# VOICES OF THE UNEMPLOYED:

## Inside Stories Policy-Makers Need to Know


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## Abstract

Using empirical material gathered from seven weeks of participant observations and interviews in western Sydney, this thesis analyses six individuals' experience of long-term unemployment. The thesis examines intersecting influences - stigma, ethnicity and social class, and a sense of place, revealing the manner in which relations of power in everyday experiences are negotiated. Developing these concepts contextually necessitates an overview of structural processes of political economy and social welfare, as these help us understand historical dimensions of work and unemployment, and the contemporary spatially complex and negotiated state of employment-deprived areas of western Sydney, Australia.

## Declaration of Authenticity

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signature: _____

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge several people without whom this thesis would still be in the making.

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# Chapter One – Introduction

## ORIGINS OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to understand the experience, perceptions, world view, beliefs and values of individuals who have experienced long-term unemployment. It also explores the demands placed upon those who are seeking or in receipt of unemployment benefits.

My interest in this subject was triggered by the Australian Government Budget 2014-15, presented on national television on 13 May 2014. My interest grew as a result of an ABC investigation into allegations of fraud by Job Services Australia[1] (JSA). This agency is contracted by the Australian Government to provide labour market support and training opportunity for the unemployed.

The ABC investigation found flaws in the way JSA was providing certain services. JSA staff was shown to be tampering with clients' paperwork while the organisation made false claims for payment from Federal government for services rendered. The investigative team obtained JSA documents stating that employment had been obtained by certain individuals who were, in fact, still unemployed. When presented with these documents, the individuals had no idea that their paperwork had been falsified. Neither had they any recollection of signing these documents to confirm jobs acquired when they were clearly still unemployed.

[1] Four Corners Investigation of JSA - http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-23/government-recovers-millions-after-rorting-of-jobs-scheme/6193022 http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/news/fourcorners/video/promos/2002_ABCNews24_FOUR_CORNERS_WK9_DS_288p.mp4].

It has subsequently been found that the government has had to recover millions of dollars (Smerdon 2015; O'Flynn 2015) because employment services like JSA have been rorting the system.

The question needs to be asked: how can a government-contracted agency that conducts business in such an unethical manner be allowed to continue operating, especially one whose help is sought by the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities?

Moreover, how can JSA's behaviour foster trust, self-esteem and confidence in their clients who are trying to find jobs? This is particularly significant at a time when social policy demands that the unemployed show responsibility in actively seeking and participating in work to help reduce the government's expenditure on social welfare.

The media events outlined above prompted me to investigate whether coordinated political activism around unemployment occurs at a local level. I found several examples: the Australian Unemployed Union organised by and for unemployed people; the Welfare Rights Network[2] (WRN); and the Australian Council of Social Services[3] (ACOSS), a peak body operating nationwide. All three are a political voice for unemployed people.

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[2] http://www.welfarerights.org.au/news/2015/5/13/media-release-budget-hits-and-misses-leaves-vulnerable-families-and-jobless-risk

[3] ACOSS: https://youtu.be/y8FUbds7tNU.

Several reports from ACOSS (2013, 2012) have repeatedly pointed out the need for Federal government to reform the way services are rendered by job-search agencies, including Centrelink.

For these reasons, along with many others as will be outlined in this thesis, unemployment is a topical and contentious issue.

## STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter Two: This documents the methods and methodology of the study, including recruitment, selection criteria and ethical considerations.

Chapter Three: This is an analysis of the literatures that are foundational to this thesis and set the stage for this substantive research. These literatures offer international and national viewpoints that critically demonstrate the unemployment-related conditions in the field, such as ghettoization and poverty, the urbanisation of employment, precarious working conditions, and economic exclusions from place-based disadvantaged regions.

Chapter Four: This presents the participants' experiences as a compilation of the 'findings' of the research, grouped around the following intersecting themes:

First, **stigma** relating to unemployment, focusing on stigmatisation as a divisive form of social control that devalues and disempowers unemployed people.

Second, **ethnicity and class** as a mode of classification focused on non-classed forms of social division and identity. In exploring this intersection, I use the 'non-class frame' adopted in part from Anthias (2001) as the utility for incorporating

social division to illustrate how non-classed forms of social division and ethnic identity are coupled with inequalities and exclusions that are central elements of the stratification system.

Third, is the theme '**sense of place**', shaped by notions of belonging and home. Even though participants' lives have been complicated by issues such as economic hardship and being linked to areas of place-based disadvantage; they have still managed to find a sense of place, called 'home' in the world.

The final intersection concludes with activities called **work-as-non-work:** a form of participants' agency and resistance, as a way of contributing to community.

Chapter Five: The final section of the thesis is a critical and conclusive analysis of the themes explored and participant experiences, in the form of a "**discussion**" that situates the study as an evidence-based examination.

# Chapter Two: Method and methodology

## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses empirical material gathered from seven weeks of participant observations and interviews in western Sydney to analyse six people's experience of long-term unemployment.

The research examines intersecting influences – stigma, ethnicity and social class, and a sense of place – revealing the manner in which relations of power in everyday experiences are negotiated.

To develop these concepts contextually, there is an overview of the structural processes of political economy and social welfare. This offers an understanding of both the historical dimensions of unemployment and the present-day spatially complex and negotiated state of employment-deprived areas of western Sydney, Australia.

**RESEARCH QUESTION: Where are the voices of the long-term unemployed? Inside stories that policymakers need to know.**

The research method of 'participant-observation' is an approach used not only from the emic (insider's) stance but the etic (external observer's) view.

To achieve this balance, I undertook a series of seven 90-minute visits to each of the six participants to establish and build relationships that would enable an inside view of how each person spent their daily life and frame their experience of long-

term unemployment (defined as 12 continuous months or more without work – ACOSS 2013).

During the first of these visits, I made observations of day-to-day experiences as handwritten field notes. In the seventh week, I recorded a 60-minute interview session with each participant. The interview comprised 16 specific questions, the same in each case, which were designed to gather explanations about their fields of vocational expertise and experience. These are participants' previous field of work, career skills they possess, and type of work they are seeking in the future, their willingness to participate and the value placed on work.

The interview also aimed to reveal how their experiences sat in relation to the social and political commentaries and media representations of life as an unemployed person in western Sydney.

The questions were as follows:

Q1: Tell me about your unemployment experiences

Q2: Tell me about your job interview experiences

Q3: What impact has unemployment had on your day-to-day life?

Q4: What was your last experience of employment like?

Q5: What circumstances led to your unemployment?

Q6: What industry or trade were you in and for how long?

Q7: Has unemployment caused any difficulties in your relationships?

Q8: How does it feel to be unemployed for more than twelve months?

Q9: Did you have any education and training for your last employment or since?

Q10: What are your plans and desires for the future?

Q11: Are there things you have to go without?

Q12: What is it like having limited money?

Q13: What impact, if any, has limited money had on your life?

Q14: If you have dependents, such as children and/or older parents, what has all the above been like?

Q15: What has been your biggest worry? Or what has been your worse fear?

Q16: If you had the opportunity to discuss your experience with [then] Prime Minister Tony Abbott, what would you want to tell him or ask him?

## PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA

For the study, I sought six participants, male or female, aged 45 years and older, who had been unemployed for 12 months or more.

Essential to the integrity and consistency of the research, participants needed to be able-bodied, not affected by any serious medical conditions, and able to speak English language satisfactorily.

I assured all the participants that if at any time they felt overwhelmed by talking about emotional and/or disturbing experiences, I would be more than happy to help them access counselling support, such as Lifeline Counselling Services (phone 13 11 14).

## RESEARCH SAMPLE

Although six people is a relatively small sample in the context of 700,000 unemployed in Australia, their contribution is important. It helps illuminate the complex situation of those who belong to a region steeped in hardship and vulnerability as a result of high unemployment levels and social exclusion.

The participants in this study gave not just of their time but of themselves – as they shared their often difficult and frustrating experiences living with limited resources and money.

## PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Halfpenny is a 45-year-old Chinese woman whom I met while working as a Community Hub Coordinator in the community services sector. She came to my attention as a referral from Mission Australia, an organisation that source and places volunteers with community groups like mine. She was not needed by my organisation at that time but wanted to help in some way. I discussed my research with her and she was willing to participate as she felt she had something to contribute.

I first met Cornelia, a 46-year-old Vietnamese woman after a sector conference where she was networking with my colleagues for future employment

opportunities. I spoke to her about my research plans and asked whether she would be interested. A few days later, after discussing the project further, Cornelia agreed to participate.

Kung, a 36-year-old Chinese man, was referred to me by Cornelia, who thought he might be a good candidate for my research after she listened to him speak at a Toastmaster's meeting about being unemployed. Kung was eager to share his experiences with me and signed up after we had spoken a few times on the phone and then met in person.

I met Daisy, a 45-year-old Lebanese woman, one night after work. She was with her friend, a client of the organisation I worked for. Daisy told me about an interview experience she had just had, and I spoke about my research plans and asked if she would be interested in being involved. We arranged to meet a few days later to allow her some time to think it through. I met with her the following week and she signed up.

Effie, a 44-year-old Lebanese woman, was a friend of Daisy's cousin. Once put in touch with me, she was eager to share her unemployment stories, and did not hesitate in asking to see and sign the form.

I first met Joycelyn, a 35-year-old woman with mixed (African and Dutch) parentage, after a playgroup session I ran at a local school in Bankstown. She came along with friends and their children. I discussed my research with Joycelyn and asked if she would like to participate. She agreed immediately, and signed up officially the following week.

## ADJUSTMENTS TO THE STUDY

Although one of the selection criterion placed on my research proposal was that participants needed to be at least 45 years of age, my initial search for eligible candidates of this age did not bear fruit.

The final cohort of participants were aged 35 to 46.

The initial reasoning behind the 45-and-over criteria was that, according to an NCOSS (2013) report, this age group not only finds it difficult to obtain re-employment but are the cohort least likely to be supported for training and placement by jobs search agencies.

Initially, the research time-frame was to be eight weeks duration, by completing the interviews in week eight. Instead, the research interviews were completed in week seven. This was due to my being called away on a family emergency.

I had originally assumed that because I worked in the community sector, finding participants would not be difficult. I expected that my engagements with partner agencies would facilitate the recruiting and shortlisting of eligible individuals from the appropriate age group.

I approached several agencies to help in this way, including Welfare Rights, Mission Australia, Wesley Employment, Bankstown Council Community Development, Creating Links, and Lend Lease, which runs an unemployment skills program. I also contacted individual welfare, community and development staff in western Sydney, and parents from schools I am associated with in the area.

After several weeks (and in some cases, months), each of the organisational contacts decided they were unable to support the process of recruiting participants because of “confidentiality and/or Privacy Act” reasons.

The individual persons I subsequently approached responded positively, and were accepted into the research project.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Each participant was given the list of questions two weeks before the actual interview so they could prepare themselves as best as possible in answering them within the one hour limit. The first participant during the actual recorded interview after the first question was posed asked what kind of experiences she should speak about. Whether it was nervousness on her part or mine, the reply was interpreted in a slightly different way to the original written first two questions outlined above. Arguably, one could say the interpreted short-form reply of both questions (as indicated below in intersection on Stigma) were similar to that of the original questions (as above in list of 16 interview questions).

## THESIS ARGUMENT

In this thesis, I argue that long-term unemployment in Australia is the result of the emergence of two types of global phenomena intrinsically linked to post-Fordist dynamics. These are:

- **high unemployment levels** as a ‘flow-on effect’ from global economic restructuring, and

- **social exclusion**, the resultant impact of high unemployment, and a condition which is systematically concealed from view.

Because of the trend towards the ‘new economy’ worsening, working conditions are causing greater insecurity. Insecurity has manifested in three distinct ways: through stigma; ethnicity and class; and through the effects of precarious work conditions and methods.

These relational conditions add another dimension, (that is, living in a disadvantaged region) to participants’ sense of place in urban western Sydney. These issues challenge popular views and have been explored in this thesis to reveal the complex and impermeable experience of living with long-term unemployment in 21st century urban western Sydney, Australia.

# Chapter Three: Literature review

In this chapter I draw on national and international literature to illustrate the spatial conditions framing the issues explored in this thesis.

The literature is not only helpful in terms of outlining residential place-based effects but also because it demonstrates a unique set of prevailing conditions of our time – mass unemployment, and a greater scope for employers to use certain 'tailored practices'.

These conditions have contributed to the long-term unemployment of each participant in varying ways that will be discussed further on.

Mass unemployment and the power imbalance between employer and employee can be attributed to the events leading up to and beyond the global financial crisis in 2008 and the subsequent actions of companies, businesses, small firms and sole traders committing to restructuring. With the relocations, closures, forced redundancies, hiring freezes, pay freezes, and reduced wages, then came higher levels of unemployment and welfare spending.

## WORK AND UNEMPLOYMENT – HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The meaning and history of unemployment is rooted in the late 19$^{th}$ century when it was referenced as a social problem that industrialised nation-states wanted to solve (Jancius 2006).

In retrospect, work in the 17th century was not at the centre of social relations but was associated with suffering and humiliation. During that time the only people

who were made to work were either servants or slaves. It was not until significant changes had occurred, particularly the ascendance of capitalism that business-trading relations became dominant, forging a new way of conceptualising work (Perelman 1980).

Work then, during this period of the 19th century, had a new meaning, one that was market-centred with an emphasis on time as part of its definition. Time and time-keeping now had monetary value – of hours worked. Not only was work a means of subsistence but a fundamental ethic of capitalism, a moral obligation for civil societies, and the true essence of humanity. According to Perelman (2010:10) this perspective has dominated Western cultures since the 19th century.

## THE GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Research shows that the contemporary unemployment landscape is patchy – large sections of the workforce have been downsized and many types of jobs made redundant by the closure of certain businesses. This is a feature not only of Australian society but of the globalised Anglophone world (Strangleman & Rhodes 2014; Egbert & Wilson 2010; Fagan & Dowling 2005; Sennett 2000; Bluestone & Harrison 1982).

The feature has been broadly exacerbated by the processes of deindustrialisation (a diverse range of economic trends that have emerged since the 1970s), which underpin major changes such as global economic restructuring in contemporary western societies.

Currently in Australia, economic restructuring conveys the overhauling of production methods by introducing flexibility into conditions of employment. I argue that this has manifested in ways that allow for firms and businesses to take advantage of the opportunity to indulge in discriminatory practices. Employers do this alongside reducing wages, reducing the strength of unions, employing fewer low-skilled low-income workers, and transferring whole businesses off-shore in order to enhance production and reduce labour costs.

According to Bryson, Winter and Lazzarini (1996), the global economic restructuring processes have been associated with major social effects that include a shift of jobs from manufacturing to service industries, along with increases in women's labour force participation, casual jobs, qualified workers, unemployment, income inequality and poverty.

Egbert and Wilson (2013) speak of the precarious nature of work brought about by these restructuring processes that is consonant with Bryson et al. (1996). Moreover, the more flexible working conditions benefit employers and some younger-age workers for whom flexible hours blend well with their lifestyles.

Other workers face an increase in part-time work alongside a dramatic decrease in rates and benefits – casual work often means not knowing when or how many hours one will be required until the day or night before.

All these features have shaped and are shaping the 'new economic' landscape of contemporary Australia (Morgan & Idriss 2012).

## Work – Sydney and Western Suburbs, NSW, Australia

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that Australia's major cities are undergoing some fundamental changes in character and structure. Sydney, like all major cities has its own distinctive character, while sharing some common features. By world standards, Australia's cities are highly suburbanised and low density (Forster 2006), but Sydney has a distinct dynamism of its own. There are rapidly growing new outer suburbs surrounding older areas of population decline or stagnation, albeit with gentrification in the inner suburbs.

Since the early 1990s, despite economic growth, many researchers have argued that levels of social polarisation and exclusion in Sydney have worsened. For example, patterns of residential differentiation and access to employment opportunities have become more complex.

In the comparative study on place-based disadvantage, *Dropping off the edge* (Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015), Claymore in western Sydney was listed as one of the 11 most disadvantaged postcodes. This reflects a top 5% ranking across at least 10 indicators used as substantial degrees of cumulative disadvantage. Claymore also appeared in the studies conducted in 2014, 2007 and 2004. Ranked next most disadvantaged in the 2014 study were Fairfield and Villawood, also located in Sydney's western suburbs. Cabramatta and Mt Druitt were in the 10% ranking.

A similar result was produced in the place-based study of Baum and Gleeson (2010), consonant with Vinson & Rawsthorne (2015). Although suburbs in close proximity, such as Airds and Auburn in Sydney's western suburbs, scored less

highly compared to Cabramatta and Mt Druitt in Baum and Gleeson's General Deprivation Index (GDI) sourced from the ABS Census, 2006.

While suburbs can be analysed on the basis of individual types of deprivation, it is recognised that places can suffer from several types simultaneously. Blue-collar unemployment tended to be the most severe in these 'residential' (by postcode) areas, affecting those who experience multiple features of disadvantage, such as being limited by language, literacy and numeracy skills, low income, disability and/or mental illness.

These features may be more prevalent in communities with concentrations of low socioeconomic status groups, ethnic minorities, including refugees and new migrants and Indigenous Australian communities (Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015).

Recent research on job location and journey to work revealed the increasing complexity of the patterns and the processes shaping them (Baum & Gleeson 2010). For example, Forster (2006) indicated that Sydney's central core has been increasing (or at least maintaining) its share of total metropolitan employment at the demise of the west. These patterns reflect strong growth in finance, business and other categories of employment associated with the producer services sector of the economy and favouring 'central locations' (Searle 2002; Turner 2008).

These locations show that similar job growth has occurred in adjacent high-status suburban areas such as Sydney's North Shore and the 'Global Arc' – a term that applies to the belt of employment growth extending from Botany in the south

through the central business district (CBD) and North Sydney, to St Leonards, Chatswood and Ryde (NSW Government, 2005).

The term ‘Global Arc’ essentially implies the phenomenon is seen as springing from Sydney’s developing role as one of Australia’s most global city (Connell, 2000). According to Forster (2006), Sydney is the main beneficiary of the globalisation process, and typical of global cities in experiencing rising levels of multinational command-and-control functions, international financial activities and advanced producer services generally.

Intra-regional differences in levels of economic wellbeing have remained wide in Sydney’s case, between eastern and western suburbs (Searle 2002) with no concrete improvement in sight.

For example, the new high-income global jobs give these workers the pick of high amenity, mainly eastern suburbs to live in, and forcing lower income groups to compete for lower amenity housing. At the same time, rising global competition has weakened the lower skill job availability and income base, further confining such workers to a decreasing pool of affordable lower amenity housing (Baum & Gleeson 2010; Forster 2006; Fagan & Dowling 2005; Bryson, Winter & Lazzarini 1996), and creating longer unemployment duration.

With competition at a premium, some western Sydney unemployed workers revel in the idea of being offered a job.

> ***Cornelia:*** *"It remains to be seen if I get a job offer here. Usually organisations get a high turnover of job applications and I've been lucky to been shortlisted for a few of them but disappointed when told someone else has just pipped me at the post. Working in the community sector is so low-paid that I've tried for jobs in the city but with the cost of commuting, it makes sense to remain local. Of course if I get a job offer in town and it pays well then I will have to commute, even if it's in Parramatta."*

Already pessimistic about the likelihood of being offered work from an ever-decreasing job pool, unemployed residents of disadvantaged suburbs may find more disappointment with the realisation that most of the high paying jobs will be taken by workers in eastern, northern or inner-city suburbs as jobseekers transition from job to job (Fagan & Dowling 2005).

> ***Effie:*** *"Yeah, I've thought about the city but there's too much competition from the youth … that's why I think I've been reluctant to go to town. There's just got to be a job locally … especially if the school rings me for something urgent with my son … I can get there."*

While employers search for flexibility and reduced labour costs, part-time workers on low incomes face job insecurity, even with work possibly being closer to home.

> ***Halfpenny:*** *"It won't be a problem; in fact, it would be a good journey by train. I don't mind if its city or local … just getting teaching work would be a nice change."*

According to Fagan & Dowling (2005) the region of western Sydney contained 80 jobs for every 100 resident workers but that strong concentration was in the declining manufacturing sector and deficient in the finance and business categories. Because the spatial structure of Sydney is represented by employment location (with inner city areas being preferred), this issue continues to grow in complexity (Forster 2006). The uneven distribution of job-stock is thereby causing systematic labour market exclusion of western Sydney's residents.

## SOCIAL IMPACT OF ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Economic restructuring resulting in phenomena such as 'mass layoffs' can have major effects on the lives of individuals and their families, and cause widespread economic hardship. The loss can be concentrated in cases of families with up to two/three generations whose livelihoods were dependent on Australian-owned and/or multinational companies (Bryson et al. 1996) that went offshore to undeveloped countries in order to reduce labour costs.

Social dislocations have led to longer-term unemployment. As research such as Wacquant and Wilson's 2008/1989 study on the city of Chicago shows, becoming a long-term welfare recipient doesn't just impact an individual's health and wellbeing. It also affects the wellbeing of their neighbourhood and community.

Experiencing economic hardship in a community where unemployment levels remain high over long periods leads to deprivation and exclusion (Wacquant & Wilson 2008; see Claymore and Mt Druitt, western Sydney in Warr 2004), and often causes deficits in social and cultural capital.

When neighbourhoods experience such decline, people, material goods and services relocate (Smart & Smart 2003), resulting in the decay of the physical environment and residents demonised (by outsiders, political and media commentaries), unless remedies such as investment strategies, social planning and policies are put in place by authorities.

These dynamics are the reality of several areas in western Sydney – several of which are in close proximity to the neighbourhoods of the participants.

Some of the features of disadvantage of western Sydney have been brought to public attention through investigative journalism (for example, the SBS series *Struggle Street*, 2015) and demonstrated as place-based deprivation by social researchers in the field (Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015; Baum & Gleeson 2010; Ebert & Wilson 2013; Baum 2009; Sennett 2007; Fagan & Dowling 2005; Warr 2004; Bryson, Winter & Lazzarini 1996).

These trends, linked to economic hardship, are a direct result of the labour market exclusion that has become a global trend across Western welfare states (Strangleman & Rhodes 2014; Wacquant & Wilson 2008, 1989; Newman 1985).

For example, looking at the dilemma within inner-city Chicago, in the United States, Wacquant (2008, 1989) and Wilson's (1991, 1989) controversial research demonstrated 'social structural dislocations' causing damaging hardships and undue emphasis (like victim-blaming). This in turn led to the decline of the inner city, the creation of 'ghettos' and dramatic transformations of African-American communities.

Over time, these ghettos have turned into enclaves of criminal activity, and drawn many poor, uneducated, low-skilled jobless together into environs of decay and dilapidation. This critical situation has inspired labels such as the 'underclass' and 'hyperghettoization', terms that not only illuminate the seriousness of the problem but place emphasis on the dynamics of the social structures and processes involved.

As Wacquant and Wilson (1989:9) argued:

> *"… beyond the sociographic focus, the central argument … is that the interrelated set of phenomena captured by the term "underclass" is primarily social-structural and that the ghetto is experiencing a "crisis" not because a "welfare ethos" has mysteriously taken over its residents but because joblessness and economic exclusion, having reached dramatic proportions, have triggered a process of hyperghettoization."*

In contrast, take the case of Australia's largest global city, Sydney. In the last two decades, job stock in the western Sydney labour market has been dire, to say the least, amid closures of industrial and manufacturing companies.

According to research by Baum and Gleeson (2010), Sydney is home to both the least and most deprived suburbs in Australia. Least deprived is the suburb of Milsons Point on the city's North Shore, while Claymore in the city's west held the prize for being the country's most deprived. Although close in proximity

(approximately 40 minutes by car), the socioeconomic reality of these suburbs could not be starker in contrast (Baum & Gleeson 2010:143).

As shown in the 2006 census, unemployment in Claymore stood at 31.8%, while in Milsons Point it was just 2.1%. In Claymore, the median individual income was $237 per week, compared to $1311 per week for people in Milsons Point. The family median income for Claymore was $530 per week, while in Milsons Point it was $2766 per week.

In a time of low wages and high cost of living, how can families prevent themselves from falling into the poverty trap? (A 'poverty-trap' exists when income is inadequate to meet basic needs as in the case of most single persons on welfare benefits, missing out on essentials of life and lack adequate income for resources and utilities, Townsend 1979 cited in Saunders et al 2008).

An uneven allocation of jobs across the city persists to the detriment of families in the west. Suburbs close to Sydney's highly resourced central business district, such as the northern and eastern suburbs, are preferred locations for business and international investments. These affluent suburbs are described as the 'wealth belt' or 'global arc' with Sydney absorbing most of the global benefits. In the western suburbs, however, two-thirds of local jobs are taken by people living elsewhere across the metropolitan areas (Baum & Gleeson 2010; Randolph 2004; Forster 2006; Searle 2002; Turner 2008).

By comparison, in the inner city of Chicago, Wacquant & Wilson (1989) showed that some of the city's white affluent neighbourhoods and upper-class suburbs had

reached more than twice the average income size citywide figure. For example, half of the white families in Highland Park had incomes in excess of $43,000, whereas half of the African-American families in the locality of Oakland had to make do with less than $5500 a year. Tellingly, more than two-thirds of all African-American families living in these areas and conditions were headed by women.

The inequalities in Sydney are just as striking. Take the case of the outer southwestern suburb of Macquarie Fields (similarly with St Marys and Mount Druitt in Greater Western Sydney – see SBS's *Struggle Street*, 2015).

Warr (2004) explains how communities in Macquarie Fields are enduring the ravages of disinvestment. As shops, community services, and industrial businesses close down or relocate, high levels of unemployment are created. These are poor neighbourhoods crammed with public housing, long-term welfare recipients, family trauma and domestic violence that is largely ignored (by community and police) until something terrible happens. The experiences are those of entrenched economic exclusions and employment disaffiliations generating social and cultural forms of disengagement, and leading to communities being stigmatized as 'discredited' neighbourhoods.

Researchers have argued that neglect and inadequacies of planning and policy were in the mix with disinvestment in many areas of western and southwestern Sydney (Turner 2008; Collins et al. 2004; Fagan & Dowling 2005; Baum & Gleeson 2010; Forster 2006; and Searle 2002). These researchers concur that these structural changes not only affected traditional industrial engineering sectors

(industrial tools, metal works, and automobile, mining and so on) but also sectors of footwear, clothing, electronics and the white goods industries (Turner 2008).

The researchers emphasised these were the sectors that predominantly gave employment to the residents of western Sydney. Governments (Federal and State) repeatedly promised to improve the situation in the most vulnerable areas, comparable to adjustments being made within the new global context, but these promises proved to be empty. Moreover, many policymakers verged on implying that residents were to blame for their own labour market dislocations (Turner 2008; Fagan & Dowling 2005).

Finally, observe the case of economic restructuring in Australia. I fervently argue that Australia's economic restructuring (the overhaul of production methods and business relocations) is economically strategic, resulting in higher levels of unemployment because of political unpreparedness (the Australian Labor Party not excluded).

When the Liberal-National Coalition Government took office, its leading rhetoric was the reinforcement of three distinct issues:

1. Debt and deficit (Treasurer, Joe Hockey, 2014)
2. Welfare reform – compulsory work participation: inducing the unemployed "to get a job, any job" (Hockey, 2014)
3. Job creation. "We will deliver one million new jobs over the next five years and two million new jobs over the next decade as we modernise

and transform all sectors of our economy." (PM Abbott & Hockey, 2014, Policy Priorities – Real Solutions for All Australians 2013).

In the meantime, the private sector continued to reduce its workforce, management levels deploying workers to meet the technological demands of our globalised world. Hence the need for the installation of the National Broadband Network (PM Turnbull 2015) and the political and economic push for foreign investment driving the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, among others.

The government promised to create jobs as well as "modernise and transform" all sectors of the economy, which reveals two important dynamics:

- that not enough jobs really existed (after businesses relocation), thus the government had to have known about this through business economic engagements, and
- that restructuring of all sectors of the economy would take place.

The government was left with no choice but to politically engage the public with rhetorical/ideological discourse that demonised the unemployed and displaced responsibility for unemployment onto working class individuals. However, if unemployment was primarily a result of people shirking their 'duty' from workplace participation, surely one could expect a few hundred in the population, but not 784,000 (ABS February 2015).

What unifies the government's neo-liberal political strategies is a deliberate use of a peculiarly asymmetrical distribution of power and information.

The fact of the matter is, in my view, that the government's promise to modernise all sectors of the workforce was a smokescreen for normalising the conditions of insecure employment. This normalisation is often understood in terms of 'shifts in capitalism' on a large scale (Morgan et al. 2013).

With this shift came a 'trend' that enabled high proportions of middle class women to enter the workforce, mainly in part-time work. At the same time, there was a decline in full-time work participation of men, resulting in an increase in non-standard and casualised employment. This brought about an intensification of work for full-time workers impacting work-life balance and adding to the precariousness of existence for many people (Hancock 2005).

In other words, this dynamic (adjustment made to appear normal) allowed for the shift in capitalism and the resultant trend it brought about *is* 'normal'. In economic restructuring terms it precipitated the very expectation of insecure employment conditions, bringing about the drought of long-term unemployment (Morgan et al. 2013). This was done to shed and trim the workforce in preparation for the kind of flexibility that employers require to produce 'fast capital' – profits.

The employment drought served two additional purposes. It paved the way for:

- conditions of the 'new economy', for example, workforce flexibility, and
- the dismantling of the-once-known job-for-life (Fordist notion of full employment) (Morgan et al. 2013).

Tweedie (2013:297) rightly argued that “capitalism not only creates harmful working conditions but also systematically conceals them from view.” This concealment has been legitimised by ‘place’ through the process of urbanisation of employment that has disadvantaged workers from western suburbs. They are increasingly unable to access jobs because of the distribution of ‘preferred central locations’ with Sydney in the role of the global city.

Thus, globalisation (a term expressing the processes of an interconnected world) has seen an intensification of worldwide social relations, as Giddens (1990:64) indicated, “linking distance localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”.

What this suggests is that globalisation is a world economic process which prescribes and describes ways in which businesses, concepts and events are organised around the world; and as pointed out by Ukpere and Slabbert (2009:37), “it is a phenomenon that has affected people differently in every sphere of life”.

This linking of global/local economic affairs has been to some degree an influencing factor on Australia’s manufacturing, industrial and automobile industries.

## MODERNISATION AND THE POST-FORDIST ECONOMY CAUSING INSECURITY

In many Western economies, neo-liberal globalisation has increased uncertainty about paid employment. Gullestad (2002: 48 cited in Grillo 2003:160) attributes current insecurity to changes in the international scene post-Cold War, concerns about the European Union (EU), the ‘modernisation’ of the welfare state, and

economic restructuring and resizing. These global issues reflect some of the ways in which the Australian domestic economy has changed – becoming fraught with uncertainty, making economic decision-making more difficult for workers, and life more challenging for unemployed people.

Post-Fordism can be characterised by profound transformation in the organisation of work, management and wage-relations. Its dynamics link the growth in precarious employment to employers' search for workforce flexibility (Burgess et al. 2008; Campbell 2010, cited in Morgan, Wood & Nelligan 2013). This is often understood in terms of shifts in capitalism on a global scale. A decline in Fordist mass production, especially in advanced economies, has been accompanied by the growth of 'fast capitalism' (Gee et al. 1996) – in other words, capital accumulation. With drastically reduced fixed costs, smaller firms engage in more tailored types of production involving rapid adaptation to change and differentiated demand.

I argue that in some cases this situation is ripe for allowing discreet discriminatory practices by employers or employing personnel to take hold. This kind of situation warrants closer attention by policy-makers, particularly when evaluating the labour market in this climate of 'tailoring types of production' that can lead to situations of cultural preference in an uneven recruitment market.

## AUSTRALIAN WELFARE

Neo-liberal thinking has played a major role in shaping Australian economic and social policy over the last two decades (Saunders & Deeming 2011). Neo-

liberalism is a concept and a political project that has been influential in the Anglophone world since the 1970s. Typically, this conceptual neo-liberal project seeks to deregulate markets, advance free trade, and promote capital mobility unobstructed by regulation. Neo-liberals advocate privatisation of commonly held assets, and seek to reduce public expenditure. They promote competitiveness, individualism and self-sufficiency as incontestable features, which mean they refute all forms of social protection including welfare programs funded by taxes. Furthermore, they regard business regulation as an unnecessary imposition, and consider unions and collective bargaining as damaging to a 'flexible' labour market (Davidson & Gleeson 2013; Wilson & Ebert 2013; Saunders & Deeming 2011; Fagan & Dowling 2005).

Research studies have identified that, within this new economic era of neo-liberal policies and projects, nationally and internationally, welfare emerges as a critical problem where targeting (claimants with greatest needs) and an emphasis on work are more substantial than have been observed earlier (Castles 1994; Deeming 2013).

In particular, there seems to be heavier criticism levelled at welfare recipients and the unemployed, epitomised by repeated political rhetoric on work being the best form of welfare while trying to induce them back into the workforce.

In the wake of the 2012 global financial crisis, research and news media (Deeming 2013; ABC TV 2009) highlighted profound changes taking place in several European countries to cope with public sector deficit (Greves 2011), and the rapid pace that ensued to set up packages to support the financial sectors.

In Australia, however, the government was able to avert much of the downturn by stimulating the economy before the flow-on effect. This stimulation took the form of a series of one-off payments (the first one made in December 2008) to pensioners but not unemployed people or sole parents on Newstart Allowance or the Parenting Payment. This payment was said (Gillard government) to be made to boost consumer spending and as a "down payment in the lead-up to comprehensive pension reform" (Deeming 2013).

Readjusting of the welfare state in this sense is a way of emphasising policy continuities that actually hides as much, if not more, than it reveals (Jessop 1999).

The second of the one-off payments (early 2009) were made to a range of taxpayers and "certain groups of income support recipients" (Saunders & Deeming 2011:375). These measures were underwritten by the Gillard Labor Government. While this government's actions were praised by international commentators, many internal critics condemned the large public spending. In my view, these actions were critical to Australia's economy and as a result, good for society.

However, the question that remains is how and whether the crisis has changed welfare states around the globe. According to Greves (2011:333) many countries introduced tax increases to reduce public sector deficit, and sometimes a direct reduction in public sector employee wages. Cuts to welfare spending was also placed on the agenda, to a larger degree than previously, implying reductions in the level of benefits for pensioners and the unemployed, a delayed retirement age, and decrease in welfare services.

In Australia, social welfare policy reform presides over the social security that absorbs a large proportion of means-tested government spending. According to Saunders and Deeming (2011:372), the economic situation "*is fraught with uncertainty and the Welfare Reform is still experiencing, after 20 years of tighter targeting, has left little room for further incremental tightening*."

In order to help us understand social security benefits and their exclusionary measures, we need to turn retrospectively to 19th century historical factors, to the conception, when wage fixation evolved from various exclusionary decisions around non-white employment. Thus, according to Bryson (1992), [social] policies successfully promoted by male workers also had the effect of excluding the competition of cheaper labour. Moreover, Australia's social settlement was in effect under "the strict control of immigration through a White Australia policy, which prohibited all immigrants of colour" (Bryson 1992).

This was a time of racist sentiment, class struggles and workforce unionisation. Conversely, these struggles eventuated in the creation and formation of the Labor Party (Deeming 2013). A decade later was the enacted ruling of a basic wage, known as the Harvester Judgement (1907) (Herscovitch & Stanton 2008, cited in Deeming 2013). This gave the courts power to determine minimum wages and conditions based on the grounds that the white male 'breadwinner' (a concept relating to a man, his wife and children) was to be provided a minimum wage sufficient to provide for his family.

This enactment later became the criterion for the 'breadwinner-homemaker model' of Australia's social welfare policy, the idea later taken up by the popular and

notable works of comparative policy (Francis Castles (1890-1980, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1994, 1997a, 1997b; Castles & Uhr 2005).

These works on social policy were based on the premise that welfare in Australia had developed alongside white working-class party politics crucial to influencing welfare policies for the protection of working-class families. This was what led Castles to argue that 'wage-earner' welfare states had evolved in Australia and that social democratic efforts were directed at securing acceptable conditions of work, including legislative measures that would ensure a fair minimum family wage. This also meant that attempts at redistributive efforts using the instruments of wage regulation were to be achieved (Castles 1997; Deeming 2013). However, under a neo-liberal-coalition, the only possible redistributive efforts would be aimed at increasing the wealth of the middle classes by way of tax credits and benefits through the taxation system in the form of the Child Care Rebate and Family Tax Benefit (Australian Government 2011 cited in Deeming 2013) and further discriminate against the working class.

## QUESTIONABLE SANCTION OF MUTUAL OBLIGATION TO WELFARE BENEFITS

The aspects of the Australian Government Budget 2014-15 pertaining to social welfare reform were received with great ambivalence and contention from community, public sector and parts of the business sector. It was deemed an unfair budget (ACOSS 2014; NWRN 2014) because, among other things, it demonised the unemployed, set higher measures for them to prove they were actively seeking work, and attempted to restrain benefit claiming for six months for unemployed youth.

In this thesis, I have focussed on two of the more contentious conditions of the 2014 budget, relevant to the 35-46 age group of my participants.

Firstly, is the requirement for the unemployed to prove themselves to be 'active' in seeking work by producing 40 job applications per month in order to retain their benefit payments. This precondition is known as Mutual Obligation (Deeming 2013; Morris & Wilson 2014; ACOSS 2013;[4] Australian Unemployment Union 2013; Wright, Marston & McDonald 2011; see jobseeker compliance – National Welfare Rights Network 2008;[5] Mendes 2003).

The second condition is that an unemployed person who refuses to accept any job offer made will be penalised by losing eight weeks of benefit payments (see 'Doling out punishment' – Welfare Rights & ACOSS 2000).

These conditions are arguably very unfair (in most cases it is next to impossible to achieve 40 job applications per month; and some of the jobs offered to unemployed people cannot be accepted because of onerous conditions, such as working at night when public transport is not available). The situation is particularly unfair when coupled with rhetoric that 'work is the best form of welfare' and the unemployed need to prove to be 'hard working'.

I argue, that by restricting access to income security payments, and redirecting responsibility for the 'disadvantage' to private individuals, the government is

[4] ACOSS: http://www.acoss.org.au/the-view-from-the-community/

[5] WELFARE RIGHTS: http://www.welfarerights.org.au/welfare-rights-review/welfare-rights-review-vol-1-no-3/job-seeker-compliance-tough-tougher-and

reflecting the influence of the 19th century distinction between the ‘deserving poor’ and the ‘undeserving poor’.

It is simply illogical to blame 780,000 unemployed Australians for their failure to secure a job at a time when there are only 150,000 job vacancies across the country (as at February ABS 2014; Smerdon 2015). During this period of high unemployment (levels we have not seen in decades), unemployed people should be supported and helped.

Returning to and pursuing the 19th century “poor laws” of the needs and needy, “is to strengthen that lineage which connects welfare to its historical roots” (Bryson 1992). Far from upholding rights and equality, these laws imply an individual causation of social problems that results in victim-blaming. Again, we witness exclusionary ways in which a path-dependent welfare policy can alienate and discriminate sections of working-class people.

Mendes (2003) points out that the deserving poor are those who have become briefly dependent on welfare relief through no fault of their own and who, with some assistance, could return to independence.

In times such as these, with high unemployment figures and stringent, targeted means-testing, who gets to decide who deserves support and who does not?

Until recently, those considered as the ‘undeserving poor’ were treated with indignant contempt by representatives of government departments, including some social workers and welfare benefit administrative staff (this attitude persists

in some regions). Often put in the category of the 'undeserving poor' were Indigenous groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and Native Americans in North America, and poor and working class African-American people in the United States.

In Australia, many unemployed people are still being let down by such overt prejudice, compounded by the inadequacy of the welfare state in dealing with their specific challenges.

For example, remote Indigenous Australian people are more likely to reside in areas with a different cost of living than for the average urban Australian resident. Indigenous households also tend to be exceptionally large in size and often involve extended kinship networks that have no direct equivalent to the nuclear family model used in most poverty studies (Morphy 2006, cited in Hunter & Jordan 2010). Their traditional cultural preferences, needs and lifestyles are often ignored due to entrenched institutional racism dating back to divisive (and even genocidal) practices during colonisation.

Unemployed individuals have been faced with these archaic attitudes for some time. Here are the views of some research participants who have experienced prejudicial behaviours in more recent times:

> ***Daisy:*** *"[The people] at Centrelink, they look down on you as if you aren't human or that they are paying you out of their pockets … Most people on benefits are not there by choice – they really need financial support. Most people would prefer to be doing*

*some kind of work and not have to go to [Centrelink]. That is why a lot of people don't claim … they prefer to do work and get cash up front … even if it's a day here and there. I can't wait to get on to a course. If I can't find work, I think those Centrelink people would prefer to see me really poor and have to beg. They have no compassion. They shouldn't be doing that kind of job if that's their attitude."*

The attitude revealed here suggests the system is designed to deter rather than help.

***Effie:*** *"I can't wait for the day I find work so I don't have to depend on unemployment benefit payments. The money I get is a help but it doesn't go far and you cannot live on that … I would rather be out there earning good money so I can live the kind of life I want for me and my children. The [Centrelink] people look down on you… they treat you like you're nothing, as though they are better than you. It makes you feel worthless, you know?"*

Supportive measures are indeed helpful but insufficient giving impacts wellbeing and inhibits motivation to incur travel costs looking for work. Any accompanying 'judgement' also lowers self-esteem.

***Cornelia:*** *"After seeing the amount of questions and size of the forms you have to fill in … that put me right off. I made the choice then and there that I would use my savings for as long as I can*

*until I manage to secure another job. I guess I didn't want to be judged."*

The impulse to take responsibility for oneself is a perfect example of the neo-liberal aim of shifting the responsibility back on to individuals for the circumstances in which they find themselves.

These systematic, bureaucratic, attitudinal behaviours may well be a form of strategy to get unemployed individuals back into the workforce. The neo-liberal (Abbott) coalition government (now Turnbull) and its social policy are fervently against any kind of welfare, believing in principle that it leads to dependency.

In their 2014 book, *Struggling on the Newstart unemployment benefit in Australia: The experience of a neoliberal form of employment assistance*, Morris and Wilson describe it well. They argue that the "low level of the Newstart (unemployment benefit) payment has become a major source of concern about Australia's willingness and ability to protect unemployed Australians from poverty."

Australia's welfare system has a heavy reliance on means-tested benefits and targeted assistance aimed at reducing benefit 'churning' and lowering budgetary costs. While these measures are arguably necessary (within reason), the current welfare system is a long way from its originally conceived purpose – to provide security for the unemployed working class. Many commentators have criticised Australia's tough stance, describing it as no more than "meanness" (Morris & Wilson 2014).

Saunders and Deeming (2011:376) have pointed out that “targeting has mainly been pursued through policies that restrict benefit eligibility rather than through using the means test to reduce benefit entitlements” (also see Saunders 1991, 2000). This welfare reform is evidently the neo-liberal ‘active’ project whose principles remain – individualism and self-sufficiency.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed in this chapter shows how Australia’s current welfare system has been influenced by historical factors such as racial and class-based prejudice, the outdated concept of the ‘nuclear family’, and the rise of neo-liberalism. The result is a social welfare system with the basic aim of inducing people back to work and punishing those who do not work.

The historic view of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ continues to influence policy to this day. Macarov (1980:51) points out that punishments meted out to the unemployed include leaving them out of programs, limiting their income support, making it difficult for them to collect benefits, and stigmatising them to the point of creating emotional, social, and physical problems.

# Chapter Four: Participants' experiences

This chapter grounds and exposes the reality of the participants' experiences of unemployment. It gives crucial context to the investigations and findings of this thesis by presenting a compilation of the challenges faced by real people, told in their own voices.

The participants' experiences are discussed in relation to each of the following intersecting themes:

- stigma
- ethnicity and class
- sense of place
- work as non-work.

## STIGMA

### Why is 'stigma' relevant to unemployment?

This chapter seeks to outline the power relationships between the participants, their family, friends, potential employers and agencies. Here the participants talk about the 'stigma' they have experienced as a result of unemployment.

Stigma is pertinent because of its impact and range. Some participants acknowledge feeling stigmatised (that is, labelled as socially undesirable) by friends and family members, but more often in new social situations and by social structures. Because of the impact of these interactions, I decided to further explore the meaning of 'stigma' and its implications.

This section is concerned with the ‘fuzzy’ process of stigmatisation entrenched in societal and gendered power relations with the unemployed. In my view, it occurs where discreet discriminatory practices are taking hold, particularly in these times of ‘work modernisation’.

Stigma is reinforced through coercive measures, such as in a situation Cornelia describes in which her referee undermined her for a job. Unbeknown to Cornelia, her referee had a friend who was applying for the same position. When contacted for a reference, the referee supported her own friend, and not Cornelia, who thereby missed out on the job.

This kind of situation is sometimes endorsed by hierarchical social and economic structures and remains subliminal to the ‘ordinary’ or taken for granted in society.

This chapter attempts to make clear that although there are many kinds of stigma, articulation of its components (labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination) is significantly important in this discussion. It is of particular importance because of the ways in which people interact formally and informally.

The term ‘stigma’ or ‘mark’ is seen as something in the person rather than a designation or tag that others affix to the person. The term directs our attention differently than a term like ‘discrimination’. According to Link and Phelan (2001:1) in contrast to stigma, “discrimination directs focus on the producers of rejection and exclusion – those who do the discriminating, rather than on the people who are the recipients of these behaviours”. Thus, the terms we use can lead to different understandings of where responsibility lies for the problem and, as a consequence, to different prescriptions for action.

At times, participants have found it difficult to determine whether they had been blatantly discriminated against or not. This happened in situations when they realised a negative label had been applied to them and/or they felt they were being viewed as less competent, intelligent or trustworthy. They came away feeling uncomfortable and 'questionable', in doubt as to whether it was discrimination or something else.

It is this 'fuzzy-ness' (a kind of 'either/or') that has impacted them, as they have expressed in the interviews. Using the term 'stigma' does not always clearly show where responsibility lies and for this reason it is explored further below.

### Historical background

Research on stigma has been multidisciplinary, including contributions by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and social geographers. Across these disciplines there are overlaps and differences in emphasis (Link & Phelan 2001).

Erving Goffman's seminal work, *Stigma* (1963) utilised the term, originating from the Greek, referring to bodily signs that were cut or burnt into the body to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of that person. Usually the mark was to signify that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor: "a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places" (Goffman 1991:1).

Today, the term is widely used in something like the original literal sense, but is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it. Society

establishes the means of categorising persons in a way that usually sanctions the individual negatively.

Historically, unemployed people were seen as lazy bludgers, willing to allow others to take care of their needs (Harris, Harris, Lee & Davies 1999). A similar attitude goes further back, demeaning persons in social and personal situations. We are reminded that in the 17th century, work was about suffering and humiliation, not highly regarded because it was only servants and slaves who worked (Perelman 1980). Ironically, during the 1950s, even the sick were considered deviant, dysfunctional, and in violation of social norms (Parsons 1951). The consequences of being regarded in such a way include shame, humiliation, ostracism and despair (Carr & Halpin 2002).

### Relevance

A short explanation is required here. Even though the participants were commenting on the feelings they experienced from unsuccessful attempts to get a job, they were also implying the experience was more than that, leading me to further explore stigmatisation as opposed to racism.

I propose that stigma and racism (both issues of control) can be interchangeable, as with discrimination. However, the participants were adamant that it was both stigma *and* discrimination. They expressed this through verbal feedback after receiving a draft copy of my report.

Stigma is a potent form of social control because it often involves a social process or a related personal experience that is characterised by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation. This often results from an experience of adverse social

judgment. This ***is*** a form of social control precisely because it can be integrated into social structures (Link & Phelan 2001). It is used as a political rhetoric device, and affects the kind of structural discrimination that occurs in social policy, and by government and benefits-payment administrative staff in their labelling (consciously or not) of the unemployed as socially undesirable.

For example, explicit in their speaking and in policy about welfare, politicians often imply categories of 'good' and 'bad'. When they mention 'hardworking families', they are generally talking about the middle-class (Deeming 2013); but when they say "get a good job – any job" they are usually referring to low-income, low-skilled working-class constituents.

Politicians often use language that can deliberately explicate meaning in a particular way (like sending subliminal messages) to society thereby reinforcing the stigmatising element (i.e. judgement) especially aimed at those not conforming and participating in the workforce.

### Discrimination in focus

Structural discrimination is also found in areas where employers are recruiting (especially in the present climate of high unemployment not seen in decades), reducing labour costs and regulating wages by 'tailoring types of production. As Harvey (2002:103) explains:

> *"Literally millions of currently employed job seekers competed with unemployed job seekers for vacant jobs during the period. In theory, at least, it is possible for an economy to have both a high job-vacancy rate and high job-turnover rate without any persons of*

> *unemployed job seekers ever finding work. All that is required is a high rate of job search among currently employed workers and a hiring preference on the part of employers for employed applicants over unemployed applicants."*

In my interviews, participants were each asked the same questions. The following two questions produced the most answers relevant to the themes of discrimination, stigma and/or social exclusion:

- Tell me something about your job interview experiences?
- How does it feel to be unemployed for more than 12 months?

These were some of their responses, noting that some participants chose to answer both questions, while others focused on one.

### *Theme: Discrimination*

**Note:** Halfpenny is a Chinese migrant who holds a PhD in education.

> ***Halfpenny:*** *"I sometimes had the feeling that's why I haven't had a job yet – because when they see me they change their minds. Especially when I've been so encouraged after speaking on the telephone, then when I get there they seem very disappointed; but… showing respectful face and friendliness."*

Prior to this response, Halfpenny asked me what kind of experiences she should talk about. I replied that she could speak about whether she felt her job interviews were a good experience and how she felt about being unemployed for as long as she has.

In Halfpenny's response there is an assumption that discrimination based on her ethnicity may have played a part in her unsuccessful attempts to gain employment. While her assumption may be unsubstantiated, it may have been caused by an intuited awareness of subliminal feelings on the part of the discriminators (based on non-verbal facial communication), which cannot be disputed.

According to Link and Phelan (2001:367), a situation like this is 'individual discrimination': labelled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of 'us' from 'them'. Hence, labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.

It is also important to bear in mind that stigmatisation is entirely conditional on access to social, economic and political power "that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination" (Link & Phelan 2001:367).

Link and Phelan concluded that once differences are identified and labelled, they are typically taken for granted as being just the way things are. This is why they carry such weight.

### *Theme: Discrimination*

**Note:** Cornelia is a Vietnamese migrant. She has a diploma in finance administration and a bachelor's degree in community welfare work.

> ***Cornelia:*** *"I've been shortlisted for jobs on a number of occasions … and later discovered that one of my referees was giving*

*inaccurate information about me to the organisation because she wanted her friend to get the position. I experienced discrimination from all sides."*

*"I terminated the position because of being bullied by colleagues. I was given the position over internal staff … they made life and work difficult … they were older … and [I was] often having to do their work as well as my own."*

Cornelia's situation is complex for several reasons. In the first scenario, she could have brought this matter to the attention of HR as a violation of the terms of company policy. In this second example, she could also have contacted HR because she experienced bullying in the workplace. Cornelia's reasons for not involving Human Resources (HR) are unclear, but may be because she assumed she would not be believed or supported, given the discrimination she was already feeling.

Cornelia's first response relates to her job search experience, and the second to her employment situation. In both cases, it cost her a job.

Link and Phelan (2001) refer to such situations as 'structural discrimination', much like Harvey (2002) mentioned (earlier above). Link and Phelan claim that the concept of institutional racism desensitises us to the fact that all manner of disadvantage can occur outside of a model in which one person does something bad to another. At face value, this certainly seems to be what happened in Cornelia's case. However, Hamilton and Carmichael (1967) indicate that institutional racism refers to accumulated institutional practices that work to the

disadvantage of racial minority groups even in the absence of individual prejudice or discrimination. They pointed out, for example, that employers (more often white) rely on the personal recommendations of colleagues or acquaintances (more often white and more likely to know and recommend white job candidates) for hiring decisions. The same kind of structural discrimination is, of course, present for other stigmatised groups.

In the following example, Daisy comments on the job search process and how she feels about the (perceived) stigma or judgement made on her intelligence and competence. She compares this to how she feels when the discriminator is personally known to her and the damaging effect this has. She then talks about being unemployed and the disarming effect of the interactions she has with the benefit payment staff at Centrelink.

*Themes: Stigma and discrimination*

**Note:** Daisy is a Lebanese migrant. She has a diploma in beauty and natural therapies.

> ***Daisy:*** *"When people find out that you're unemployed, they end the conversation as though you have nothing to contribute or that you wouldn't understand them. People are still discriminating … they assume that job defines who you are, and if there's no job then you're not worthy or you're just a bludger … The worse thing is, it's usually the people you think you know well – that's the hurtful part; it's not some random you don't know, and if it was you wouldn't really care because people can think what they like. But*

*when it's people you actually like, it's a bit of an eye-opener and let-down.*

*[The people] at Centrelink, they look down on you as if you aren't human or that they are paying you out of their pockets. And if you give them attitude back, they send you on a merry-go-round … I think those Centrelink people would prefer to see me really poor and have to beg. They have no compassion. They shouldn't be doing that kind of job if that's their attitude."*

Daisy seems to have experienced both sides of the coin: stigma and discrimination.

Firstly, let us consider her interactions with someone she knew. Link and Phelan (2001) draw attention to 'discrimination and status loss': low placement in a status hierarchy creates stigma and can begin to have effects of its own on a person's life chances. Link and Phelan point out that it is not necessary to revisit the labelling and stereotyping that initially led to the lower status, because the lower status itself becomes the basis of discrimination. For example, the low status might make a person less attractive to socialise with, or to involve in community activities.

However, according to the concept of 'stereotype threat' proposed by Steele and Aronson (1995, cited in Link and Phelan 2001:374), people are affected by their own awareness of the stereotypes that might be applied to them. Steele and Aronson point out that the stereotype becomes a threat or challenge either because one might be evaluated in accordance with the stereotype or because one might confirm the stereotype through one's behaviour. In other words, Daisy

herself may have internalised the stereotyped belief and therefore feels subordinated by it so that when challenged, even by her close interactions, her immediate fears are brought to the fore.

Steele and Aronson concluded that nobody in the immediate context of a discriminating encounter needs to have engaged in obvious forms of discrimination. Rather, “the discrimination lies anterior to the immediate situation and rests instead in the formation and sustenance of stereotypes and lay theories”. Nevertheless, the consequences can be severe and undoubtedly contribute greatly to the life chances of people in stigmatised groups.

Daisy’s response about the Centrelink staff also suggests she has had previous altercations with them. Daisy may be holding residual feelings from a previous encounter which has left her with negative emotions. Nonetheless, researchers have documented examples showing that institutions such as Centrelink have been known to engage in ‘administrative exclusion’ (Brodkin and Majmundar 2010). This includes the bureaucratic ‘tied-up-in-red-tape’ syndrome. In other cases they have wrongfully suppressed benefit payments (it is not known whether this was intentional or not).

One should never try to minimise another’s feelings about a situation but as Link and Phelan (2001) have indicated, once the cultural stereotype is in place, it can affect labelled persons in important ways that do not involve obvious forms of discriminatory behaviour by those in the immediate presence of the stigmatised person.

*Theme: Stigma*

**Note:** Effie is first-generation born Australian with Lebanese parentage. She has extensive on-the-job-training in customer service.

> ***Effie:*** ***"****People look down on you when they know you're on benefits. They treat you like you're nothing, as though they are better than you. It makes you feel worthless; you know? There are not sufficient jobs for people because 14 months out of work is a long time and nobody wants that."*

Effie's response relates to her job-search experiences in which she felt she had been judged, leaving her with feelings of low self-worth. She attributes her long-term unemployment to a limited stock of jobs in the labour market.

Effie's response also suggests that she is aware of stereotyping but links the 'labels' to undesirable attributes of her situation. Thus, 'she' becomes the rationale for a belief that negatively labelled persons are fundamentally different from those who don't share the label.

Link and Phelan (1989) refers to this situation as 'status loss': pointing out that although inequalities in status-related outcomes definitely occur, they do not result from forms of discrimination that would be readily apparent to a casual observer.

*Themes: Stigma and social exclusion*

**Note:** Kung is from a Chinese background. He has been educated in Australia and holds a degree in engineering.

> ***Kung:*** *"I worked in the construction/manufacturing industry for 10 years. Due to lack of demand and increased competition, [the] company decided to close down its Sydney branch, making my position redundant. I feel I get judged in a negative way when I tell people I am unemployed. Sometimes I feel like I have to lie about being unemployed to avoid feeling embarrassed. I'm worried people will assume I am receiving unemployment benefits and be labelled as a dole bludger even though I don't receive benefits from Centrelink."*

Kung's response clearly relates to 'status loss'. He first outlines how he became unemployed and then explains how he avoids being judged and how he feels when he is judged, especially if he is assumed to be drawing benefits when in fact he lives off his savings.

Link and Phelan (1989), Cohen (1982), and Driskell and Mullen (1990) point out that when a person is connected to undesirable characteristics that reduce his status in the eyes of the stigmatiser, this is often manifest in the hierarchies created in organisational settings. For example, who sits where in meetings; who defers to whom in conversational turn-taking and so on?

Link and Phelan maintain that research findings on stigma are important because they show how having a status that is devalued in the wider society can lead to very concrete forms of inequality in the context of social interactions within small groups.

Kung clearly articulated his vulnerability to a stigmatising condition in terms of the extent to which he holds others – and himself – responsible for the stigma. Research has demonstrated that stigma varies widely in the degree to which it is perceived to be personally caused by, or under the control of, the stigmatised individual (Jones et al., 1984).

In general, evidence suggests that stigmatised individuals are treated better and elicit less anger and more pity when they are judged not to be personally responsible for their condition (Farina, Holland and Ring, 1966; Levine and McBurney, 1977; Vann, 1976; Weiner, Perry and Magnusson, 1988). In contrast, blaming oneself for a stigmatising condition may make the individual more vulnerable to low self-esteem (cf. Kerbo, 1975).

### *Theme: Stigma*

**Note:** Joycelyn, an Australian, is from European and African parentage. She holds bachelor's degrees in social work and fashion design.

> ***Joycelyn:*** *"I've experienced the stigma of unemployment especially in social situations with people I don't know … There's a marked difference when you tell people you study instead of being unemployed. It's like being in the in-crowd if you're a student but if unemployed you get to feel as an outsider. I don't want to have to lie but at the same time too many people are quick to judge."*

Joycelyn's response relates to general social interactions with others about her unemployment situation and includes an interesting observation about being in the

in-crowd or feeling like an outsider. She explains how she has had to adjust her 'status' in order to avoid judgement, by deciding whether to remain an accepted member of the in-group or be excluded.

According to Crocker and Major (1989:609), a stigmatised group is an 'out-group' relative to the dominant group in a culture or society, whereas a standard out-group is defined by reference to any particular in-group, regardless of which one holds the dominant position in the social hierarchy.

Crocker and Major suggest that although some of the dynamics of interaction between stigmatised and non-stigmatised individuals are generally characteristic of in-group/out-group relations, stigmatised groups are devalued not only by specific in-groups but by the broader society or culture.

Joycelyn's account relates to what Cohen (1982) and Driskell and Mullen (1990) call 'status loss'; when unacquainted individuals come together in a group situation, it is their external statuses, such as race and gender, that shape the social hierarchies.

Link and Phelan (2001:371) make two important points in respect of this. Firstly, they point out that having a devalued status can lead to very concrete forms of inequality in the context of social interactions within small groups. Their second claim is that although inequalities in status-related outcomes definitely occur in the groups, they do not result from forms of discrimination that would be readily apparent to a casual observer. Instead group members use external statuses (like race and gender) to create performance expectations that lead to a labyrinth of

behaviours such as taking the floor, keeping the floor, referring to the contributions of others, head nodding, interrupting, and the like.

I argue that while the impact of stigma is plainly evident from the participants' responses, less attention in general is paid to the processes of stigmatisation. These processes are forms of social control used formally and informally to impose exclusion, blame and rejection, and devalue a person on the basis of supposedly non-conformity to the social norm, in this case, of being employed. This process occurs irrespective of whether the person is responsible for their own unemployment or it happened through no fault of their own.

The imposition is taken for granted and often viewed as 'the way things are without consideration of how others are impacted by it. Furthermore, it is generally exercised by those who assume power over others and is intended to diminish self-esteem to bring about conformity.

As the above responses have suggested, at most times when a stranger comes into our presence, first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate whether this individual is in the *in* or *out* category. We then assign an according 'social identity' to that person.

I concur with Goffman (1991) who argues that a term like 'social identity' is better than 'social status' because personal attributes such as honesty are involved, as well as structural ones, like occupation. Goffman proposes that the referent is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. When an assigned attribute has an extensive discrediting effect, it can be

considered a stigma. Sometimes the attribute is also called a failing, a shortcoming, or even a handicap.

### Summary

Contemporary research and the participants' responses demonstrate that stigma is widespread and common, and that stigmatised circumstances and processes can affect multiple domains of people's lives (Link & Phelan 2001). The consequences it has when delivered by say, our leaders, or people we hold in high regard, not only reinforces negative messages in society but has destructive effects on those at the receiving end.

Prejudice and discrimination have substantial negative social, economic, political, and psychological consequences for members of oppressed or stigmatised groups like the unemployed. We also know stigma promotes and reinforces social isolation, and limits equitable opportunities for employment and recreation (Carr & Halpin 2002). This is especially true in times such as these in which modernisation of the workforce continues to make both workers and the unemployed more vulnerable.

Stigma was a particularly important concept to review in this chapter because it was an opportunity to explore the circumstances in which stigma arises and observe its impact. The participants' responses offer a deeper understanding on how stigma makes them feel, the negotiated ways they deal with it (or avoid it), the effect it has on their everyday relational experiences with others, and the related challenges they face. While some participants identified stigma as a 'labelling-stereotype', others clearly saw it as 'discrimination'.

The participants were clearly able to identify the behaviour of their discriminators, but unfortunately they were unable to change the attitudes that produced it. Indeed, perhaps the fear of being labelled (as socially undesirable) caused individuals to delay or avoid seeking help, while those who understood the 'labelling' may have decided to distance themselves from it. There were several individuals, however, who recognised overt discrimination when faced with rejection of a job application, and so on.

Structural discrimination (historically situated in social policy) is much more subtle, such as when a white employer relies on job recommendations from their white colleagues, who in turn are more likely to recommend white candidates (this scenario was experienced by Cornelia). The denial of a job to a person of colour does not happen directly, on those grounds, yet discrimination has clearly occurred.

Another example concerns Halfpenny, who experienced an insidious form of discrimination when she realised that a negative label had been applied to her, making her doubt her own competence, trustworthiness and intelligence. She was completely taken aback by the attitudinal behaviour given their previous good telephone relations she had felt, encouraging her to the next step in attending the job interview process. She felt sure this was a sign of their interest in her as a possible candidate for the position.

These behaviours are actions of those who assume power over others. It *is* an act of social control and, I believe, this is why it was brought up so often in the participants' explanations about what it is like being unemployed. Many of them

were still showing signs of disempowerment following a discriminatory experience. This is why, in this chapter, I felt it was necessary to explore the concept of stigma and how it relates to unemployment.

## ETHNICITY AND CLASS

### Social category in a place-based disadvantaged location

In this chapter, it is essential to first clarify the concept of 'non-class' (a form of differentiation). This issue arose because a participant in my study expressed her objection to being perceived as 'poor'.

This may have been because 'poor' is a loaded word, at once political, material, structural, personal, emplaced, and discursive. It is also deeply entwined with struggles over power, resources, inclusion, and meaning in ways that implicate ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and other axes of social distinction that the participant may not, as yet, have been able to articulate.

Also, she may feel that being seen as 'poor' is a negative reflection of her identity because it positions her within a 'underclass' of people rendered poor by their own negotiated actions and everyday practices, not just by labour market conditions.

Without wishing to over speculate, I believe the participant may be in a state of disorientation about her circumstances that reflects the deep ontological insecurity experienced by many working class people in her community who are educationally unsuccessful. Not just educationally, but, also unsuccessful in securing employment.

At any rate, in an attempt to respect her objection, I decided to use the expression ‘non-class’, as I needed to find a way to talk about class as it intersects with ethnicity, and the other participants did not see themselves in terms of class. It was also a way of making sense of my own research.

Despite acknowledging that race, gender, and ethnicity processes are relevant in determining social positioning and that they might influence an individual’s class position, this chapter on ethnicity and class as a mode of classification is focused on non-class forms of social division and identity.

In doing this, I use the ‘non-class frame’ adopted in part from Anthias (2001) as the utility for incorporating social division in order to illustrate how non-classed forms of social division and ethnic identity coupled with inequalities and exclusion constitute central elements of the stratification system.

Such an approach focuses on western Sydney’s ethnic minorities as a ‘category’ in which to demonstrate non-class status. Alongside this category are factors relating to experiential social inequalities from exclusionary practices that are discreetly found within ethnic communities that bring about unequal social outcomes and distinct social divisions.

Traditionally, the concept of class is often used in the social sciences to invoke economic and cultural influences on the positioning of particular groups within social hierarchies (Argyle 1994; Bourdieu 1987; Centers 1949; Marx and Engels 1848/1998; Michels 2013; Savage et al. 2013; Skeggs 2004; Standing 2011b; Walkerdine 1992).

A cursory look at the canon on social class quickly reveals the complex and contested nature of this concept as reflected in classic and contemporary scholarship. These complexities are compounded when we consider recent discussions of the intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and place in influencing the positioning of different social actors within socioeconomic hierarchies both within and across the Western world (Anthias 2012; Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2012; Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler et al. 2012; Reay 2013).

At its core, social class theory is concerned with the effects of social and economic stratification of people and society.

As a 'frame' of classification, non-class involves the allocation of individuals to positions on the basis of a range of criteria or markers. These may include work role or relations, skills, educational credentials, personal competencies, property and knowledge (Anthias 1998; Crompton 1998). Therefore, in this chapter, non-class assumes an analytic category as a group occupying the same social positioning. Furthermore, people do not have to explicitly recognise class issues, or identify with discrete class groupings, for class processes to operate.

### Historical background

Over the last 150 years, many eminent philosophers and social scientists have engaged with issues of social class. Marx initially developed his historical materialist-economic theory of 'class' as part of an effort to challenge socioeconomic oppression in support of the development of a more equitable society. A key focus for Marx was the organisation and control of the means of

production by merchants and the rewards of commerce that concentrated among elites.

This was at a time Marx was witnessing the exploitation of the ‘proletariat’ (working class) by the ‘bourgeoisie’ (the owners of production). On this basis Marx focused his conflict theory on the antagonistic unequal relationship. Hence, the birth of the opposing terms: proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Central to this focus, Marx proposed the proletariat would one day unite in rebellion against the exploitative conditions of their existence. Marx envisioned this would result in a new and more equitable society characterised by the shared collective ownership of the means of production. It was this vision that set in motion Marx’s mapping of the capitalist emergence.

Debate was sparked as some of Marx’s ideas were expanded and others challenged by social theorists such as Weber, who read in the works of Marx an overly narrow understanding of social stratification that hampered progressive developments towards a more equitable society (Weber 1922/1978). Weber argued that control of the means of production was only one of three core components that shape a person’s social class. Other cultural factors such as prestige, political power, and wealth, including control of other forms of property and assets, would also influence one’s class position within the socioeconomic hierarchy.

These class theorists, Marx and Weber, thus set the stage for subsequent contemporary social scientists and theorists to further investigate the positioning of

manifold groups within the social formations of class, gender, race, ethnicity and so forth.

Presenting the case for non-class forms of social division and identity, it is argued that exclusion as a concept is structural, multi-dimensional and dynamic. Contextually, exclusion incorporates non-class forms and other concepts such as people being on the periphery, employment stigmatisation and rupture to emplacement, and it gives a more accurate view of the processes involved where (employment opportunity) exclusion is both the cause and the outcome. Many people can identify with it as an exclusion of some kind that makes it seem like a universal experience (Estivill 2003 cited in Australian Institute for Social Research 2007:30).

Enabling the non-class status then, as a construct that focuses on how the personal is interwoven with the social, it is argued that non-class status provides a means of understanding group affiliation, intergroup relations, and social inequalities. With this broadening focus on networks of inequalities, we need to include economic, cultural, and ideological processes. By doing so, ethnicity can be treated as an ideological or cultural construct or a form of organisation involving common cultural and symbolic ingredients and action.

Anthias (1989) indicated that groups can have very different employment characteristics and the variations between minorities are great, if not greater, than those between minorities and non-minorities (Modood et al. 1997). Hence, the criteria for being in this study was being unemployed; ethnicity or cultural background was not a selection factor.

However, as it turned out, the participants are largely non-white in a nation where whiteness continues to dominate, according to theorists such as Ghassan Hage (2002). It must be acknowledged therefore, that some minority ethnic groups are systematically underrepresented in the higher social categories and despite this diversity they suffer particular disadvantages in an economic sense (Anthias 1990).

The economic and cultural dimensions are important because a solely economic framing of non-class runs the risk of missing important ways in which non-class relations are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed in everyday life.

In order to make sense of non-class framing, here follows a brief description of the economic and cultural dimensions of Bankstown (as a reference point), based on 2011 census data that reflects some aspects of relevant criteria and markers, and then goes on to discuss personal attribution and ethnic group identification.

### Social division in Bankstown, Western Sydney

**Note:** the following information is based on the 2011 government census in the City of Bankstown.

The proportion of residents who stated their ancestry as Lebanese was more than eight times the national average. The areas were linguistically diverse, with 10+ cultural languages in wide use. Arabic or Vietnamese was spoken in 30% of households (approximately seven times the national average for both languages).

The median age of residents was 35 years, which is slightly lower than the national median age of 37 years. Of people aged 15 years and over, 52% were married and 11% were either divorced or separated.

Population growth between the 2001 and 2006 census was 3.43%, and in the subsequent years leading up to the 2011 census, it was 6.96%. When compared with total population growth of Australia for the same periods (5.78% and 8.32% respectively), growth in Bankstown was approximately 75% of the national average.

The local government area of Bankstown ranks 6$^{th}$ overall in terms of size throughout NSW (BCCW 2012).

Congruently, the local economy in Bankstown City is fairly diverse. There are a large number of manufacturing businesses in and around Bankstown. There are also a large number of services and administrative jobs, particularly in the Bankstown city centre. Some established businesses include printing presses for Fairfax Media titles such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Sun-Herald*, and News Limited mastheads *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*. These presses are based at Chullora.

Bankstown Airport and the surrounding industrial areas in Revesby and Milperra are centres of economic activity. Airtex Aviation has its head office on the grounds of the airport (BCCW 2010).

Approximately 61,000 people work within Bankstown city, more than two–thirds of whom reside outside Bankstown. Moreover, just under a third of workers live in the

city itself (a population of 182,352 in the 2011 census). Unemployment is significant in the area: unemployment rate is at 7.6%, with 4.6% of the population looking for full-time work, 3.0% looking for part-time work; the labour force participation rate being 52.9% (BCCW 2010).

Conveying in statistical economic terms the median weekly income for residents within Bankstown was slightly lower than the national average, but the median weekly income for 2006, the personal weekly income was $372; in 2011 it was $428, % of Australian median income for 2006 was 79.8% and in 2011 it was 74.2%. The median weekly family income in 2006 was $926 and in 2011 it was $1,228, % of Australian median income was 90.2% in 2006 and in 2011 it was 82.9%; median weekly household income in 2006 was $1,069 and in 2011 it was $1,091, % of Australian median income in 2006 was 91.3% and in 2011 it was 88.4% (ABS 2012).

Economically speaking, personal and family income in Bankstown has been declining, as is apparent from the following census data (ABS 2012).

| Bankstown income, per week | 2006 census | 2011 census |
|---|---|---|
| Median personal income | $372 | $428 |
| Percentage of national average | 79.8% | 74.2% |
| Median family income | $926 | $1228 |
| Percentage of national average | 90.2% | 82.9% |
| Median household income | $1069 | $1091 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Percentage of national average | 91.3% | 88.4% |

The purpose of the demographic information above is to give a sense of the ethnicities, languages spoken, types of possible employment, population size and income that enables a more accurate view of the factors involved.

Membership of any individual to an ethnic group involves a range of criteria or markers, such as country of origin, language, religion, colour of skin and self-identification. Individuals are attributed competencies on some or all of these bases. Anthias (1998) points out that where ethnicity is concerned, personal attribution may already be formulated as group identification. Competencies are ascribed when other criteria are met. In this way participants and their ethnicities are included as markers of competencies variously described in the following case studies.

Halfpenny is a Chinese woman from Hong Kong who lives with her New Zealand-born partner in a rented apartment in Bankstown. She holds a PhD in education, speaks three languages, and is seeking employment in early childhood education.

> ***Halfpenny:*** *"Prior to coming to Australia I worked as a college tutor first in Canada before returning to Hong Kong where I attained a PhD in education and continued teaching. It's strange because I thought I would find a job in Australia no trouble but each time I apply and go for interviews, I'm told they will get back to me, but they never do."*

Cornelia is a Vietnamese woman who lives with her parents in their own home in Cabramatta and shares the household expenses. She holds a diploma in financial administration and a bachelor's degree in social and community welfare. Prior to becoming unemployed, she worked in finance and then in the community sector as a coordinator. She is seeking to return to either industries.

> ***Cornelia:*** *"I worked in the finance services industry for five years then decided to change direction when I entered the community services sector as a community coordinator. This was a two-year contract position [arranged] shortly after the organisation's funding was cut so there was no possibility of extending the contract. I found another job in the same sector, holding a similar position but resigned the following year after the tension and stress from experiencing gross bullying from other staff members. I don't seem to be able to secure any job now."*

Daisy is a Lebanese mother of two and lives in her own home in Merrylands. She has been a manager in a hardware store and worked for several years in her ex-husband's parents' confectionery business before starting up a business of her own as a beauty therapist. She holds a diploma in beauty and natural therapies and is seeking employment in any of these industries.

> ***Daisy:*** *"I have a diploma in beauty and natural therapy and used to run my own beauty therapy business for 10 years after I left my in-laws' confectionery business. I stopped my business, thinking it would be only for a while as my body needed time-out and because I needed to pay more attention to the kids as they were*

*growing up and needed more support. But once they gained more confidence I went back out to work. I managed a hardware shop. I really enjoyed that but once the financial crisis [happened], the hardware trade wasn't doing well and they put me on part-time, but I soon found I wasn't able to manage on reduced wages so they had to let me go. I have managed several cafes since then but they went broke and I found myself out of work. I can't find anyone that will take me on, maybe because of my age, as the places I've applied at seem to have a lot of younger staff."*

Effie is a Lebanese woman born in Australia. She has three children and owns her own home in Merrylands. After leaving high school she worked as a senior customer care officer in the car manufacturing industry for many years before being made redundant. She is seeking employment in the banking sector in customer care.

***Effie:*** *"I worked for years, since I left school, for a car manufacturing company where I did customer service. I was good at it and I liked it a lot. Everyone got along – it was like family. But the company was losing business during the financial crisis and a lot of staff had to go. I haven't been able to find a job since then. I have been trying to get into the banking service, doing customer service, but for some reason I don't seem to be a good fit for them. I've done a lot of in-house customer service training over many years and it wouldn't be that difficult to transfer those skills to banking services."*

Kung is a Chinese man who lives with his parents in their own home in Cabramatta, where he contributes to the household expenses. He worked for several years in construction and engineering before being made redundant. He holds an engineering degree and seeks employment in the export industries.

> ***Kung:*** *"To get back into either construction or the engineering sector has been difficult. They don't appear to have many full-time openings, not even part-time for that matter and I guess they don't need the experience that I can give. So I'm not having much luck with those types of businesses but those are the kinds of training I've had. I have only had three jobs since leaving university and I managed to stay in the first job for 10 years, the second about five years and the last one nearly three years before they had to let me go because business wasn't doing so well. I sometimes just drop in to some of the workshops and factories on the off-chance they may need someone but they don't seem to need anyone right now."*

Joycelyn lives with her partner and her two primary-school-age children in a rental house in Belmore. She was born in Australia to African and Dutch parents. She worked as a social worker until her contract ended, owing to government funding cuts. She ran her own fashion boutique for several years until the global financial crisis led her to close her business; she then started a family. She has degrees in fashion design and a bachelor's degree in social work, and is seeking part-time administrative work.

> ***Joycelyn:*** *"I wouldn't be able to go back to starting up a business again now. Well to begin with, the kids are too young to leave them at after-school-care and besides, it would cost too much money which we haven't got and we are not in a position to go after a loan right now. That's why I've been trying so hard to secure work, even if it meant looking after someone else's business, but again, I would only be able to do part-time work. The community work sector seems to have cut back because of government cuts so I've been trying to find part-time office work but finding that locally seems difficult at the moment. Having a degree in social work hasn't helped me so far. I would need to go into Sydney, see if they have part-time office work. I haven't tried that yet because … once I drop off the kids at school and find public transport to get into town, that's half the day gone. Transport and travel costs are against me right now because of my financial situation, as well as the time it takes to get into the city."*

It is clear that these participants have acquired skills and employment experiences that one would consider as marketable. Why then are they unable to find work? To answer this, we need to investigate other forces that might be at play.

Anthias (2010) reminds us that in the concrete labour markets, what is regarded as a marketable skill may be dependent on who possesses the skill. For example, Anthias infers that the market value for administrative or secretarial skills or teaching qualifications may go down if the people possessing them are already

seen as having an intrinsically lower social value or not regarded as a major family breadwinner. In this way, the feminisation or ethnicisation of occupations may be an influence.

This means the class category is allocated to people on the basis of individual outcomes or functions despite the fact class reproduction via socialisation and other social processes often lead to continuities of class within families and neighbourhoods.

Anthias (1998) indicated that movement in or out of class categories is seen as a product of individual capacities, even though the processes that produce such capacities are subject to social determinations. Although true that in modern class systems people achieve their positions on individual grounds, it is clear that this achievement is determined by a range of structural and cultural processes, influenced by factors including ethnicity, place, and social class.

In regard to the continued unemployment and 'social classification' of the participants in my study, I would argue that they (and many like them), have been systematically denied equal access to the labour market because of structural and cultural determinations imposed upon them, keeping them out of employment.

When competing in the labour market, the participants have found themselves on an unequal playing field even though they all hold qualifications and/or work experiences and education that would normally determine marketability.

What this situation seems to reveal is how various intersections of discriminatory practices and factors, including (but not limited to) unemployment, ethnicity, class

and place, are played out through everyday practices and relationships that enact and reproduce social hierarchies.

### Geographic location

Contemporary research draws attention to the way that successive waves of immigrants have transformed the rural landscape through the construction of public and private spaces, expressing their cultural heritage by altering their physical environment. These built sites can also significantly impact the dynamics of social cohesion and inter-cultural relations in multicultural rural communities (Jordan, Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins 2009; Turner 2008).

I argue that the spatial environment of western Sydney can be viewed as a form of cultural expression, an important facet of people's self-identity, just like in spaces where people live and work. This expression is manifested in the ways that various cultures have transformed their physical environment by erecting buildings such as mosques, Coptic churches, schools, social clubs and businesses of various kinds; also public artworks, gardens and other such community decorations. This physical expression can be viewed as a mode of communication through which people express something about themselves, their values, aspirations, needs and desires. It is reflected in the structures, social and cultural, that are found where people live and through the lived-experiences of cultural and political changes to the landscape.

The processes of globalisation (including migration and trade) are implicated here, as they caused major structural and material changes to employment in the region (Turner 2008; Jordan, Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins 2009).

Villawood Migrant Hostel, for example, was built to house migrants until they were able to relocate to affordable accommodation in the western Sydney area. This allowed many people to be employed in manufacturing jobs that absorbed the migration flow in significant numbers. The building remains, although it no longer serves the purpose for which it was originally intended. Now called the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, it houses refugees and undocumented individuals pending immigration processing.

I propose that in western Sydney, cultural expressions are made through channels such as language, religion, identity and ethnic backgrounds. Included in this, are the participants of this study, and their families, who are more likely to be entwined in a process of class reproduction via socialisation and other social processes.

These processes may involve further changes to the physical landscape as well as changes to the social landscape, for example through language, food and cultural practices in an attempt to build a comfortable and familiar space in which people (especially immigrants) feel they can belong (Jordan, Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins 2009; Turner 2008).

Leisure and ritual commitments often lead to continuities of class within families and neighbourhoods. For example, community members often gather in large numbers for cultural festivities and religious observances at which the transmission of these learned practices are passed on, experienced, reproduced, negotiated and transformed into everyday life.

Anthias (1998) remarked that sociological literature has tended to look at ethnic minorities as either characterised by distinctive cultural values and practices

brought from their place of origin, or as structured by their position of marginality (particularly racism) in their host country.

I agree, but would argue that both are simultaneously active. In other words, ethnic groups in this geographic location have been characterised by their distinctive cultural values as well as being structured marginally. This is made evident by their cultural and spiritual observances, like Ramadan on the one hand, and by the Islamophobia that has taken hold by mainstream and political instrumentalities on the other ("they're not on team Australia" as the political rhetoric went).

As a category, of a diverse group of people who share culture, identity and/or religious faith means they hold cultural capital by living and having attachment to a geographic location – western Sydney.

Generally, places are understood to be social constructs insofar as our ideas of place are products of the society in which we live (Massey 1995:50 cited in Easthope 2009:70). The creation of a 'place' is not entirely subjective. It is influenced by physical, economic, and social realities. I propose that places are doubly constructed in that most are built or in some way physically carved out, and are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined (Gieryn 2000 cited in Easthope 2009) as modes of expression.

In the same way, 'identity' is tied to place in the sense that one's spatial identity is related to the feeling of *belonging* to a place, and encompasses ideas concerning a special attachment to place and people. But it is always an interpreted element. As a construct, this highlights the significance of participants' conceptions of themselves as located in a particular space and time and as members of a social

community and cultural group. Furthermore, the meaning of place can become more to do with everyday living and doing rather than thinking (Beidler & Morrison 2015).

I further propose that this geographic location is complex and multi-layered in that ethnicity is attached to or ascribed images that are charged with powerful dominant discourses, institutional structures and practices that define and redefine rules of inclusion and exclusion of people whose lives can be shaped and are reshaped according to those rules.

This is what Anthias (1992) was referring to as involving an attribution of 'difference' from the 'other'. I therefore argue that these social practices are spatially patterned, and these patterns substantially affect the very social practices that exclude people like this study's participants from material security and wellbeing. In other words, they are affected by discriminatory practices that sanction them on the basis of economic mobility, ethnicity, and place.

As an ethnic group, their cultural capital is valued meaningless in a nation that exercises dominance over particular minorities as opposed to those who have access and rights to particular resource claims within the state. As Anthias (1998) reminds us, cultural resources have either negative or positive material value, with some forms of culture being more acceptable than others. For example, European languages have more 'currency' in Britain or the United States than Asian languages.

What's more, research has long demonstrated the inequalities found in different cultural resources that show negative material value. For example, Jordan,

Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins (2009) have identified places built by non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants that remained largely unrecognised as part of Australia's heritage. This lack of recognition was deemed to be a result of official definitions of heritage that prioritised 'elite' or 'Western' heritage at the expense of places significant to marginalised ethnic groups.

Therefore, not only does ethnicity represent a form of mobilisation around material and cultural aspects, dedicated to making claims for resources of different types which determine, individual and cultural capital, in their broadest sense, the life conditions on the one hand, and the life chances on the other.

In summary, geographic location represents the mode of expression communicated by non-class forms of relations that are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed in everyday life. Politically, economically and culturally, some ethnic minorities have been those who occupy social spaces of adversity, whose very rights as citizens are brought into question, and who live insecure lives characterised by none of the employment opportunities necessary for social mobility (Hodgetts & Griffin 2012).

After a thorough examination of ethnicity and class as a mode of classification, coupled with the inequalities and exclusion that constitute central elements of the stratification system, I therefore propose that we can view place-based identity, ethnicity and class divisions as bound up in various ways that shape and are reshaped by dominant structural discursive power rendering the specifics of place-meaning open to contestation by these voices of the unemployed in this locality of western Sydney.

## A SENSE OF PLACE

This chapter deals with the activities and issues that have challenged those participants who are living, for the most part, transnational lives: remaining in touch with their homeland through return visits and use of technologies and constructing contemporary selves in the midst of unemployment in the 21st century.

The participants in my research are drawn from the urban locality of western Sydney. They do not know each other and have been brought together only for the purposes of this study on unemployment and social exclusion.

This chapter focuses on the participants' sense of place and explores how it links and shapes their feelings of belonging and their meanings of 'home'. Thus, 'place' is a meta-concept that allows them to be heard.

There has been a significant amount of scholarship on the concept of the neo-liberal city in the past three decades. Much of this literature critically examines neo-liberal policies and their impact on urban space and social justice issues (see for instance, Brenner & Theodore 2002; Smart & Smart 2013; Peck & Tickell 2002; Fagan & Dowling 2012; Baum & Gleeson 2010; Harvey 1996; May 1996; Massey 1993).

A concurrent branch of the literature has focused largely on the right to the city – people's right to thrive in it (de Souza 2006; Harvey 2008; Purcell 2006).

While the majority of these works are part of an accepted canon of research on the neo-liberal city, there has been, nonetheless, a contribution that has examined the

applicability of place theory to neo-liberal globalisation in an urban context. At the same time, contributions have examined place-based reactions to the increasing hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism (Harvey 1996; May 1996; Massey 1993; Smart & Smart 2003).

However, during these past decades a small number of scholars have built upon this theoretical framework or conducted empirical research that examines 'sense of place' or place theory perspective (Long 2013:52) in relation to Australian migrants living under a neo-liberal capitalist system in the western suburbs of Sydney (Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015; Baum & Gleeson 2010; Turner 2008; Forster 2006; Fagan & Dowling 2005; Randolph 2004; Searle 2002).

### The ethnographic task

The concept 'sense of place' seeks to capture the predicaments, interactions and desires of those who find themselves experiencing life in such disadvantaged urban places.

Although anthropology has an emphasis on place and seeks to account for its remarkably social features, not only when determining location as fieldwork – i.e. ethnography, but primarily as a discipline that explores the complex and myriad ways people experience, conceptualise and confer meaning to their surroundings.

For anthropologists then, the concept 'sense of place' seeks to capture these ideas, though Basso (1996:53 cited in Bassett 2004:1) has argued that ethnography has reported little about the complex ways in which people are "alive to the world around them".

While encounters are always relational, in this section I focus on how they are narrated from the perspective of each participant as residents.

**“People do not simply occupy places; they experience them, infusing them with life and social meaning.” (Barrett 2004)**

It is undoubtedly clear that Western Sydney is one of the most diverse places in New South Wales. It is characterised by a multiplicity of ethnic minorities, different migration histories, religions, educational and economic backgrounds both among long-term residents and newcomers. This is visible in the built environment along with the structures and/or boundaries established by the various communities.

For example, there are Greek schools and orthodox churches, restaurants and cafes located in Belmore as well as Bankstown, along with a large number of Lebanese structures like mosques and schools, restaurants, cafes and corner-shops that open early and close late in Belmore, Bankstown and in other neighbouring suburbs.

Countless Vietnamese restaurants and grocery stores can be found in Cabramatta, Canley Vale and Bankstown. There are Chinese medical centres, restaurants, retail shops, hired church spaces, real estate and banking services in Bankstown, Canley Vale and Cabramatta.

In Belmore, Bankstown, Parramatta and neighbouring suburbs, one can also find African businesses, run predominantly by women, offering African hairdressing and hair products, artworks, clothing and accessories.

From such diverse, fragmentary places arises a colourful patchwork of cultural diversity.

At an empirical level, the research material in this study has been used to render the lives and experiences of six individuals visible – in all their richness, complexity and humanity. I have sought to give voice (to employ a rather dated phrase), to those whose lives are most usually silenced, erased or ventriloquized (Alexander et al. 2012). In this outdated expression, 'voice' is deliberate because it seemed to be, in a small way, a form of consciousness-raising, similar to that demonstrated by the activism of the 1970s and the women's movement of the 1980s.

This was a time when it became important to show how the personal was political, and vice versa.

What these diverse individuals share is a commonality of experience of the broader socio-political and historical contexts from which unemployment and social exclusion derives. These presuppositions are cognisant of the ways in which issues of power and inequality remain integral to their significance and consequence to a world beyond their sense of place.

By unravelling the concept 'sense of place' from the experiential perceptions of these participants, I draw on critical academic and research literatures of 'place' to help connect and fathom how sense of place remains personal, found and grounded in lived experiences. Thus, sense of place and place-identity may respectively be thought of as views from 'those on the periphery' rather than those who wield power from above.

What is significant, I believe, is how a place is experienced, often referred to as ‘sense of place’, which may be broadly defined as the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals or groups associate with a particular locality. Fisman (2007:1) added, “The concept of ‘place’ is more than the biophysical and built settings in a defined space; it also includes the human meanings and values associated with these locations.”

I argue that the concept of ‘sense of place’ represents not only the complex and dynamic orientation of place but also how it is process-oriented.

Notwithstanding, disadvantage and deprivation are structural phenomena, thus the structuring of space and place is critical. It is important because disadvantage is embedded in the distribution of and access to social networks and a range of essential services necessary for inclusion and participation in society. Moreover, international research (Marcuse 1989, 1007; Dear 2000; Marcuse & van Kempen 2000a, b; Soja 2000; Walks 2001; Mikelbank 2004 from North America; and Rhein 1998; Musterd & Ostendorf 1998; Wessel 2001; Hamnett 2003 from Europe and the United Kingdom), has identified changes in space and race as new processes of exclusion that are part of a broad pattern making up the post-Fordist city (Baum & Gleeson 2010).

These researchers discuss the social ecology of post-Fordist global cities which are characterised by increasing social complexity and differentiation among, between and within neighbourhoods. They demonstrate this by highlighting the most deprived and least deprived suburbs found in Australia’s global cities.

Similar work has been undertaken (by Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015; Baum, Mullins, Stimson & O'Connor 2002; Randolph 2004; Baum & Hassan 1993; Beer & Forster 2002) showing that job losses tended to be highest in residential areas of manufacturing employment in lower income, inner and middle suburbs (see Baum & Gleeson 2010; Fagan & Dowling 2005).

The research has shown that these suburbs have exacerbated established patterns of residential differentiation and contrasts in employment and income between high and low-income suburbs. Baum et al. (1999, 2002, and 2006) and Stimson et al. (2001) have supported the conclusion that across Australian metropolitan regions, some spaces are increasingly being identified as places of "status and opportunity", while others are increasingly known as places of "vulnerability and deprivation" (see Vinson & Rawsthorne 2015 and Baum & Gleeson 2010).

While I agree that there are some areas of western Sydney in which pockets of disadvantage and decline are visible, the places I observed did not show signs of being significantly deprived. However, the more severe areas of deprivation may well be located in the middle to outer regions of western Sydney.

As a matter of fact, what I saw was a vibrant diverse group of ethnic minorities going about their everyday lives, often in the capacity of consumerism and consumption. In other words, I observed people rushing off to work (catching public transport, buying goods and services in shopping centres and the main street shopping strips), attending libraries, healthcare appointments, and crammed in cafes and food courts. That is not to say they are not deprived. There are

degrees of deprivation and this is what I observed from the participants and the localities around their homes and the places they visited. Their economic status (or lack of it), is the aspect found most critically wanting – evidently so, because of their experience of long-term unemployment and most definitely as a consequence from their experiences of structural discrimination.

I propose that while these 'places' (the western suburbs of Sydney) are the places of lived experiences of the participants, some suburbs have become the focus of media attention "for all of the wrong reasons" (Baum & Gleeson 2010), such as Islamophobia (Dunn 2010; Turner 2008), creating restrictive distancing by sending divisive messaging to the general public. These suburbs are also associated with stereotypes such as 'westies' and 'bogans'; recently referred to as the 'underclass' (Wacquant 2008; Warr 2004).

In recent times, there has been political and social tension in some neighbourhoods, mostly levelled at the large Lebanese and Muslim communities in western Sydney. This tension is related to the geopolitical crises in the Middle East, and exacerbated by media and political rhetoric such as Tony Abbott's infamous "Team Australia" speech. These tensions, along with limited job stocks and sparse social resources, are some of the difficulties that residents of these communities currently face (Turner 2008).

### Ethnographic portraits

It is now time to bring in the voices of the participants to narrate the complex challenges and triumphs they have experienced in creating a sense of belonging within their neighbourhoods. These are their stories.

**People can be connected and still be deprived.**

'Place' can show gender (Rose 1993) by way of the built environment, ethnic and class categories (Cosgrove 1984), and by social division and classification. It can also represent the cross-germination of categories and the activities to which they can refer (Creswell 2008). The expression 'sense of place' can be used in a variety of ways but its meaning here is given in terms of three dimensions:

- location
- social context
- everyday or community engagements with place

The first dimension incorporated into the concept of 'sense of place' is location – the site in space in which an activity or object is located and which relates to other sites or location because of interaction, movement and diffusion between them.

### *Profile: Cornelia*

Cornelia, sharing one of her earliest memories of 'place' recalls a pleasant memory.

> *"After we [the family] left the hostel [Villawood] we lived in a one-bedroom half-house in Cabramatta; it was a tight squeeze sharing a bed with my siblings. We were very poor but we had an easy-going lifestyle."*

As an adult, she still finds positive things to say about her location.

> *"[This is] my strong appreciation of the area and living in a peaceful country. Look around you because this is how Cabramatta is. There are Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Africans, Southeast Asians and many other cultures here and most of the time they live together peacefully without resorting to name calling or making you feel you don't belong."*

The second eldest in a family of five children, Cornelia arrived in Australia with her parents from Rach Gia, South Vietnam when she was eight years old. The family had to flee Vietnam as refugees, displaced with many other people, young children and babies made orphans as a result of war.

Cornelia has a graduate degree in social and community welfare and held the position of coordinator in her last employment. She lives with her elderly parents (whom she cares for while actively looking for work), and maintains herself from her savings. Her family have established links within the Vietnamese community both in Australia as well as in Vietnam, North America and Britain.

'Place' here concerns its process-orientation because of Cornelia's established interactions with place and people – movement and diffusion with others from Cabramatta. This can also include her homeland, representing a settlement often thought of as part of a system of places with mobility inherent in relations between them (hence the word 'translocal').

These links are also transnational, through her parents' relationships with other Vietnamese people in locales spanning other English-speaking countries and their

homeland of Vietnam. Cornelia and her family recently travelled back to Vietnam to attend her cousin's wedding. Not only was this about reunion, it was about gift-giving as Cornelia and her family were responsible for purchasing the bride's wedding dress.

The second dimension of 'sense of place' relates to the idea that place is not merely limited to a physical location; it can also be found in a social context, creating an intimate experience of place (Tuan 1977).

From this perspective, physical and social interpretations of 'home' create an apex for all other place-related understandings. This frames the dimension of place as a series of 'locales' or 'settings' where everyday life activities take place.

### *Profile: Halfpenny*

As we sat in the central business district of Bankstown after she had purchased her groceries from the mall, Halfpenny told me about her job search activities and the effect on her intimate relationship. She felt embarrassed about not being able to find work, and her finances were problematic. She was growing concerned about losing her sense of independence as she became more dependent on the relationship with her partner. This resulted in her not being able to communicate openly and honestly with him about the difficulty being caused by the increased duration of unemployment.

> *"A lack of honesty [on my part] made things difficult in the relationship. I don't know why this has been so difficult. I find it upsetting and scary to talk about as I don't know how he feels or what he will say when I ask him to pay my share of the rent."*

Halfpenny came to Australia with her partner who is a New Zealand-born national living and working in Australia. They met several years ago while he was working on contract in Hong Kong. When that contract ended 12 months ago, they decided to return and settle in Bankstown.

Halfpenny is the eldest of two. Her parents were school teachers, living in Hong Kong in close proximity to her young brother who works in IT as a sole trader. She holds a PhD in education and was a college tutor in her last job. She speaks conversational Vietnamese and is fluent in Cantonese and English. She is actively involved in facilitating English Conversation Classes for Vietnamese preschool parents' groups as a volunteer in the local area. At the time of this research she had been unemployed for 12 months, and was financing herself from her savings.

Another example of locales that are not necessarily tied to a particular location but can be places other than the home, for instance, like setting the appointment for the purpose of this research to meet with Kung can be referred to as mobile-relations between two places. Or even, the influence of sociocultural experiences in the development of a sense of place.

### *Profile: Kung*

Kung lives in Cabramatta but frequents Canley Vale (30 kilometres southwest of Sydney CBD) which is annexed to Cabramatta. We first met in Canley Vale Diggers Club because, as he said, "It's more appropriate to meet here as it's difficult to find a place to park in Cabramatta and there's ample parking here at the Diggers Club".

Once seated, Kung immediately asked me, “what if you were being told by someone they were a dole bludger and didn’t want to work, would you still want to know why?”

He looked at me quizzically after I told him I would still be interested to hear their point of view.

When he was eight years of age, Kung immigrated to Australia with his older brother and parents from Hainan in the South China Sea, the smallest and southernmost province of the People’s Republic of China. After arriving, he and his family lived in a small rural town in Canberra, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), where his parents worked on a farm picking fruit. They couldn’t speak English until he began school. Kung said this concerned him and he was embarrassed about it:

> *“Right from the start I made up my mind I would learn to speak English, so I copied everything the children said and did. I made myself join in everything and I was determined to learn and fit in with everyone. I gained friends quickly and learned from them and soon I was able to make progress with learning the subjects. I even made myself take part in all the sports and I was good at it too.”*

Kung seemed happy with his progress at school, doing well academically until the family moved up to Sydney, settling in Cabramatta, 30 kilometres southwest of the Sydney CBD. He began Year 12 at the nearby high school in Fairfield, but felt he

was out of his league there. He says he felt he was no longer the popular boy who was made to feel special at his previous school.

Kung recalls a number of changes that startled him:

> *"I was shocked to see so many Asian kids and they were all so competitive with everything. I was always the only Asian at my last school and was highly thought of … and now I was just ordinary, just another Asian; and they were all so much more talented than me. I didn't like it at all. I stopped trying hard."*

This dimension of performative perspective is place as an associational concept: the weaving together of all manner of spaces and times that can never be completed because it always depends on further works of association.

'Here' is where Kung felt threatened by the number of students who were high achievers which meant competition for him. Until that point, he had been the only Asian student at his school in Canberra, but in Fairfield (Sydney), being among a large number of Southeast Asians was not something he was used to.

> *"Things changed for my family once we moved here. First my dad got himself a job writing columns in the Chinese newspapers, and tutoring students in Mandarin – you know literature and stuff. Then, my mum got a great job making spectacle lenses; and my brother started socialising more and attracted girlfriends. I just wanted to finish school and go out to work."*

Kung now lives with his parents, spending time assisting his father who has a heart condition, driving him to hospital appointments and doing domestic chores, while actively searching for work. He finances himself from savings and is a regular and active member of the local Toastmasters Association in Cabramatta.

Reflecting on the spaces where I met each participant, I queried whether it was a 'masculine' preoccupation to be invited by Kung to meet up in the Diggers Club. I wondered whether he frequented the club regularly but when I asked him, he said no, just occasionally.

Here the location is not just the mere address but the *where* of social life and environmental transformation. Examples include a range of everyday social settings from homes to shopping malls, clubs or churches. The structuring of social interaction helps forge values, attitudes and behaviours, in cases like Halfpenny, Cornelia, Kung and Effie.

### *Profile: Effie*

Effie relayed all her current interests to me as we sat beside her computer desk in her home. She walks three mornings a week with her best friend, her mother and a cousin who started two years ago after being motivated by her mother's recovery from cancer and how healthy she looked after years of early morning walks.

After the walk, Effie tells me they often treat themselves to a girly gossip session" at the local Lebanese coffee shop.

"I also volunteer at my local church with sorting donated clothing and toys, or bake biscuits or cakes whenever the church has a function."

A divorced mother of three, Effie owns her home in Merrylands in southwest Sydney. Her youngest child is at high school. She is an only child whose parents immigrated to Australia from Bane, North of Lebanon.

Effie is a Centrelink benefit recipient who has been vigorously seeking employment for 15 months. She has considerable in-house training experience in customer care, gained from her last (and long-term) employment in the automotive industry.

### *Profile: Daisy*

The third dimension is 'place' as sense of place or identification with a place as a unique community landscape and moral order. In this construction, every place is particular and thus singular. A strong sense of belonging to a place, either consciously or as shown through everyday behaviour such as participating in place-related affairs would be indicative of 'sense of place'. This is an example of the everyday in Daisy's story:

> *"I'm from a Maronite Catholic family from Bsharri, Lebanon, a mountainous region of North Lebanon, and the eldest of nine siblings. Families are very close-knit in the village and very poor. Families live close by their kinship and help each other out with material and domestic things and on the land, especially my grandparents who were always out there from before sunrise till sundown ploughing and planting so the families can always have foodstuffs. This was our survival, you know, thanks to those old people; and then they would sell what was left at the marketplace.*

*Most of the men, including my father, were in and out of work when I was growing up, because of the impact of the 24-year-long war between Lebanon and Syria. This was also why the village had such rubble because of the bombings left the village in ruins and a constant play-haven for the local children who were always dirty because they played among the rubble in the dirt."*

Daisy was full of praise about living in Australia and contends that living here has been her "ticket to freedom", as she recalls a number of stressful experiences:

*"I first lived with my ex-husband's family when I arrived in Australia and worked long hours; did the household chores and helped with most of the cooking. I didn't get paid but I was willing to do my bit to show my gratitude because of the arranged marriage. I lived there for the first few years until my children were born. That's when I felt I needed to live with my husband and children away from his parents, especially as we were living in cramped conditions and I needed to care for my children instead of working in the family business. My in-laws were difficult to live with and my mother-in-law was very negative and complained a lot so I needed to get away from that."*

Daisy is now divorced with two children. She owns her home and is an established citizen with meaningful relationships within her community of Merrylands, which is 25 kilometres west of Sydney. She supports her son's school with many activities, spending a day each week volunteering to help with a range of tasks, from repairing book covers to doing administrative work.

She has been unemployed for 14 months and is a Centrelink benefit recipient. Her last employment was in hospitality. She holds a diploma in beauty and natural therapies.

### *Profile: Joycelyn*

Retsikas (2007:971-2 cited in Agnew 2004:25) reminds us that "place is a tool of sociality" by which he means that because people move and stop, settle, and move again, places too are ever-shifting and changing, always becoming through people's engagements, material as well as discursive, in and with them.

In Joycelyn's case, 'places' gather things in thoughts and memories as she recalls the events and situations that shaped her life. She is of mixed ethnic heritage, her mother of West African background and her father Dutch, from the Netherlands.

> *"My mother in her early years, say, around 15, was a model and got to travel extensively internationally because of it. She was very good at it but then met my father, who was an architect-turned-builder, constructing commercial and residential buildings in various places overseas. Once my mum found she was pregnant with my elder sister, they decided to settle down, attaining residency in Australia. I finished high school when their goals sought separate directions. During my high school years my mother graduated in social work, spending years working with Children-in-Care and Wards–of-the-Court."*

Joycelyn now lives in Belmore (15 kilometres southwest of Sydney) with her partner and two children at primary school. She has degrees in social work and

fashion design and has been a sole trader in fashion garments as her last employment. Due to the effects of the global financial crisis, Joycelyn has been unemployed for 12 months. Because her partner has a low-income, she is in receipt of family benefits.

Looking at all the participants, I propose that each have shown particular links with sense of place.

For example, **Halfpenny** through her volunteering in the local school has an attachment to 'place'. Home-caring was very much routine, like shopping and preparing meals.

**Cornelia** expressed both place attachment and place identity. She remarked on the peacefulness and safety in her residential environment, and identified with her cultural surroundings. She, like her parents is a long-term resident and is relaxed with other ethnic groups living alongside her.

**Daisy** has both a place attachment and place identity. Her volunteering at her son's school contributes to and reinforces a sense of place attachment. Her sense of place identities with her family back in her homeland and the memories she holds within, and being a homeowner.

**Effie** certainly has both a bond and place identity. She, like her parents has lived in the same neighbourhood since she was born. She lives nearby her parents, which reinforces the bond with 'place'. Her volunteering in the community strengthens the attachment.

**Kung's** attachment to place is not only caused by living there long-term but also because of his bond with his parents. His commitment to the Toastmasters Association solidifies his social relations in the neighbourhood.

**Joycelyn's** attachment to place is reinforced by her long-term residency in the region. Having strong family bonds and social relations cement this association.

'Places' are best thought of relationally, with directional power relations (in all directions), especially since there are differing interpretations of place, such as feelings of belonging or revulsion, result from various modes and degrees of attachment.

I argue that 'place' is not just where social relations simply take place, but an inherent element for forging real expressions of actualisation (as shown by the diverse range of participants experiences, work skills and creativity). Today, (during this time) they each have the opportunity to make their new-found life in Australia beautiful and real that involves fulfilling their potential and becoming all that they can be. For instance, participants are all connected to families in communities near and in far off places. Some of them have lived lives that have been touched by the ravages of war, hunger and limited resources. For many of them, this forms a memory, a reminder, of a reality, of a lived experience, in a place. Thus, contexts of place and time are best considered as always located somewhere with some contexts more stretched over space and others more localised.

## Summary

‘Sense of place’ refers to spaces with the capacity to accommodate enormous diversity of groups that actually enable a kind of peaceful coexistence for long stretches of time, even amid structural discrimination – of place, people and economic status. This was the very point Cornelia was trying to articulate about living in Cabramatta, with the ease of cultural diversity situated around her.

Hence, coexistence does not [only] mean equality and mutual respect but, can produce such a capacity for interdependence even if there are major differences in religion, politics, class, ethnicity, age and/or gender (Sassen 2013).

What has been apparent ethnographically is that these neighbourhoods can exude very different auras, sounds, and smells: a kind of choreography of how people move through them. Similar with these unemployed people, who are at risk of invisibility due to societal prejudices and fears around unemployment and how being unemployed become ‘present’ to themselves, to others like them, and to others unlike themselves.

In this chapter, I sought to capture the possibility of making their presence visible, where otherwise there would have been silence and absence. Being aware of this elusive in-between space is essential to the experience of urban living that lends to discernible transitions. It reveals the uneasiness of specific spatial configurations, often charged with memories and with ‘presences’ of the past that in some cases unsettle their current meaning (like Daisy and Cornelia carrying internalised memories of war).

### ‘Home’

I propose that for many of the participants, ‘home’ represents the memory of those left behind in the ‘homeland’. For others it may be when communication is received via digital technology that ‘home’ becomes an affective experience.

A few of the participants engage with their homeland regularly, by gift-giving to ensure those ‘back home’ are surviving and to reassure them they are not forgotten. New bonds have been forged, even with people they have never met in person, through the use of modern technology. These are more the actions of the participants’ children, the younger generation, forming cyber communities.

For participants Daisy, Effie, Halfpenny, Cornelia and Kung, their lives are connected transnationally because of their strong attachments to older parents who remain bonded with those in the homelands and elsewhere around the world. This bond takes the form of gift-giving as well as remaining socially and politically conscious of what is happening in places where they have ongoing relations with families and friends.

Thoughts of ‘home’ are individual and particular. At the same time they are common to many people, not only ethnic minorities and recent migrants but also long-settled ethnic majority populations. However, as the participants have all made clear, western Sydney remains their ‘home’.

## WORK AS NON-WORK

In this chapter, **work as non-work** is discussed as activities that participants willingly engage in as ‘routine’ activities in their week.

Work as non-work challenges the idea that paid employment is the only recognised and accepted form of work and thus, has worth, as one will find with social welfare policy's mutual condition and neo-liberal principles. Perelman (2007:10-11) argued for the need to broaden conceptualisations of what is considered work, which is often guided by a Western modernisation ethic that imbues it with a 'unified, abstract and market-centred meaning' marginalising the multiple forms of work that provide subjects with a sense of identity and worth.

In most Western societies 'work' is usually identified with *paid* employment as a normative activity, so in order to be normal, one must work. People who fall outside this norm, or do not or cannot work, are viewed as outside the mainstream. The distinction has enormous practical consequences. For example, attitudes to work are socially and culturally learned from socialisation. Work has been viewed and become important criteria for judging one's worth, including one's economic worth where the widely accepted attitudes toward work and working are currently prevalent (Macarov 1980).

The vast majority of unemployed persons still perceive themselves as workers: as the symbolic and economic components in the meaning of work, often seen to be intertwined. A person's conception of work constitutes the framework within which meaning can be constructed. For example, as research participants indicated:

> ***Effie:*** *"I would rather be out there earning good money so I can live the kind of life I want for me and my children … I'd like to work in a bank in customer service … I like dealing with people because I'm a people-person. Besides, work helps me keep in*

> *touch with other things going on in the world, and it helps with meeting and making friends with other people … so I'm eager and motivated to find work and earn good money and hopefully my life will be better."*

Even after 12 months, participants are still motivated to find work.

> ***Daisy:*** *"When I became unemployed … I felt a sense of loss and hopelessness and adrift … When I was working I felt strong, ambitious and a sense of worth, especially when I can help others … it kind of restores faith, you know? Besides, I'm still a taxpayer even though I'm on low-income I insist on Centrelink taking $20 per fortnight for tax … it makes me feel as though I'm still contributing."*

Being unemployed does not necessarily mean a loss of responsibility or diminished work ethic.

> ***Cornelia:*** *"I want to start living my life independently as I had done a couple of times in the past but with much better financial resources back then. The limited resources right now are constraining me from going ahead with my dream and desire to have my own place of solace and rest, but it will have to wait a little longer when the dream job comes along again."*

Being unemployed, individuals often show resilience and agency even in the face of continued difficulty and hardship.

***Halfpenny:*** *"While I'm unemployed I volunteer two-to-three hours a week as a facilitator of English conversation classes to a group of Vietnamese mothers whose preschool children attend playgroup … at the local primary school. It's fun and worthwhile … I get to spend time and play with the little children after the group while the mothers are building friendships with each other over coffee/tea."*

***Kung:*** *"I spend my time helping my parents with household chores like shopping and cleaning and driving my father to his hospital appointments for his heart condition or eye, and blood-sugar check-ups for my mother. I'm glad I'm able to help them during this time otherwise they would find it difficult coping with it all. During the evening once a week I attend the local Toastmaster's group: this group is all about building self-esteem through public speaking, and building friendships. I find it very interesting and I learn a lot of interesting topics from many different people."*

***Daisy:*** *"Usually I do two hours a week at my son's school as a volunteer covering books or doing admin work in the office. It's the least I can do to help the school … they always need support with those little things that teachers rarely have time to do. I also help out at Parents and Teachers evenings with activities when they need me."*

Participants are engaged in activities that are meaningful and caring and in all these cases, their time, travel, skills, regularity and preparation would be equal to a wage. However, these are the invisible hours of unpaid work that are all too often taken for granted, considered non-work, or marginalised as a 'family responsibility'. Moreover, these are the kinds of routine work participants find themselves informally engaged in and which shows they too can be hard working'.

As local residents of the western Sydney region where employment prospects are bleak, they find motivation and willingness volunteering their skills and time. Irrespective of their reality, they show resilience and agency even though the labour market remains impotent and marked by economic uncertainty, leaving them without expectation as to when they will be able to achieve their dream of finding paid work again.

At this local level impoverishment has resulted because of diminishing economic opportunity. Focus need to be given to the specific ways this has played out.

The economic shifts over the past decade have resulted in unique employment conditions for these participants; but never before in their lives have they experienced such high rates of unemployment. They are educated workers situated in places of multiple disadvantages, and yet have still found ways to contribute and get involved. They remain humble.

Being responsibly active in their community is one positive way they are dealing with unemployment and achieving self-esteem. Unemployment carries unique hardships in part because employment status is used as a signal of social quality (that is, worth, value and self-worth). Unemployment is a stripping-away of their

economic identity, which can leave a searching sense of failure if resilience is not their foundational life; or else they will be filled with social isolation and doubts about their future place in the world.

In addition, their volunteer activities reinforce the point that they *are* willing to work. The only conclusion one is left with is their exclusion from the paid workforce is strategic and political. In other words, their government has failed them, the economy has failed to make use of their skills and talents, and their urban environment is ravaged by disinvestment and political ill-will.

Summing up and analysing these intersections is to restate the contextualised nature of exclusionary factors found in employment, geographic location, that was determined by association of belonging to ethnic minorities.

Participants who have been socially excluded by families and friends because they are unemployed (i.e. non-participant of key activity in society), offer us critical illustrations of the inherent structural dimensions of power and control when they describe their views, beliefs, and unemployment experiences.

Metaphorically, these issues represent, for the most part, the very entrails of Goffman's (1963) seminal work, referring to stigma as bodily signs that were cut or burnt into the body to expose something unusual and bad. How right he was. This metaphorical image of stigma, discrimination, control, disapproval and so on is felt by participants on an inner level, as kind of a spatial temporal plane. The moral effect is that the status of that individual has been wounded, cut, or burnt. Is it any wonder they needed to express it?

Many researchers have demonstrated stigmatisation in the social sciences but it is from these participants' responses that I begin to understand at a deeper level the impact of these stigmatising experiences. Whether it is structural and/or social prejudice and discrimination, or being judged on the basis of difference, the woundedness is the same.

Society has failed to absorb their skills, knowledge and time because of the unpredictability of the economy and the uneven distribution of employment opportunity of a labour market that allows discriminatory practices to be doled-out on its place-based ethnic minorities in western Sydney.

Work as non-work is considered as an invaluable activity by the participants who repeatedly speak of being thankful they have some opportunity to give back to their community in whatever small way they can.

In my view, these intersections are snapshots of resistance and agency. The participants (and many other unemployed people like them) show resistance by choosing to contribute to their community in their own way (rather than spending all their time trying to provide proof of 40 job applications each month to Centrelink, for those receiving benefit payments).

They show agency by not giving up on re-entering the workforce, waiting in hope for a brighter future with humility and strength.

# Chapter Five: Discussions

This thesis forms the qualitative ethnographic study of long-term unemployment and social exclusion. It outlines the life histories of six research participants: a small sample size that represents a snapshot of their everyday lives and experiences of being unemployed.

The study is rooted in the discipline of sociocultural anthropology that deals with human ways of life, and is situated in urban anthropology that concerns urbanisation, ethnicity, sense of place, the global city and neo-liberalism, while being more broadly interdisciplinary in scope.

The sociocultural context of this research is indicative of the cultural systems that mediate and influence people's everyday relationships and social organisation, including political economics, work and unemployment, ethnicity and class, home and family and so on.

The study used an ethnographic approach – the method of participant observation (Malinowskian method). Participant observation has two purposes: 1) to participate in the lives of the participants, and 2) to observe, distancing oneself sufficiently to make objective reasoning about the participants' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, values and everyday interrelationships in the environment.

This methodological approach is well suited to observation and participation. It creates opportunity for explanations and generalisations to emerge, and allows critical meanings and categories to form the cultural frame of analysis concerned with structural patterns of relations between people and places.

The second phase of this methodological approach is an ethnographic interview of each participant, using specific open-ended questions to enable targeted data collection.

Chapter One introduces the origins of the study and my interest in the subject. The thesis begins when allegations of fraud by an employment service were brought to public attention by investigative journalism (with the government having to recoup millions of dollars as a result). Immediately, this allegation sets up the intricacies of unemployment that reveal its problematic elements. Indeed, how the unemployed historically endures the contradictory policy-dependent nature of welfare.

The descriptive illustration on the allegation about Job Services Australia sets the stage on which to expose the inherent elements of contradictions, discriminatory and exclusionary practices in an uneven employment and welfare field from which unemployed working class people have to contend within the current employment landscape. An environment continually used as a smoke-screen to conceal who really benefits from social and economic provisions.

Chapter Two is an extensive literature review examining the nature of work and unemployment and its relationship with social welfare policy. This chapter illustrates and argues about the inherent contradictory nature of welfare policy, being one that historically sets out to protect the welfare of certain sections of the workforce.

The social welfare policy has shown divisiveness and path-dependent nature it maintains from the historical origins of the “poor laws”. Australia’s welfare policy’s first exclusionary sanction on non-white workers, by adhering the needs and

protections of white workers during white settlement to the detriment of contemporary low income low-skilled migrant workers and the poor and working class. Divisive because social welfare does not show how middle classes actually gain through the various ways of taxation and tax incentives they are given. Benefit payments made to the working class are always highlighted and made scapegoat for high social expenditure. Thus, social welfare protects the interests of businesses and the middle class and punishes the unemployed, working class as well as low-skilled low income ethnic groups.

Divisive and discriminatory structural processes continue to play a significant role in policy as well as the practices of employers in their companies. The literature illustrates how precarious work and work practices has become in the climate of economic insecurity (in times such as these), allowing for discriminatory practices, used to the advantage of businesses and employers, where types of production are tailored to allow recruiting on the basis of cultural preference (for example white workers over ethnic minorities), disregarding policy practices of equality of opportunity.

The threads of discriminatory practices are woven throughout the thesis to further outline and describe the processes through which practices of power prevail over participants standing without the benefit of representation of unions, whose power is also being curtailed by neo-liberal policies and practices.

Support is found for the proposition that the impact of economic restructuring varies by geographic region (northern, eastern suburbs and the CBD in contrast to western Sydney), as was shown, how different areas deflect broader forces in

varying ways to produce an uneven economic landscape in relation to employment opportunities and deficient job-stock .

Chapter Three discusses and describes intersections of stigma, ethnicity and class, as illustrations where the likelihood of discrimination and exclusion are found to be the experience of unemployed ethnic individuals residing in place-based disadvantaged locations. This is evidenced by the social-structural power relations implicated in mediating such stigmatised discriminatory relations with ethnic groupings who in turn are responsible for the transformation of public/local spaces created in their efforts to carve out a place to call home.

Notwithstanding, place-based disadvantages are described to reveal effects of disinvestment and economic hardship particularly in concentrated areas inhabited by blue-collar, low-income, low-skilled, unemployed workers and ethnic communities coupled with barriers of disability, education and language skills.

The workforce of western Sydney was heavily dependent on manufacturing industries. Highlighting the effects of recent economic changes for a population that historically had intimate links with manufacturing, and as a region has undergone such change, it could be expected, as a result, would be very much at risk.

However, a comprehensive understanding of these changes must ultimately rest on a complex mix of cultural, economic and political factors. Included in this mix, consideration must be given to immigration programs and their changing role in Western Sydney. Villawood Migrant Hostel is an exceptional example. Originally built to house new migrants brought in to support Australia's manufacturing

industries, it was converted into the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in 1976 and used to detain humanitarian refugees and their families, and those with illegal status.

In the section on ethnicity, I evoked Anthias' (2001) theory of **non-class** to deal with social positioning from a cultural perspective, using substantiated and grounded identity and location as criteria and markers. This enabled me to reflect 'meaning and cultural values' about participants' ethnicity (category) and their social location, and how these elements are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed in everyday life (for example, in language, food and spiritual observances).

**Sense of place** evolved by way of participants' connectedness with western Sydney, drawing on examples to elucidate the way in which participants were bonded to their locations by daily activities and social context. The examples also showed how they are active in their communities, linked to the concept of **work as non-work** in which they have found ways and means of belonging and coping better. Work as non-work shows their willingness to participate in their communities while also highlighting their resilience and agency at a time of disadvantage, impoverishment and insecurity.

While they have established strong community links, the participants' social identity is very much tied in with their translocal living (that is, their connectedness with faraway places, people and homelands) as well as identifying with local people of their culture. Connections with '**home**' were evidenced by their sense of

place attachment and bond with ‘place’ as homeland location – local and global, hence, the term ‘translocal’.

In summary, this research examined unemployment and social exclusion experiences that pertained to my research questions: “**Where are the voices of the unemployed? Inside stories that policymakers need to know?**”

In conclusion, I argue that this study shows high unemployment to be a flow-on effect from economic restructuring, evident by the current local work and unemployment patterns in relation to the global economic trend of restructuring and high rates of unemployment.

The participants have experienced social exclusion by the practices of structural discrimination that limited their access to labour market opportunities, exacerbating economic hardship, even though they are well-educated and experienced workers. This is, in itself, a unique situation, and one that is enveloped by a unique set of conditions: high unemployment alongside discriminatory practices where employers take advantage of the current economic situation in the attempt at employing white workers (historical welfare policy feature) by discriminating in terms of class, ethnicity and place-location through exercising power and control methods.

This situation is historically situated, firstly because of the past enforced White Australia Policy and exclusionary work-related condition embedded in social welfare policy set in motion by white male working-class wage-earners decades earlier during the time of Australia’s early settlement.

Participants' 'place-identity' and the socioeconomic structures constituted in society have been validated by evidence of discriminatory and exclusionary practices of welfare policy and failure of the labour market to absorb laid-off workers because of government unpreparedness.

This included the intersections as evidence of experience and giving visibility to the unemployed participants by inviting them to share their values, beliefs, thoughts, memories, worldviews and feelings about their unemployment and connectedness with locality.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

As shown, the participants in this research study are mature, experienced, well-educated workers caught up in labour market exclusionary practices that are unique in this time of high unemployment.

If social justice efforts cannot be enacted where employers are discouraged from the ways they are tailoring types of production that result in discriminatory practices, this bodes negatively for social policy and industrial relations.

If they are serious about boosting productivity and securing growth in the economy, policymakers would be wise (and economical) to realise that, in times and conditions such as these, marketable workers can easily fall through the safety net and be deemed irresponsible and undeserving when in fact they would be assets to the nation's workforce.

Social justice and equal opportunity principles need to be proactively monitored and administered so that rampant discrimination (based on elements such as place, class, and ethnicity) can no longer occur on such a wide scale.

In short, the power to decide who and who isn't worthy of employment opportunity should not be solely left in the hands of those with vested interests, historical prejudices, or narrow perspectives. Other voices need to be heard.

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