other hand, by disregarding the enduring legacies of the advantages that white people acquired under Apartheid – that is, incorrectly assuming that the races are now “equal” – the interviewees seem to support the point raised by Howard (2004:70), who argues that whites tend to believe that efforts to reverse discrimination, such as affirmative action, are unnecessary because socio-economic success is attributed to those

who study and work hard (Howard, 2004:70). This is also an example of the problematic ‘colour-blind’ ideology discussed in section 2.3.3.

When asked whether they believed that policies such as affirmative action compromised their potential to get a good job, the interviewees responded unanimously. Andrietta said: “It’s not fair. So, yes” (30/10/2018). Tinus argued that whites did not get certain jobs anymore and that this is why there were more of them in secondary employment: “if you’re white, you don’t get a job. If you go to shopping malls, there’s white people looking after your car. So white people don’t get [formal] jobs anymore” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). Christien believed that the way the labour market operates in contemporary South Africa affected her negatively because of her lack of qualifications: “Because of my grade, that’s why I can’t get work” (Christien, 31/10/2018). George argued that whites were not getting jobs because black people would not employ them:

I mean you’ll have ten whites and two blacks that go for the same job. We might have more experience than the black person, but they’d rather give it to the black person with no experience because they’re not going to have to pay that much. But then it’s not gonna get done the same. They look after themselves (George, 30/10/2018).

When asked whether he thought that affirmative action disadvantaged him from getting a good job, Riaan said:

Like BEE – yes of course it did [disadvantage his potential to get a good job]. Like, we’re a hundred years back now; we lost a lot. I think if [former president] FW de Klerk – or whoever it was, Pik Botha, Verwoerd – just kept their mouths shut and did what they had to do, this country wouldn’t be a Third World country ... [De Klerk] must die. He traded our country for rocks. He gave up on white people. He’s a traitor. There’s nothing more you can say; in my eyes, he’s a rubbish (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

This is clearly a profoundly racist worldview. Aside from believing that South African presidents from the Apartheid era ‘gave up’ on white people, his dissatisfaction was partly premised on a confusion between affirmative action and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), which facilitates black economic empowerment by “increasing participation in the economy by all black people ... through diverse but integrated socio-economic strategies” (Luiz and Van der Linde, 2006:405). The hypocrisy in Riaan’s position is evident in his disdain for B-BBEE, which aims to ensure equal opportunity for all, and his support for the Apartheid state, which guaranteed good jobs for whites only. Along with these

fundamentally racist ideas, Riaan's lack of knowledge of the workings of the labour market were also highlighted: B-BBEE is about developing black-owned businesses and not about preferential employment (Luiz and Van der Linde, 2006:406).

Amy was also of the opinion that B-BBEE disadvantaged her and that it was put in place because poor blacks were unable to help themselves:

I don't disagree with ... BEE and all that type of thing ... because I understand that they were [disadvantaged], but it's 20 years later. I mean, come on. If you guys still haven't stood up and made a plan by now, then I don't know. I mean you guys are still being spoon fed. It's like they're choosing to sit back and say: 'You white people still owe me something'. I don't owe you anything, my friend. I am here with you (Amy, 30/10/2018).

This statement by Amy reveals the contradictory position of poor whites, as articulated by Ndlovu (2016:128): when whites display poverty, their behaviour contradicts the qualities (such as power and wealth) which are normally associated with whiteness. It was apparent that Amy was aware of the social contradiction she embodied by being white and poor. She seemed to ignore (conveniently) the fact that she is also being "spoon fed" by living at a homeless shelter, and that after hundreds of years of discrimination in favour of whites, she had not yet "made a plan". In criticising black people, she sees herself in the same socio-economic situation as them when she said: "I am here with you", while still displaying a sense of superiority as a white. An element of colour-blindness is also evident in that she thinks that she and poor black people – by virtue of belonging to the same class – experience the same struggles everyday irrespective of differences in history and race. Niemonen (2010:56) argues that whiteness can manifest itself in (colour-blind) claims that race has declined in significance and that racism is only the fault of individuals. This is patently evident in Amy's statement quoted above.

In a similar vein, Lieve argued that affirmative action was unnecessary because 'everyone is now equal':

Can I start crying? I don't approve of [affirmative action]. I believe we are all equal, whether you're black, white, green, purple, whatever. To me, in God's eyes and in my eyes, we are all the same (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Not only does this quote by Lieve emphasise the problems with the notion of colour-blindness, but it also highlights the contradictory position of poor whites in post-Apartheid South Africa:

Lieve is both opposed to affirmative action and committed to equality (with whites “being the same” as blacks). In reality, whites predominate in the best jobs, best houses and opportunities because of the significant advantages gained through colonialism, Segregation and Apartheid. This is why the labour market in South Africa, as we noted above, can be characterised as racially segmented (Kraak, 1995:548). Therefore, it may be that Lieve is thinking in class terms only and comparing herself and her circumstances as a poor white with poor blacks.

Wikus said that affirmative action was unfair, but he did not acknowledge that the reverse (i.e. the best jobs should be reserved for whites) was equally unfair. In short, he wanted a return to Apartheid. He felt threatened because of his lack of education and was aware that he was outcompeted in the labour market because of it:

There’s no such thing as a black and a white working together, but rather think of the white people first. Give them the work first before you give it to someone else ... Because if their education is higher, they will hire them before me because my education isn’t good enough. I don’t have a problem with a black boss but rather think about the whites first before you before giving the blacks everything (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Davies (cited in Gouws, 2011:504) shows how the collapse of Apartheid affected the Afrikaans community in particular. According to the findings of her study, what displeased Afrikaners the most about the transition to a post-Apartheid society was the displacement caused by affirmative action and black economic empowerment. This is evident with in the responses of my interviewees as well, especially George, Lieve and Wikus, who are Afrikaners. Wikus was the most emotive and even advocated for the policies that prioritised white employment under Apartheid to be reintroduced. The irony lies in that he was against affirmative action in favour of previously-disadvantaged (black) people, but did not think that policies that favour him, as a white person, were wrong. Wikus embodies white privilege. He could not assert superiority over black people by virtue of his class position, and therefore attempted to assert superiority on the basis of his race – emphasising the point made by Niemonen (2010:55) regarding whites clinging to their race when they have nothing else.

4.6 WHITENESS AND POVERTY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

4.6.1 Poverty as a Source of Embarrassment and Lack of Unity

In being asked to reflect on what ‘being white’ means, claims of an idealised past and imperfect present were common among the interviewees. With the shifts in social, economic and political landscape of South Africa since 1994, the state of liminality that characterises the country is likely to bring about perceptions of imagining their lives as having been better under Apartheid.

Andrietta experienced being white as embarrassing at times and believed that white people cannot stand together:

Sometimes I feel embarrassed to be white. Because the white people cannot stand together at all. They can’t even build a community and then stand up for each other. If there’s a fight with one, then everyone is against them. Whereas with the blacks they actually stand together. Why can’t white people do that?” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Riaan remarked that he carried being white with pride and like Andrietta, also believed that white people do not stand together:

I’m proud of being a white person, I will always carry my colours. I’ll carry it strong no matter what ... I’m going through. But for the other white people, I feel sorry for them. My heart does go out to them. I wish I could help everybody but it’s not possible. And what pisses me off is that white people don’t stand together – even here, they will back stab you (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Wikus also believed that whites do not stand together, and that most people have misconceptions about the socio-economic position of whites:

Now people think there are more whites than there actually are and that we have more education and more qualifications and stuff and that the whites are doing better than they actually are ... Us white people need to stand together like the time in the Apartheid where everyone stood together. Now we are not standing together and that’s why today us white people don’t have education and are not getting work or anything. The blacks all stand together. That’s why they all have work. That’s why they all have education and everything (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

The interviewees may have believed that whites “do not stand together” because they were told by other conservative and racist individuals, who tend to invoke idealised visions of the past, that white people “stood together” under Apartheid. There were always divisions between whites in South Africa, for example between conservatives and ‘verligtes’, Afrikaans and English speaking, Catholics and Protestants, etc. However, as outlined above, in the historical

processes of constructing ‘good whites’, any ethnic differences between them were underplayed. That is, no separate areas were established for English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites and they were also treated similarly (Teppo, 2004:16). As seen in chapter 3, a similar point is argued by Davies (2009:9) regarding the coherency of the white community and how a distinctive Afrikaner social identity was deliberately cultivated by the regime.

Tinus and Lieve believed that being white meant that one was nothing. “Nowadays if you’re white, you’re nothing. No, it wasn’t like that before. A lot has changed. BEE, that’s when things changed” (Tinus, 31/10/2018). “Poverty, it means poverty. The black empowerment changed it. Instead of them calling it black empowerment, they should call it fair empowerment. Be fair and equal” (Lieve, 30/10/2018). These interviewees strongly believe that they are affected by policies geared towards black economic empowerment, yet in the secondary labour market where they would be looking for work, policies such as B-BBEE would not affect whites.

Christien believed that White people

will always suffer. In the olden days – no – but now and in the future, yes. Because at the moment we aren’t getting work, the salaries stay the same, but everything changes around you. So, how will you survive? It’s really difficult to live on R2000 a month if you live and work outside. There’s water and lights you have to pay for and if you add it all up, how much is it at the end of the day? (Christien, 31/10/2018).

4.6.2 Perceptions of Poverty

In the research conducted by Schuermans and Visser, interviewees indicated that white poverty is a relative problem in that poor whites find it difficult to adopt the standard of living expected of them in the white community (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:267). This emphasises the relativity of poverty, as delineated by Ravallion and Chen (2011:1254). It shows that a person can have his or her basic needs met (absolute poverty) while not having his or her social inclusion needs (relative poverty) met or experiencing both aspects of poverty (De Notten and Neuberg, 2011:254). The former refers more to a feeling of being poor while the latter refers to actually being poor. The relativity lies in the way in which social inclusion needs differ from person to person based on a number of aspects including socialisation and the socio-economic background a person comes from (Ravallion and Chen 2011:1254).

4.6.3 Perceived Differences between ‘White Poverty’ and ‘Black Poverty’

Andrietta did not think that, at its core, poverty between the races is the same. For her, it is different for whites because of the stigma surrounding it:

Because white people are not supposed to be poor. They're supposed to have a higher education. That's probably why they treat the [poor] white people worse than they do the blacks (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

Amy raised a similar point. She believed a white must have really gone wrong if they are poor:

I think the mindset is that a black person is supposed to be poor, and a white person isn't. You're supposed to make it work somehow. So, when that situation happens, you must automatically be on drugs or be an alcoholic. But it's more about the circumstances that lead you to your situation, regardless of colour (Amy, 30/10/2018).

Not only have the interviewees experienced being 'othered' by whites who are not poor, but they have also experienced the social contradictions of poor whiteism. Given the prioritisation of white employment in South African history, poor whites today are seen as 'failures' by many and are treated as though they "did not take advantage of a poverty-free future" (Ndlovu, 2016:133).

Tinus believed that there is more sympathy and relief for poverty among black people:

for me, parliament or whatever will rather donate 2.2 million or 2 million to poor blacks to start his own farm and don't give the whites anything. That's how I see it. I feel let down by the government (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

Christien also believed that people have more sympathy for blacks:

a white woman goes and stands at the traffic light with a board. What will she get? She will get nothing. But if a black woman stands there, with a child nearby, everyone will feel sorry for her [...]" (Christien, 31/10/2018).

Christien generalised by saying that the white woman would receive no donations because of her race – however, Ndlovu's research (2016:139) shows not only that Christien was incorrect in her beliefs, but also that there is more to donating to white beggars than simple compassion. White people have different historical backgrounds than black people, and these come into play when it comes to begging. Hence, when a donor analyses a person's validity in begging, the race of the individual – in light of South Africa's history – is also important (Ndlovu, 2016:133-134). This also relates to Sibanda's (2018:15) statement that the paradox of these experiences

is that, while poor whites bear the historical shame of being part of the initial “wounders”, they also carry the identity of the “wounded” in contemporary South Africa.

George noted that all poverty is the same: “I haven’t actually looked at it, haven’t thought about it [but] I think poverty is poverty” (George, 30/10/2018). Lieve stated that no matter what colour, poor people are not treated with respect. She then went on to say that there is a different stigma around poverty among whites:

You get treated like trash if you’re poor. Instead of getting help, you’re getting ditched. ... There’s more sympathy for blacks ... because people think it’s just the blacks that are poor, which is not the truth. Anyone can be poor, doesn’t matter what race. People just need to stop looking down on other people. And the whites need to stand together (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Riaan was aware of the different stigmas surrounding poverty among the races and would donate to anyone irrespective of race:

in my eyes, poor is poor hey. I see a black I feel sorry for them. Like with Woolworths food I deliver. If I see a black guy or a white guy standing at the robots, I’ll give him food. I’ve got a place to stay but he doesn’t. Feed his stomach. I don’t care. If they catch me, they catch me (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Wikus was threatened by the employment possibilities afforded to black people:

I think that black people treat white people differently than what white people treat black people. Because a lot of black people will take white people out of work and then the white person is at home. So, the black people get the job. So, they want that the white people to go out of work, so they can have the jobs (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

Wikus claimed that there is a ‘new Apartheid’ in which whites have become the oppressed and marginalised – a claim that is patently false. Wikus exhibited a deep insecurity of his position in the labour market, and as seen above in fact advocates for the return of Apartheid and adamantly states that white people in South Africa should be entitled to jobs before black people. The way Wikus responds is in line with Gerhart’s (1996:170) argument about the erosion of the National Party’s rule resulting in the fracturing of Afrikaner political opinion and those believing in its race policies now facing a deep existential crisis. Wikus truly believed in Apartheid race policies and the fact that they were abolished is something he believed to be an injustice toward the white race – a clearly racist and irrational worldview. This worldview

may also be the reason why he said that he will always stay at *Die Rivier*, where life makes sense to him and he does not have to cope with the changing world around him.

Amy was demonstrating an awareness of the social contradiction she embodies in that her poverty goes against what is associated with whiteness:

I speak to people and I walk around the street with them, but when I'm walking around a shop they'll still say to me: 'Aw madam please give me money', and then I say to them: 'I don't have any' but they say 'you're lying' ... [As] a white person, I'm assumed to have money, so that irritates me (Amy, 30/10/2018).

All the interviewees agreed that there are more poor whites now in comparison to before 1994. This perception, irrespective of whether it may be right or wrong empirically, was strongly reinforced by day-to-day interactions and experiences.

Andrietta argued that Apartheid was pointless because there are still poor whites. In this way, she may be recognising the unfairness of Apartheid: "Even now there's a lot of poor white people, so what did they achieve in doing that [Apartheid]?" (Andrietta, 30/10/2018).

In stark contradiction with the facts, George believed that there are more poor whites in South Africa and that all blacks have work and whites do not. South Africa is not only one of the most unequal countries in the world, but poverty and unemployment are also disproportionately concentrated among blacks. As George (30/10/2018) put it: "there's not much white people that have work, compared to blacks ... [who] run the country".

Riaan noted that under Apartheid there were no white squatter camps and that now there are many:

Because there wasn't [a] white squatter camp. I'd never heard of a squatter camp back then. I think you had your hobos and stuff like that, but I think that's people that gave up on life, but not as many as now (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

In an effort to eliminate poverty among whites, suburbs were established to 'rehabilitate' poor whites and teach them how to be 'good whites' (Teppo, 2004:17). This is why Riaan would be correct in assuming that there were no white squatter camps under Apartheid. Accompanied by the designated white suburbs were a range of policy responses aimed at solving the 'problem' of poor whites were put into place to ensure that whites did not have to compete with black labour costs (Phillips, 2005:113; Callinicos, 2014:123). Furthermore, Riaan referring the

possibility of their being some poor whites having ‘given up’ on life is taken of what Bottomley (2016:79) argues of poor whites being seen as having let down their race during the construction of the ‘poor white problem’.

While the interviewees were correct in suggesting there are more poor whites today (Schuermans and Visser, 2005:259), they chose this particular narrative because they are in an environment surrounded by poor whites and drew these conclusions based on their immediate surroundings. Similarly, it is important to note that these respondents were largely cut off from the rest of society and only had others like them to engage with, meaning that they would come to similar conclusions based on their daily experiences. Even today, as shown in Table 3, unemployment by whites is only 0.9 per cent of the population, whereas among blacks it is at 63.2 per cent. By saying that “most whites don’t have jobs” when that is patently untrue, the interviewees are in fact rationalising their own position by normalising it. This, in turn, plays into a (fake) victimhood narrative: under the black government, all whites are discriminated against and deprived of what is rightfully theirs.

All the interviewees were of the opinion that they are treated differently because they are white and poor. Andrietta said that she is looked down on at *Die Rivier* as well: “Even the Pastor. Some pastors look down on you as well” (Andrietta, 30/10/2018). Tinus said that there is more sympathy for poor blacks:

For instance, if I can give you an example: if you get a black guy at the robot, he’ll wash your windows and the people will leave him. If you get a white guy, then the people want to scream at him and swear at him. Things like that; so, there’s more sympathy for poor black people (Tinus, 31/10/2018).

Christien noted that poor whites being looked down upon is a prevalent behaviour even among Afrikaners:

I’ve been shown that [I am seen as less-than] time and time again. They don’t have respect for you. They look down on you ... Even Afrikaans people do it too] *Of course, what are you talking about!* South African *Boeremense* (Christien, 31/10/2018).

Riaan’s response hints that being looked down upon as a poor white is a class factor more than race:

I lost my brother because a lot of people won't associate with a person living in a shelter because they don't want to associate with a person living in a shelter because I am beneath them (Riaan, 31/10/2018).

Amy said that it was seen as wrong to be poor and white. "Definitely, its frowned upon, and its worse to be poor as a white. They pity you and I hate that" (Amy, 30/10/2018). Wikus alluded to being safe from the opinions of others outside the shelter:

No, no other people treat me badly or bother me; they won't. I'm here to say I stand with the other whites, and the white people here care more about each other than the other white people do (Wikus, 30/10/2018).

4.6.4 A Mythical Past, Imperfect Present and Bleak Future

This sentiment (as well as the discussion above about "whites not standing together") presupposes a mythical time of 'white unity' to which the interviewees want to return. Most reactionary ideologies, like fascism, are premised on the mythology of a 'glorious' past. Reflecting on what has been discussed about nostalgia, it can be observed that these poor whites cling to an idealised past because of their imperfect present and uncertain future. In doing so, I believe they cling to what Verbeeck (2000:388) describes as a Eurocentric view of history that hails the arrival of whites, seeing them as the bringers of civilisation. As noted above, the time of 'white unity' that these poor whites cling to never existed and there was never an undivided white community (Verbeeck, 2000:389).

Lieve also noted that being looked down upon by others should not happen, but it does. She believed that the way her poverty is perceived is more about race than about class. When it happened to her, she did her best to overcome it:

I don't know how to put it. To me, it doesn't matter what race you are, if you're poor, you're poor. I've had situations like that, but I just brush it off. It won't affect me (Lieve, 30/10/2018).

Poor whiteism represents a non-privileged form of whiteness that the Apartheid era worked very hard to eradicate (Ndlovu, 2016:129). The interviewees felt as though they are looked down upon and viewed differently from other whites in society, due to the effects of "othering", as evinced in the above-mentioned studies by Sullivan (2014:26), Ross (2015:S001), Sibanda (2018:18) and Ndlovu (2016:129). It is arguable that as white people they are more aware of

their race because they are poor and do not display the characteristics associated with whiteness in South Africa.

The way in which George responded also suggested that he experienced the effects of this 'othering' and that he was treated differently because he lived in a homeless shelter:

Ja, they treat us different because we stay in the shelter. Sometimes they say: 'we don't want to know these people because they live in the shelter. How can we employ him? How do we know what he is like?' But sometimes people do come here from outside, the church people, and they can see what people are working here, and what people are like (George, 30/10/2018).

The effects of othering experienced by George are evident in his claim that other whites think: "we don't want to know these people because they live in a shelter". The implication was that his poverty made him believe that others regard him as a pariah. Because poverty is associated with marginalisation and powerlessness, it does not conform to the historical norms of whiteness in South Africa (Howard, 2004:68-9). It may thus be that the interviewees experienced heightened awareness of their poverty among white people but experienced a heightened awareness of their race when interacting with black people. As we see above in the statistics on poverty above, poor whites make up a very small proportion of the population – with the majority of the poor population being black people. These poor whites find themselves having more in common with the majority of the black population that face poverty everyday as opposed to having less in common with other white people apart from race.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to explore how poor whites, as members of a previously advantaged racial minority, and living in what is an atypical community in the South African context, experienced the post-Apartheid labour market. The social construction of the ‘poor white problem’ led to the development and implementation of policies that prioritised the employment of whites. While investigating poor whites and the contradictory position they occupy, it was shown that as a group, they played a significant role in shaping the economic, political and social landscape of South Africa. Despite the key role they played under Apartheid and the massive fuss the government and other institutions such as the church made about poor whites and their need for ‘rehabilitation’, we know very little about poor whites today. This, in turn, led to the gradual ‘denaturalisation’ of poverty among whites, which has sustained the social stigma that poor whites confront today. Understanding the role poor whites played in history sheds light on how they take up their social position today, how they view their position and how it may be interpreted by others. Many of their ideas about race and the labour market can be understood in terms of the social construction of white poverty in South Africa.

From a subjective perspective, the poor whites in this study felt out-competed by blacks in the labour market, and they believed strongly that their race was to blame for their dire socio-economic circumstances. While there is no doubt that these whites are objectively poor, their circumstances are best explained in terms of class rather than race. Labour market segmentation theory, in its opposition to the orthodox account of the labour market, provides useful insights into the ways in which access to information and the choices that are made in the labour market are systematically affected by the objective conditions confronting each individual in his or her quest for a job.

The poor whites living at *Die Rivier* cling to an idealised version of the past (partly) to cope with their current circumstances. Although these idealised versions of the past may not be factually true, these poor whites feel nostalgic about the past and yearn for a time in which their lives may have been easier and they would have had privileged access to the labour market purely because they were white. It was found that, for some interviewees, this yearning for an idealised past entailed a wish to return of Apartheid and the race-based policies that favoured

them in the labour market and elsewhere. While the interviewees were quick to point out the ‘discrimination’ that they suffer, they firmly believed that the anti-racist policies which seek to redress the unfair treatment of black people under Apartheid are unfair. These beliefs were premised on a ‘colour-blind’ ideology which suggests that, since Apartheid was abolished, everyone is now ‘equal’. It was also shown how this ideology influenced their perspectives of the labour market and how deeply-entrenched notions of whiteness shaped their perceptions of poverty.

As both a key beneficiary and vital supporter of Apartheid labour market policies, this research demonstrates the significant role poor whites have played in South African history. Studying the perceptions that poor whites living at *Die Rivier* have of the labour market allows for a deeper understanding of poverty in South Africa. Their perceptions of work and employment in post-Apartheid South Africa also shed light on the complex and dynamic relations between race and class. It was shown that, while these poor whites cling strongly to ideas of racial superiority, they have much in common with poor black people. Having been socialised into a racist ideology, which was reinforced by their daily social interactions, the interviewees were unable to look beyond their race to appreciate the socio-economic conditions that they share with poor black people.

Finally, the limitations of this study must be mentioned. Given the small number of interviewees, the findings cannot readily be generalised (although the findings clearly highlight a pervasive belief system among poor whites). The aim of this study was not to challenge existing research on racial inequalities in South Africa, but rather to deepen a sociological understanding of racial and class divisions in contemporary South Africa. There is very little known about poor whites in the post-Apartheid era, particularly on how they perceive the labour market and their position in it. Because of the restrictions on the length of the study, there are several aspects concerning white poverty that could not be included in the research. These include issues of identity, the difference in how Afrikaans- versus English-speaking whites may perceive the labour market and the influence of religion on the beliefs of poor whites. These issues could be explored in future research.

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