

Troubled Transformation: Whites, Welfare, and 'Reverse-Racism' in Contemporary Newcastle*

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Abstract

This paper is based on a study of four white families living in the town of Newcastle, South Africa, and focuses on the institutional apparatuses of welfare in the town almost two decades after apartheid. Beginning with a reading of the production of the category of the 'poor white' during the first half of the twentieth century, we then discuss the particular rise and fall of Newcastle as an industrial town. We focus on contemporary welfare in the town and the interaction between whites receiving welfare and welfare officials. In the midst of moral evaluations of character, it becomes clear to officials that models of individual reformation and transformation are inadequate to realise substantially improved lives. In these conditions, officials join white recipients in invoking 'reverse racism' to explain the continued reliance of these white families on welfare and their inability to improve their conditions, regardless of 'improvements in character'. Such a claim, we argue, portrays whites as threatened and even attempts to re-claim the pathological figure of the poor white in a bid to remain exceptional, and thus to be recognised as being poor in a manner that would distinguish them from Africans.

Keywords: welfare, whites, racism, 'reverse-racism', post-apartheid, Newcastle, post-industrial towns, South Africa

Introduction

In this paper, we consider white families on welfare in the post-apartheid town of Newcastle, emphasizing the recent history of the town, the interaction of these families with welfare officials, and their reading of the transformation in the town. Central to our analysis is the contemporary fate of the 'poor white', a foundational figure of South African politics in the first half of the twentieth century. The poor white was a

figure around whom ideologies were crafted and institutions designed, a figure who was not only poor but immoral, and a figure to be empowered by being led through — or rescued by — a range of government institutions that took them from welfare to work and reformed them, lest their poverty be a sign that they were not part of God's chosen (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Du Toit 2006; Teppo 2004). The reform of the poor white, through a protected employment and state investment in social services, remained at issue when the town of Newcastle attracted significant settlement of whites in the early 1970s as part of a state sponsored venture at industrialisation by iron and steel.

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Today, under changed political and economic conditions, this figure has attracted attention again, in media and literary circles (Du Plessis 2004: 892). In an analysis based in Johannesburg, Hyslop (2003) has suggested that in the wake of both changes to the labour market and declining government support for whites, the reoccurrence of poor whites sociologically has not, like in the first half of the twentieth century, become a common white concern. Rather he argues that a shared Afrikaner nationalism among whites was on the wane since the 1960s and that a collective notion of white society fragmented in the 1980s and early 1990s, riven by class distinctions and without certainty of place in a new political arrangement. Given these social and institutional changes, here we are concerned with how the figure of the poor white appears in contemporary Newcastle and what this appearance might reveal about the sentiments of whites living there after apartheid.

We draw attention to the interaction in Newcastle between whites receiving welfare aid and officials within welfare organisations offering this aid. Reading this against a longer history of the growth of Newcastle during the 1970s as a late apartheid project of investment in so-called 'border industries' away from metropolises, we reflect on the nature of identification of the white poor in a small town after apartheid. In particular, we examine how three welfare organisations channel resources and moral messages to the four families that were central to our fieldwork. We discuss an example of the welfare organisations' attempt to 'discipline' two sisters in a manner that points to the limits, rather than affirms, what might be understood as 'disciplinary power'. We then show how discourses arising from this failure – provided by both officials and welfare recipients — attribute the difficulties of the present to post-apartheid state policy and its 'reverse-racism'. Finally, we analyse how this perceived reverse functions as a kind of mourning of the loss of the figure of the poor white, a melancholia that seeks to retain and inhabit the category as a final attempt to resist becoming part of the unexceptionally poor in post-apartheid South Africa.

Conceptually, this paper focuses upon welfare institutions and on white racism, considering these at a specific historical moment and therefore not taking their functionings and meanings as the same across time. We are especially interested in how 'disciplinary power' (Foucault 1975) exercised within and without welfare institutions produced a set of definitions, identities and boundaries (Bourdieu 1990: 120) around the figure of the 'poor white,' in South Africa and we consequently engage relevant historical literature. We do not, however, take for granted that such institutions are untransformed by the wider social and political changes that have happened in South Africa. Indeed, central to our investigation is precisely the way that these larger social changes have confronted the moralising discourses of welfare institutions in Newcastle, leading to what we regard as a troubled transformation for both white welfare officials and recipients.

We are similarly concerned with the specific expressions of white racism in post-apartheid South Africa, something we share with scholars such as Ballard (2004), Steyn (2005) and Goga (2010). We examine how, in the particular circumstances of the town of Newcastle, 'reverse-racism' became a discourse shared by both white welfare recipients and the officials working in welfare organisations. Hence, in this paper we seek to account for the conditions of possibility for a particular kind of racism among a particular class of whites in a small town in post-apartheid South Africa.

Approach and Data

The research for this paper is based on accounts gathered over almost a year between 2009 and 2010 from four families and the people with whom they had contact. Data was collected both through observation and open-ended interviews. The research was initially conceived of as an extended attempt to engage both 'culture' and social structure, endeavouring to follow the lives of five families, following Oscar Lewis' famous account (1959), while engaging more recent attempts to think about how everyday practices and beliefs may be shaped by, and in turn

reshape, economic inequalities (cf. Small, Harding, Lamont 2010; Wilson 2010).

From the beginning racism was a concern of the research. Michelle had grown up in Newcastle and was aware of how the transition to democracy and the downsizing of ISCOR were conflated, shaping sentiments among whites in the town that they had been denied good lives for political reasons. One broad question that occurred throughout the research was whether this racism that accompanied whites' bitterness about the last twenty-five years was a repetition of an extremely familiar white supremacy, or if something was specific to the kinds of spatial circumstances and historical configuration of contemporary Newcastle.

While racism and how it might be approached was a consideration in designing the research, we did not initially propose welfare as an object. The welfare organisations were initially only approached as a means to establish contact with families, only later realising how important their constructions of the poor were for the families, as the relations between welfare organisations and the four families¹ that ended up being the main informants became key sources of data. These organisations, even though they cannot achieve the kind of economic rewards for moral behaviour they promise, are extremely important in defining behaviour in relation to what constitutes poverty. This is not to say, however, and we make this point in the paper below, that these organisations' definitions of poverty and corrective social behaviour have the same purchase as they might have had during apartheid.

Beyond revealing the particular position of institutions, we should also note that the research process surprised us insofar as we collected overwhelmingly women's voices, across generation. While discussions of women-headed households and welfare among African-American communities in the United States are well-known (Brewer 1988) and may also be a feature of many predominately African villages and

towns in South Africa (Dubbeld 2013), perhaps because of the duration of apartheid and its attendant moral language of the white family — which entrenches marriage as central to the proper subject — we did not expect that the vast majority of our informants would be women in households where men were largely absent. The absence of men may be a limitation of the research, but it is perhaps also revealing of the extent to which the white poor has become unexceptional. In addition, it also offered us a window from which to observe the moralising language meted out unequally to women and to which we would not have had the same access had we spoken mostly to men.

Whiteness and Welfare: a historical background

For much of the twentieth century in South Africa to be white meant to enjoy pervasive privilege. While nineteenth century colonial wars, land dispossession and the beginnings of a racially differentiated labour system gave significant numbers of white people extensive material and political advantages over other people in the country, in the early twentieth century there were also substantial numbers of whites with few material resources. Over several decades in the first part of the century, the figure of the poor white became cast as a problem to be researched, documented, photographed, and uplifted through welfare (Du Toit 2006). Such a figure was the target of intervention precisely because the existence of poor whites who mixed with those from other races challenged the possibility of presenting a racially bounded society. Cohabiting with other races in the slums of Johannesburg or in farming districts like Middelburg, white authorities worried about 'the destruction of the white race' and the main opposition party — and forerunner of the party that would promulgate apartheid — campaigned to prevent 'the white man becoming the white nigger [sic]' (cited in Morrell 1992: 16, 18; also see Parnell 1992). It was not only from 'above' that such calls came. Du Toit (2003: 161) shows how members of the Afrikaans Women's Christian Society (ACVV) moved poorer whites who were 'living in the location amongst the

¹ One family of the initial five who agreed to participate withdrew from the research explicitly because of the fear that certain people within welfare organisations would take away their children.

coloureds to more appropriate lodgings' as early as 1907. By the 1920s this organisation's explicit goal was to improve the position of the poor white to counter the possibility of them forgetting their racial identity and assimilating (Du Toit 2003: 171).

Such a focus on poor whites did not merely reflect 'reality' but also helped to give particular form to the figure of the poor white, cast as a figure that linked poverty and moral depravity and implying that a racial and economic hierarchy were naturally linked, such that poor whites were poor due to some unnatural moral failing. Such assumptions became increasingly pervasive with more concerted attention from government and civil society organisations to uplift poor whites in the 1920s and the 1930s (especially after the 1924 election of the Pact government). Many white men received preferential positions from the government, with 25000 poor whites absorbed into state jobs in Johannesburg alone by 1931 (Freund 1992: xx; Parnell 1992: 121). The state discourse of the time was that 'not a single white person should be allowed to go under', justifying not only state positions (i.e. especially in railways) but also interventions in industry to protect white workers (Seekings 2007: 382). Together with the publication of the Carnegie Commission on poor whites, extensive measures to deal with poor white-ism were implemented, in education and through the reorganisation of city housing – in Johannesburg, Parnell (1992: 129-130) shows how the construction of council housing for whites coupled with slum clearance sought to eliminate racial mixing in the city. Du Plessis (2004: 882) notes that while the numbers of poor whites had declined significantly, the stratum that remained was 'an object of the gaze of the apartheid state'.

Alongside job reservation in workplaces, education and government housing, a critical element in the upliftment of poor whites was welfare. Church groups and women's organisations such as the ACVV organised welfare in the first decades of the century and were followed in the late 1920s and 1930s by public welfare, initially through pensions and later through child maintenance grants (Seekings 2007). In the late 1950s

the apartheid state extended the white welfare system, and until the mid-1970s spending on welfare for whites outstripped that of other groups in the country, despite people classified in other racial groupings comprising well over eighty percent of the country's population.

Such 'empowerment' for whites improved their economic position, as much as, Du Plessis (2004: 883) suggests, it attempted to 'reform' whites as productive members of society. The 'poor white' was continuously portrayed as an aberration, described in the language of disease and contamination (Teppo 2004). Willoughby-Herard (2007: 485) notes how the welfare system was an attempt to solve the problem of the poor white by 'inculcating shame, guilt and self-denigration in the white mind through practices of highly scripted body modification and surveillance of the body'. Welfare institutions became sites of disciplinary power, instilling norms 'acting on the depth of the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations' of whites' (Foucault 1975: 16). As we have been suggesting, such welfare did therefore not only aid the poor, but naturalised whites as superior subjects and cast doubts on the morality of poor whites, as if to be white and poor was a sign of suspect character.

The condition of the connection between economy and morality lies in the Protestant ethic, where 'inner and outer transformation go together' and hard work and rational calculation is the currency of the elect (Weber 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 227). Indeed, Morrell (1992: 15) notes in Middelburg that in the early decades of the twentieth century prosperous white farmers would accuse poor whites of 'lazy sickness', and hard work, decency and respectability became virtues to be instilled in the white population. Early welfare measures developed alongside work rather than as a means to deal with able bodied people who might not ever find work (Seekings 2007). We can recognise a parallel with Roediger's (2007) analysis of the formation of white working class identity in the United States around ideals of respectable work and small-scale independent production set against both the casual poor and master-servant relations. In South Africa to be white meant inhabiting places

and working in professions from which Africans were prohibited, and this was accompanied by a moral judgment that naturalised white privilege. This morality, as it were, made the poor white a pathological figure, an aberration that welfare institutions and schools sought to combat.

Newcastle and the late apartheid project

One major aim of the apartheid government was to control and improve the position of poor whites in more elaborate form than had been attempted in the 1920s and 1930s, and this was largely achieved by the 1960s, through job reservation, welfare, housing and social grants (Du Plessis 2004: 883). As the material conditions of poor whites improved, however, Du Plessis suggests that the cross-class alliance of white people in general and Afrikaners in particular gradually began to dissolve, with a project of racial identification giving way among upper and middle-class whites to an investment in 'consumption' and an interest in global connections. It is at this very moment, in the late 1960s, that the town of Newcastle gains the government's attention and rapidly grows.

Newcastle was the site for the third integrated steelworks of the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation (ISCOR). Construction of these steelworks started in 1971 with production commencing in 1976 (South African Steel Institute 2010). Todes (2001: 73) argues that with ISCOR's arrival in the town, Newcastle changed from being predominantly English speaking to Afrikaans speaking as well as shifted politically to the right, that is, more explicitly in favour of the National Party's apartheid administration. Newcastle's population was counted as 17 554 in 1960 compared to 350 000 in 1991 and ISCOR, at the height of production, employed around thirteen thousand workers with more than half of these classified as white (South African Department of Statistics 1970 [Census]; Todes 2001:72). From 1970 to 1980, the population of the municipality of Newcastle more than doubled and the Madadeni district tripled.

This investment in Newcastle aligned with apartheid policies of the early 1970s that sought to develop industries far from major cities and

adjacent to areas designated as African (following forced urban removals). These so-called 'border industries' would allow white owned and managed industries to thrive on cheap African labour without having to accommodate Africans in cities. The principal justification for choosing Newcastle as the preferred site of ISCOR's development was the proximity of labour supply from the nearby Bantustans. Also, because land around Newcastle was considered cheap and more available to aid in the expansion and growth of the town envisioned with the development of ISCOR. In addition, ISCOR's investment in Newcastle facilitated the company's economic strategy of buying out Amcor (The African Metals Corporation), eliminating it as a competitor (Trapido 1971). Hart (2002: 140) suggests that Newcastle won the bid for ISCOR over the town of Ladysmith based on local government connections.

Newcastle's informal settlements of Madadeni and Osizweni offered some of the 'earliest and most complete examples of restructuring' along apartheid lines (Todes 2001:70). White men made up a significant proportion of the town's labour force in the town and received incentives to live in designated areas of Newcastle. These were channelled through ISCOR and their housing scheme 'Yskor Landgoed'. During the 1970's, ISCOR thus not only provided employment for whites and shaped the subsequent growth of Newcastle, but was also responsible for planning and building entire neighbourhoods through their housing department and housing scheme. In this sense, Newcastle exemplifies a late apartheid attempt to fuse elaborate racial segregation through increasing private investment outside the major metropolises of South Africa (away from the concentration of steel production in the Vaaldriehoek area). In fact, Todes calls ISCOR's development at Newcastle illustrative of the intersection of national, provincial and local politics with a modernist technocratic agenda.

Yet ISCOR's growth—and that of Newcastle's white population – was short lived. As early as 1977, several planned developments associated with the plant were put on hold. The Newcastle Municipal area, after a period of rapid growth and expansion affected by ISCOR's promise, expe-

NEWCASTLE

**FAST
DEVELOPING
GROWTH POINT**

Centre of the third ISCOR steelworks which is a powerful stimulus to industrial development.

Favourably situated: 360 kilometres from Durban and 290 kilometres from Johannesburg. Electricity, water and labour in abundance.

A further industrial township proclaimed in November 1976, with majority of stands rail served.

Adequate educational facilities with four High Schools, eight Primary Schools and a Technical Institute.

Excellent sports and recreational facilities, i.e. rugby, soccer, cricket, tennis, golf, two public swimming pools, water ski on Cheimsford dam and a new indoor recreation centre.

Population: Whites 24 200
Asiatics 6 800. Coloureds 1 150
Bantu 140 000 (in Madadeni and Ozisweni townships in KwaZulu)

ENQUIRIES:
The Town Clerk, Mr. L. De Wet,
P.O. Box 21
NEWCASTLE 2940
Telephone 21141

Figure 1: 1977 Financial Mail advertisement for Newcastle

Source: Financial Mail newspaper (June 17, 1977)
"The Natal Survey: A Supplement," p. 12.

perienced a decline in population (Harrison 1990; Todes 2001). During the 1980s, ISCOR Newcastle was rationalised. It struggled in local markets and with the appropriation of technological advances in search of profit, restructuring occurred in Newcastle. Todes notes that 'the promised boom... was neither as great as expected nor was it sustained' (Todes 2001:73). All plants associated with ISCOR sustained job losses through several rounds of restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s and ISCOR Newcastle went from employing thirteen thousand to only three thousand. ISCOR privatised in 1989 and unbundled its subsidiary operations, one of the most salient of which had offered housing at reduced rentals to attract white workers. While the inhabitants of the houses received preferential options to purchase the housing, many could not afford the houses or had been retrenched leading to many houses becoming empty: houses that had once represented a dream of secure place for white workers now testify to the hollowing out of this dream (Peens 2012).

Hart (2002: 146-9) suggests that at least six hundred houses were abandoned during ISCOR's rationalisation. She examines the growth of Taiwanese investment in the town from the mid-1980s, noting the role of local government and even the use of these empty houses as a means to attract this investment. While her analysis of this investment suggests a complex account of global forces and a range of local actors and political currents, what is important for the purposes of this paper is that the security that ISCOR offered to white workers, linking work to home through a set of state institutions aiming to produce and protect privilege, began to crumble even before the formal end of white rule in 1994.

Post-apartheid social grants and the family

While welfare policy in post-apartheid South Africa largely followed policies of previous administrations (racially exclusive welfare was largely abandoned by white government in the 1980s), one decisive reform of welfare policy was the introduction of the Child Support Grant, following recommendations by the Lund Commission in 1997. The Child Support Grant replaced the State Maintenance Grant, the latter having been designed to help white families unable to work and offering a fairly large amount of aid to its limited numbers of recipients. The Child Support Grant, by contrast, offered a smaller sum but has reached many more South Africans, with more than eleven million recipients in 2012.

Growing unemployment, particularly among those without advanced qualifications, has amplified the effect of the grant. Marais (2011: 178, 205-6) has recently shown how, with unemployment in the country standing at almost 35%, government social grants have *de facto* become the major poverty alleviating tool in the country. Seekings (2008) has argued that the difficulty with the current grant policy lies in its retention of the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, categorising those physically constrained in their capacities to find work differently from those who are 'merely' unemployed. Rather than providing the latter with welfare, the government has offered them a public works programme and training schemes 'supposed to

provide the poor with the dignity of work' (Seekings 2008: 33).

Despite this, it is important from our perspective to emphasize that the Child Support Grant has not only extended the reach of government aid to many more people than previously received the State Maintenance Grant, but it has also implied a less prescriptive, heteronormative, western and/or patriarchal notion of family as it offers support to the carers of children, regardless of the parents' relationship or the kinds of kinship networks in which any child finds herself. Although there is no clear causal connection, research among poorer African households and communities has found that marriage rates have declined markedly in comparison with White and African middle-class counterparts over the last two decades (Posel, Rudwick and Casale 2011). Certainly, ethnographic work has shown that popular sentiments do make such causal connections between the grant and declining incidence of marriage (Bank 2011: 186; Dubbeld 2013). Claims about government paying women or women being married to the state also become part of a broader popular discourse about the post-apartheid government having empowered women at the expense of men (Hunter 2010).

It is less clear to us what has happened for white South Africans as a result of these changes in welfare policy. Certainly the history of white welfare in the country was deeply committed to a particular moral order centred on an idea of the family in which men were breadwinners and women homemakers. As we've suggested by drawing on the scholarship of Du Toit and others above, welfare for white South Africans was also not confined only to the state, but a number of extra-governmental organisations, and especially Church based organisations, were deeply committed to white welfare and to addressing the figure of the poor white. Based on our research, it is less clear to us that whites receiving welfare and other grants are willing to question the family: indeed, as our informants allude to below, a goal for women seems to be to find a husband who has respectable work, or failing that, to find respectable work for themselves. That is to say, the elements of welfare reform in post-apartheid

South Africa that could be considered progressive insofar as they accommodate different kinds of familial relations and are not prescriptive, seem in the case of whites in Newcastle not to facilitate local challenges to a moral order that is taken for granted: in the town, such welfare policy runs into entrenched welfare institutions, which we now turn to examine.

The poor white and welfare organisations in Newcastle

We investigated three welfare organisations in Newcastle, namely the *Christelike Maatskaplike Diens* (Christian Social Services), *Môrester* (Morning Star) Children's Home, and *Rapha*, which the latter's pastor suggests functions as a kind of halfway house. All three institutions follow the tradition of church and volunteer organisations that operate alongside government, with the three institutions linked, directly or indirectly, depending on particular families or individuals. The involvement of religious organisations is not remarkable, since churches across the continent have often been responsible for distributing welfare (Ferguson 2012: 501).

The *Christelike Maatskaplike Diens* (CMD) functions as a social services office and operates along similar lines as state welfare but does not receive any government funding. One of their social workers facilitated initial contact with the four families. This social worker talked about their food parcel system and how their recipients struggled. It was, indeed, at the offices of CMD where we first met Mrs R, Mrs E and Mrs X. They were seated on green plastic chairs at tables covered with cheerful tablecloths in the general meeting room, waiting for their food parcels.

This organisation — which works across the country — was founded more than fifty years ago and assisted only members of the Dutch Reformed Church, predominately white Afrikaners. Currently they claim to assist anyone in the community in which they are located (Christian Social Services 2008). The social workers they employ reflect, according to them 'the changes in the racial and language composition of their client base': while once they were staffed by white women who were part of the congregation,

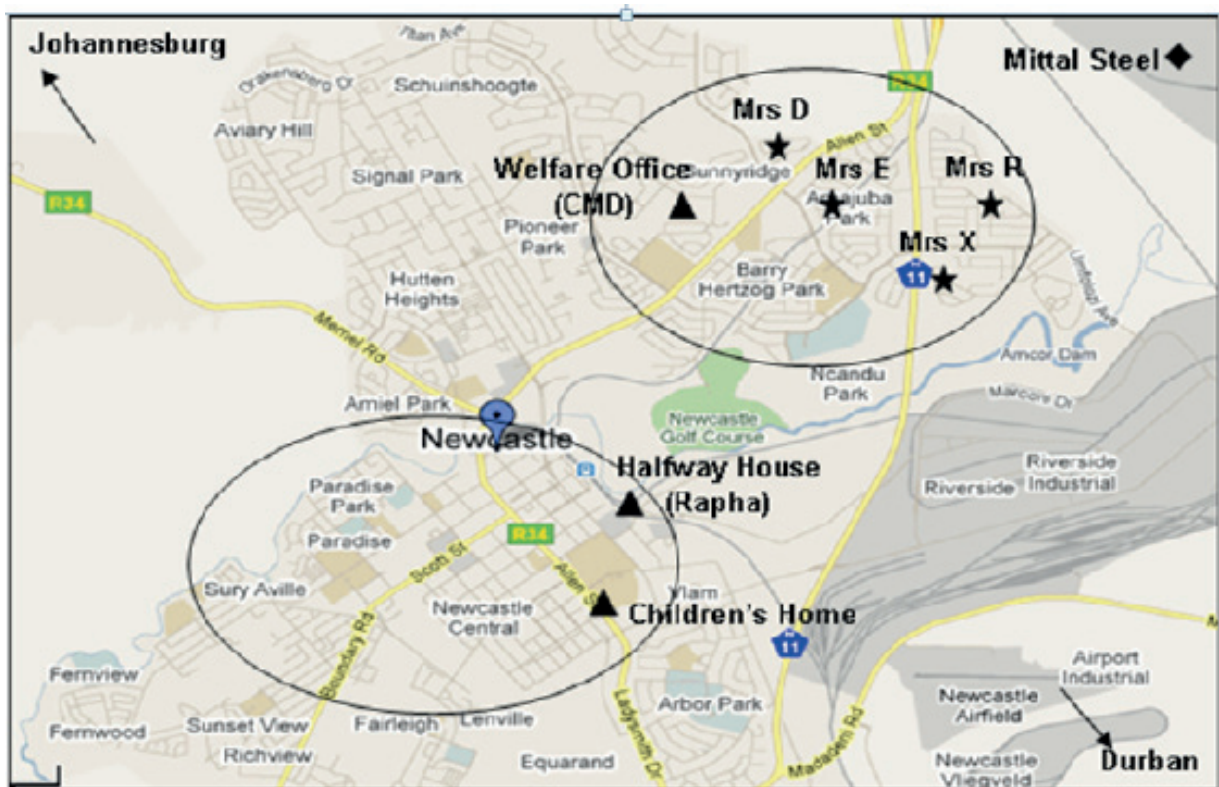


Figure 2: Google maps image showing location of individuals and institutions in Newcastle

now men and women of all races work at the CMD. Yet with white social workers operating in white neighbourhoods and so forth, and it is only on Friday mornings, when food is handed out on the church grounds that such 'diversity' appears, as white and black people wait for their parcels.

The CMD is often referred to by the white families and by the social workers alike as 'the welfare'. This is based on their association with other welfare institutions, including functioning as a channel to assist people in applying for and receiving government grants. Despite this name, the majority of their funding does not come from the government but from the Dutch Reformed Church (national and local), outside sources (such as the National Lottery) and from private donations, a significant percentage of their income. These donations are from both businesses involved with the Dutch Reformed Church and from individuals who, in addition to money, donate clothing and food. According to the official website of the Dutch Reformed church, the CMD is a welfare service affiliated to the church that delivers material, social and spiritual services to all individuals in crisis, no mat-

ter the race, gender or religion (Dutch Reformed Church 2010). Because of their association with the church, some individuals the organisation helps are identified as in need by the congregation. The main services they claim to deliver are 'prevention, care and aftercare' (Christian Social Services 2008). The social worker suggested that they might identify an individual with a substance or alcohol abuse problem and, while continuing to assist the individual, will also refer them to the South African National Council for Alcoholism.

Môrester Children's Home is presented on their website as an institution that cares for children in need (Môrester Children's Home 2010). The children are placed in their care by the Commissioner of Child Care, an indication of the greater role government plays in this institution. Children are removed from their carers for reasons including negligence, situations of failed foster care, being orphaned, 'uncontrollable behaviour', living in unfit circumstances that include lack of food or clothes, parents being unemployed, physical or sexual abuse and problems related to alcohol and drug abuse. The children's home ren-

ders services ranging from individualised therapy to simply serving healthy meals to live up to their mission statement: 'To care for our children in a safe environment so that they can reach their full potential and live as well adjusted adults in society, in honour of God' (Môrester Children's Home 2010). Their focus on the emotional, spiritual and social needs of the children is captured by their official vision 'A home for today and a dream for tomorrow'.

Môrester is closely affiliated with the CMD, and is a regional association. Another branch exists in Ladysmith, one hundred kilometres away. Currently the children's home in Newcastle caters for children in high school while the children's home in Ladysmith caters for younger children. However, in contrast to the CMD, a percentage of the children's home's income is subsidised by government. For the rest, they are reliant on donations from businesses, different church congregations and individuals. They also organise fundraising events. One such event is a celebrity makeover show that visited Newcastle to raise money for the children's home. The catering and venue were donated by the business associated with the specific services and individuals donated their time to work at the function so that all the proceeds from the tickets sales could go to the children's home.

The last institution involved in the lives of the four families is *Rapha*, which functions both as a church with its own congregation and as a centre that provides shelter and food. The halfway house is located in the centre of town behind the town's cemetery in what used to be the old commando barracks. According to the pastor's wife, *Rapha* literally means 'new beginnings' or 'making whole'. For her, this reiterates the role of the halfway house as not a homeless shelter but rather as filling the interim of space and time between where people were and where they are going. The individuals that end up at the centre are usually homeless and tend to stay for periods ranging from a few months to a few years.

The grounds are neat and the buildings seem freshly painted, but there are patches of dirt, rather than grass in the yard. Maintenance of the

buildings and the grounds is the responsibility of the men staying there, while cleaning and communal cooking is the responsibility of the women residents. These chores and others are expected in return for the room and board. Adherence to strict rules is also expected, such as a curfew for the children on the grounds and having to sign in and out. This strict discipline and organisation are attributed to the experience of the pastor and his wife, who both spent time in the police services. As well as contributing and obeying the rules, inhabitants that stay on for long periods have to make a monetary contribution. For many of the inhabitants this is deducted from a government grant they receive due to age, disability, or having young children.

The halfway house receives no subsidies from the government. The pastor's wife explained that their residents are overwhelmingly white and Afrikaans, believing that to receive state support will mean having to follow government directions about racial inclusion. While she claimed not to have a problem helping other races, she argued that she wanted to avoid neglecting their current residents and suggested that their location in the town centre matched their demographic composition, since 'other races suffering from poverty lived in other areas'. She did note that there were plans to build a similar centre in Madadeni, which would help predominately poor Africans.

At several levels, these three institutions work together in Newcastle. People the CMD have identified as being destitute are taken in by *Rapha*, but the former continues to support families where children have been removed and placed in the children's home. Donations are also shared between them. For instance, if the CMD receives a surplus of children's clothes, they distribute this among their beneficiaries and the children's home. If the halfway house receives more Christmas donations than they need, they distribute the gifts to the children's home and other institutions in town. The institutions all have a good sense of how the other institutions operate and their resources. In terms of employees, one social worker at the children's home previously worked for the CMD and many of her

old clients are still involved there or have lived in the halfway house. By the same token, the parents of some in the children's home have lived or are living in the halfway house.

Victoria and Martilda: on the limits of welfare

The families in the study are all connected to this assemblage of welfare institutions. Before Mrs R and her son moved in with her daughter and son in law, she lived with her then-husband after he lost his job at Rapha. Their household remains dependent on CMD for food parcels and access to medical services for Mrs R's sickly grandson. Mrs X and her family also rely on the food parcels from CMD, who were also involved in a custody battle for Mrs X's granddaughter (who she now seldom sees). Mrs X and Mrs R often talked about home visits by the social workers and the anxiety the visits induced. Mrs D and her two children moved into the halfway house after she divorced her husband. She previously lived with her father, but unpaid bills and his drinking meant that she felt it better to move into Rapha. Mrs D and her children later moved out of the halfway house, but continued to rely on food parcels. Even now that she has managed to find a full time position, CMD social workers still visit the house and counsel her son when he has difficulties with his father. Mrs D was often anxious in our conversations about losing her children to the children's home.

The relationships between each family and the various institutions are complex, but seem to show a familiar picture of the disciplinary character of the welfare apparatus, as if little had changed since the height of apartheid other than private institutions fulfilling functions of government, a role private institutions and the church played for much of the twentieth century anyway. Yet a more extended discussion of Mrs E's two daughters, Victoria and Martilda illustrates a variation on this familiar story, a significant difference about the character of these organisations dedicated to white welfare in post-apartheid South Africa, ultimately a tale that tells of the troubled transformations that both the organisations and the white people in Newcastle are experiencing.

Both Victoria and Martilda were placed in the children's home from a very young age. Victoria is now seventeen and her younger sister Martilda is sixteen. Victoria had to leave school and the children's home when she became pregnant at fifteen. During her pregnancy and after their daughter Lilly was born, Victoria moved in with Lilly's father who lived with his parents. After drunken brawls, during which Victoria claimed to have been attacked, hit and strangled by her boyfriend and his parents, Victoria moved back to her parent's house. Lilly stayed with her paternal grandparents, who have full custody of her as the CMD deemed Mrs E's house inadequate for her own daughters, and thus also for her granddaughter.

Early on in the fieldwork, Victoria was living at home with Mrs E and working in a factory store selling socks. She was soon demoted after the boss caught her smoking outside, leaving the store unattended. Rather than take the pay cut from R900 to R500 per month (2009/2010 US\$1:ZAR 7.5) – a cut in hours she would suffer as punishment – she found new employment managing a biltong shop in town. Mrs E lamented Victoria's attitude to work: recounting how she had visited her at the new shop and found her outside smoking and chatting to the car guards in the parking lot, leaving this shop unattended. For Mrs E, almost all the money Victoria earns she spends on herself, buying clothes and other 'luxury' items and spends but a little on her baby.

Mrs E often commented on Victoria's love life. When Michelle first met her, Victoria was romantically involved with a much older man who lived in the Pretoria area. He expected her to visit him on weekends, but the biltong shop owner expected her to work weekends. Mrs E also suggested that the Pretoria love interest had to compete with the on-off relationship Victoria still had with her daughter's biological father. Mrs E often compared these two love interests, saying the Pretoria love interest had a steady job and a place to live and was willing to look after Victoria and Lilly. In comparison, according to Mrs E, her granddaughter's father was unemployed, still living at home and violent. Over the course of fieldwork, the love interest from Pretoria waned,

and Mrs E became increasingly worried about Victoria moving back in with her granddaughter's father. However, during one of our last conversations, Mrs E shared about a new love interest in Victoria's life and claimed that he was the reason she was spending hardly any time at home anymore.

Mrs E: It doesn't seem to worry her because at once stage she told me, said to me she feels like signing away [her daughter] and making another baby... I said to her, no...You cannot even look after your child...She thinks it is that easy to have another child...It freaks me out a bit. [She becomes teary.] She works and she has a child to look after ... who she only sees when it suits her. Then when she has seen the child, then it is goodbye, now I am going to party [or] go drink with friends. Then I think, shit, what if the welfare catches you? And then? There is going to be trouble.

Mrs E characterises her daughter Victoria as the typical 'bad girl', somebody who needs to learn discipline, a work ethic and morality in order to become respectable and spend her money accordingly. Lacking these values, and without a permanent partner with respectable work, Mrs E. believes that her daughter Victoria faces an uncertain future and fears she might lose all rights to raise her daughter Lily.

In contrast to Victoria is Martilda, the youngest daughter of Mrs E. She is now in grade 11 in a high school for children with learning disabilities. As with Victoria, she has lived in the children's home throughout her school career. Martilda's mother, the social workers at CMD and the social worker at the children's home are all proud of the progress she has made in terms of the leadership roles she fulfils, both at the school and at the children's home. Indeed, Martilda seems likely to complete a 'normal' matric certificate. Mrs E says that she and Martilda have a relationship resembling a friendship more than that of a mother-daughter relationship. In conversations about Martilda, Mrs E accentuates the 'r' in her name affectionately.

Mrs E: The difference I have seen between Martilda and Victoria ... Martilda is more sensible. Victoria does not really know how to manage money. She will not come to me and say, 'Mom, see, here's some money, go and buy bread.' Martilda, when

she gets her pocket money from the children's home, she saves it, she knows it is for mother and it is needed. Then when she gets home some Fridays, then she says, 'Mom, come with me'. Then she puts out her hand and says 'here make sure there is food in the house'.

Mrs E believes that Martilda can achieve her dream of working with computers after she has finished school. During our discussions, Mrs E called Martilda 'her pride and joy' and, according to her, destined for greater things than she herself has achieved. The disciplinary apparatuses of the school and the children's home appear to have worked, morally moulding Martilda's character into a 'good girl'.

Curious about her potential future, Michelle asked the social worker about Martilda's potential employment opportunities after she completes school:

SW (children's home): [S]he is not doing that well. We received their report cards this morning... She is one of my children that I worry about this vicious cycle continuing with [...] Already, [her sister] is one-step ahead of her because she got pregnant while she was here. So she [Victoria] is already there, but Martilda will not really be able to get a job, other than at the place where her sister is working. She is a reliable little child, but she does not have the intellectual abilities to go further. That is a shame. It is hard for me... she will have to be a packer or something similar... What she does, she does diligently. [But] the reality is... [s]he will unfortunately, have to move back [home].

This was echoed by another social worker from the CMD though she was not aware of Martilda's school results.

SW (CMD): Mrs E's youngest daughter does so well at school, that she can apparently complete a normal matric – even if she is in a special school. Where things fall flat is afterwards, the moment that they are out of the welfare system. Then there are not always the resources, or the resources of a poor family who does not have resources anyway. And then the problems of welfare come up again – that we do not have the manpower or the resources to help a family [...] afterwards. Things fall flat because now that child is caught in the cycle of – 'I did well in the children's home... I have a matric now, but I cannot find work. I do not have a parent who can put me into a job ... or who can give me

money to study. So now I sit, I sit at home. There is nothing. So the best thing is I'll get a man, I'll have a child. I'll try to find someone who can look after me.' – And then they do not necessarily make the right choices. They fall into the same system of – 'now I have a child and I cannot care for him, I have a husband who cannot attend to his responsibilities.' – That vicious cycle just continues.

For the social worker at the children's home, the 'good girl' Martilda is intellectually challenged and cannot hope to get a good job. For the social worker from CMD, the fact that jobs are scarce and poor families have little or no money or networks means that acting "responsibly" achieves little. Both emphasize a vicious cycle that ensnares these children of the poor. Victoria and Martilda, seeming opposites on the 'inside' – in terms of their character – seem destined to share the same future. Although Mrs E retains hopes for a different future based on their different conduct, it is increasingly clear to the social workers who propagate these prescriptions of institutionally guided self-reformation is unlikely in most cases to lead to significant material improvements of people's lives. The incapacity of Martilda's differences in conduct to make a difference to her life not only tells about the constraints on her agency, but on the agency of the institutions in which both sisters have been raised.

Despite mentioning the problems with finding work and the difficulties of living without the 'social capital' that wealthier parents might provide, the social worker of the CMD does not connect the fate of somebody like Martilda to that of many South Africans, across race. Rather her focus is on the white population:

SW (CMD): The majority of people that end up with us are those that do not have resources anymore. There are, for example, no family or friends left that can or want to help. You know, the political situation in our country has a big impact... Because if a person now looks back to 1994, and now there is a system in place of... black empowerment – black people first have to obtain posts, then whites can be considered. There was a long period when white people in certain positions were asked to train the black person under him and as soon as the person reached a certain level of training, then the white person was put out of the job, re-

trenched or whatever. So [we] also have to look at the age situation of our white population ... Where white people are still advantaged by the old state system... are necessarily people who are fifty plus. So they still have some finances... built up because of the advantage they had, but now there is a new generation... That fifty-sixty category is getting smaller. So now this twenty/thirty/forty-year-old category does not find work simply because there is no work for whites or does not find work quick enough. So he depletes the older category's funds, and he does not have any funds when his fifteen/sixteen-year-old child is in trouble and gets pregnant and does not work and all those type of things.

White people under the 'fifty-sixty' age bracket are, this social worker goes on to tell us, victims of a government that, for her, 'distinguishes according to race, specifically rejecting whites'. Rather than conceive of the limits in the welfare system as principally to do with the changed employment opportunities, the political transformation and the post-apartheid state is read as racist. Instead of seeing the growing difficulties poor whites might have with accessing their grandparents accumulated resources as pointing to situation where the white poor become increasingly indistinguishable from the African poor, the government is accused of racism and of preventing the most qualified person from being hired. And rather than accept their own weakness as the weakness welfare organisations face globally in neoliberal conditions, these organisations increasingly present themselves as championing the interests of 'oppressed' whites, those victims of a conspiracy crafted by government that has white people training their replacements at work.

'Reverse-racism': the nature of the threat to whiteness

Social workers in welfare organisations serving overwhelmingly white families in Newcastle attempt to demarcate when, for white people, apartheid privilege 'ends' justifying their support of whites 'falling through the cracks' and 'caught in vicious cycles' who they believe suffer from the post-apartheid attempts at redress in workplaces. Members of the families in this study repeated a similar argument, without its socio-

logical pretences. Mrs D, for example, sees herself as a white woman threatened by discrimination in hiring practices:

Mrs D: If I did not have an education, maybe it would be a different situation, but I have an education behind my name. I have nursing and computers. I do not want to nurse again, since nursing took it out of me; I almost lost my life nursing.... even though at the hospital they are trying to push me back into nursing. I just put my foot down. That is why I am working as a porter. [...] The thing is, I have to keep my mouth shut again and just carry on, and that makes me so angry – because when can we open our mouths for once? You know? And that is what makes me angry about this country. The blacks, and I am not racist, but the blacks are prone to speak of oppression. They should... see who is really being oppressed today, because it is definitely not them ... It is the whites, especially the white women with children, who are oppressed. Women with qualifications behind their names. But since their damn skins are white they cannot get the work they are supposed to get. ... I experience it every time. Because most places have equity policies. If not for the equity policy, I would have the admin position I wanted a long time ago ...

While blaming the new government and understanding whites as victims, Mrs D. constantly reaffirmed to us that what ‘really’ makes a difference is religious faith and individual determination. Several times she leapt from saying ‘it’s about the individual, not race’ to saying that Africans are given opportunities ahead of whites, and hence that employment equity has undermined racial equality in hiring practices, as if individual merit as the grounds for employment was more characteristic of the past than the present. What seemed to annoy her most was her perception that ‘qualifications’ and ‘know-how’ are not respected and that things were not going to ‘balance out because the whites in this country have not yet learned how to stand together.’

Such sentiments of standing together are clearly nostalgic for the beginnings of apartheid, long mythologised as a moment when white Afrikaners were able to stand together and claim the majority in government. It is a sentiment where curiously whites have become the victims of the transition, despite large amounts of capital remaining in white hands at the point of transi-

tion. Such statements participate in the kind of discursive repertoire Steyn (2005: 131) has delineated as ‘white talk’.

Yet, there is something specific to this particular mode of white talk, insofar as the specific character of their discourse is not one whose function is to veil racism. Their racism is explicit. Rather, casting themselves as victims is a mechanism for these white people to claim and inhabit the figure of the poor white, when the institutional, state and legal support for this figure has disappeared.² Claiming oneself as poor whites in turn allows them to distinguish themselves from others who are poor, thereby constructing themselves as exceptional. Unlike well-off whites who possess considerable amounts of economic and social capital sustaining their privileged access to employment and domains of cultural privilege, the specificity of this claiming of victimhood and of their anti-black racism is thus that their white skins are no longer adequate to protect them from poverty, regardless of how they conduct themselves.

Coda

It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the natural or conventional character of social facts can be raised. (Bourdieu 1977: 169)

The rules of social life that these poor whites living in Newcastle learned was one that took white privilege for granted. It was a perception produced within a set of government apparatuses that cast being white and economically secure as a natural phenomenon and being white and poor as abnormal. Its foundation, materially,

² Hyslop (2003: 230) has written of the tension between less affluent whites and white officialdom during apartheid, with the former referring to social workers as ‘the welfare’. While recognizing such hostilities remain, welfare officials and whites receiving aid in Newcastle find common cause in a discourse of reverse racism that regards the political transition as enriching black south Africans and refuses to take account of either the continued relative economic privilege of white South Africans or a broader political economy which has seen, at least in Europe and North America, the declining capacity of welfare and a far less secure labour market (Ehrenreich 2001).

lay in the possibility that those whites who had been 'reformed' by institutions, who had learned the correct virtues of labour and life, could find permanent positions at work that would guarantee their privileged social position. We have argued that for white people in the town of Newcastle, political and economic change has called the naturalness of racial privilege into question. Welfare institutions in the town still preach that self-discipline will lead to successful and morally superior beneficiaries but, for our white informants — even if they are compliant—there is no passage to economic security based on conduct.

There is a broad sense among informants that there are troubles everywhere, claims that crime is on the increase, moral decay is rife, and how neighbourhoods are 'going down'. In one example, white people now call the neighbourhood Arbour Park 'Arbordeni' to describe the fact of a number of African people moving into the area. For these families, there was an uncanny sense of transformation, of things at once familiar and unfamiliar, of the world they knew looking almost the same but having changed so that they could no longer feel safe (cf. Ballard 2004:

68). This applies to places they had known for a long time which now felt unsafe, but also to the morality preached by the welfare organisations to be good people — that was becoming patently ineffective in producing transformed conditions — and to respectable work, where qualifications and diligence no longer seemed enough.

During apartheid, it is probable that for white South Africans the path from good moral conduct to empowerment was seldom as smooth as ideology suggested. In post-apartheid South Africa, however, it is increasingly clear for white welfare officials and for whites on welfare that there is little chance of finding permanent employment. Both blame the post-apartheid administration and 'reverse-racism', steadfastly refusing to recognise that both Africans and whites receiving the contemporary version of welfare, the social grant, share a common plight of being unlikely to secure permanent employment. Ultimately, it is a kind of mourning for the fact that being poor white is no longer a condition to be studied, or made remarkable: a melancholic retention of a state of exceptionality in the hope of being noticed and somehow helped, perhaps by other more privileged whites.

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