

# **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE COLOURED COMMUNITY SINCE THE THERON COMMISSION**

**Gerhardus Johannes van Deventer**



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degree of Master of Commerce at the University of Stellenbosch.**

**Supervisor: Professor S. van der Berg**

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### **Declaration**

**I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and had not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.**



## Summary

Poverty is a widespread phenomenon within the coloured community of South Africa. In 1976 the Theron Commission reported on coloured poverty and recommended widespread reform to the apartheid system to incorporate coloureds into social and economic life on an equal footing with whites. The commission was of the opinion that the poorest 40% of coloureds lived in a state of chronic community poverty. This conclusion was based on the culture of poverty approach, which states that negative external factors and an internal process of self-perpetuation can sometimes combine to cause a poverty-syndrome. The original culture of poverty approach was widely misinterpreted and criticised and consequently lost much of its support. However, if properly understood, the approach can still be used effectively. Since the Theron commission made a healthy reinterpretation of this approach it also provides a good theoretical framework to analyse coloured poverty.

The socio-economic position of coloureds has improved markedly since the era of the Theron commission. Total fertility rates and infant mortality rates declined, while life expectancy increased. The educational status of coloureds increased considerably. There is, however, still a large disparity between rural and urban coloureds. The per capita income of coloureds almost doubled in this period. This rise in income can be attributed to an improvement in occupational status (which was in turn influenced by an improvement in educational status) as well as a decrease in wage discrimination. In spite of the overall improvement in the socio-economic position of coloureds, poverty rates did not decrease significantly since the era of the Theron Commission. Although poverty is still more widespread in rural areas, there has been a relative improvement in the socio-economic position of rural coloureds and agricultural labourers. This has partly been caused by the urbanisation of the rural poor. Coloured poverty is, however, still at much lower levels than black poverty.



Since the era of the Theron Commission the culture of poverty has been positively influenced by several factors: racial discrimination in public education and other social spending decreased, levels of education improved and contributed to the rise in per capita income, social work has become better focussed and is provided on a more equal basis and the socio-political emancipation of coloureds were achieved with the rise of a democratic society. However, it seems that the good economic growth rates during the 1960's and early 1970's provided the biggest thrust to the upward socio-economic mobility of coloureds and played a more important role than the Theron report or any other socio-political changes.

It can be concluded that the culture of poverty as it existed at the time of the Theron report has weakened considerably and that the approach should therefore not be used as the basic model to describe the socio-economic position of poor coloureds any more. Current anti-poverty measures should be focussed on job creation, community building and education.



## Opsomming

Armoede is 'n wydverspreide probleem in die kleurlinggemeenskap van Suid-Afrika. In 1976 het die Theron Kommissie ondersoek ingestel na kleurling armoede en hulle het drastiese veranderinge aan die apartheidstelsel voorgestel om die sosio-ekonomiese vooruitgang van kleurlinge te verseker. Die kommissie het aangevoer dat die armste 40% van die kleurlingbevolking in 'n toestand van chroniese gemeenskapsarmoede verkeer. Hierdie gevolgtrekking is gebaseer op die kultuur van armoede teorie, wat veronderstel dat 'n armoedesiklus kan ontstaan wanneer daar 'n wisselwerking is tussen negatiewe omgewingsfaktore en 'n interne proses van selfvoortplanting deur middel van die gesin. Die oorspronklike kultuur van armoede benadering was onderhewig aan verskeie misinterpretasies en kritiek en het derhalwe baie aanhang verloor. Tog kan die kultuur van armoede teorie steeds met vrug aangewend word indien dit korrek toegepas word. Aangesien die Theron Kommissie die oorspronklike teorie op 'n gesonde manier geherinterpreteer het, verskaf dit 'n goeie teoretiese raamwerk waarbinne kleurlingarmoede ondersoek kan word.

Die sosio-ekonomiese posisie van kleurlinge het 'n merkwaardige verbetering getoon sedert die era van die Theron Kommissie. Fertiliteitskoerse en suigelingsterftekoerse het afgeneem, terwyl lewensverwagting toegeneem het. Die onderwyspeil van kleurlinge het ook drasties verbeter, alhoewel daar steeds 'n groot gaping is tussen landelike en stedelike kleurlinge. Die per capita inkomste van kleurlinge het amper verdubbel in die periode. Die verhoging kan toegeskryf word aan 'n verhoogde beroepstatus (wat weer deur verbeterde onderwyspeile beïnvloed is) sowel as laer vlakke van loondiskriminasie. Ten spyte van die algehele verbetering in die sosio-ekonomiese posisie van kleurlinge, het armoedevlakke sedert die Theron era nie noemenswaardig verminder nie. Alhoewel armoede steeds wydverspreid is in landelike gebiede, het daar 'n relatiewe verbetering in die sosio-ekonomiese posisie van landelike kleurlinge en die plaaswerkersgemeenskap plaasgevind. Dit is deels veroorsaak



deur verstedeliking van arm landelike inwoners. Kleurling armoede is egter steeds op 'n baie laer vlak as swart armoede.

Sedert die era van die Theron Kommissie is die toestand van chroniese gemeenskapsarmoede deur verskeie positiewe faktore beïnvloed: rassediskriminasie ten opsigte van onderwys en ander sosiale besteding het verminder, vlakke van onderwys het verbeter en het bygedra tot 'n verhoging in per capita inkome, sosiale werk is beter gefokus en word op 'n meer gelyke skaal verskaf en met die demokratiseringsproses is die sosio-politiese emansipasie van kleurlinge verkry. Tog lyk dit of die goeie ekonomiese groei van die sestigerjare en vroeë sewentigerjare 'n groter invloed op die opwaartse sosio-ekonomiese mobiliteit van kleurlinge gehad het as die Theron verslag en ander sosio-politieke veranderinge.

Die gevolgtrekking kan gemaak word dat die kultuur van armoede soos dit gemanifesteer het in die tyd van die Theron verslag in so 'n mate verswak het dat die benadering nie meer gebruik moet word as die basiese model om die sosio-ekonomiese toestand van arm kleurlinge te beskryf nie. Dit beteken egter nie dat daar nie nog steeds akute armoedeprobleme in sekere dele van die kleurlinggemeenskap bestaan nie. Huidige armoede-verligtingsbeleid moet fokus op werkskepping, gemeenskapsbou en onderwys.

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED

<b>APO:</b>	African People's Organisation
<b>BMR:</b>	Bureau for Market Research
<b>COLTS:</b>	Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service
<b>CRC:</b>	Coloured Representative Council
<b>HSRC:</b>	Human Sciences Research Council
<b>HSL:</b>	Human Subsistence Level
<b>MLL:</b>	Minimum Level of Living
<b>OHS/IES:</b>	October Household Survey / Income and Expenditure Survey
<b>PAGAD:</b>	People Against Gangsterism And Drugs
<b>RDP:</b>	Reconstruction and Development Programme
<b>RF:</b>	Rural Foundation
<b>SLL:</b>	Supplemented Level of Living
<b>SMG:</b>	State Maintenance Grant

## Chapter One - Introduction

### 1.1. Background and problem identification

Poverty is a widespread phenomenon in South African society. Various estimates of poverty exist, which are all based on different poverty lines. According to a 1995 World Bank study prepared for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) office, the different estimations on the proportion of the population living in poverty range from about 35-55%. This is illustrated in Table 1.1.

**TABLE 1.1**

**COMPARISON OF SELECTED POVERTY LINES FOR SOUTH AFRICA  
(1993)**

Types of poverty lines	Monthly Rand amount cut-off	% of population Below Poverty line
1. Population cut-off at the:		
40th percentile of household ranked by adult equivalence	301	52.8
20th percentile of household ranked by adult equivalence	177.6	28.8
2. Minimum per capita caloric intake (at 2 000 Kcal per day)	143.2	39.3
3. Minimum per capita adult-equivalent caloric intake (at 2 500 Kcal per day)	185.4	42.3
4. Minimum and supplemented living levels per capita set by the Bureau of Market Research, University of South Africa		
Supplemented Level of Living (SLL)	220.1	56.7
Minimum Level of Living (MLL)	164.2	44.7
5. Per adult equivalent household subsistence level (HSL) set by the Institute for Planning Research, University of Port Elizabeth	251.1	36.2

**Source:** World Bank, 1995: 8

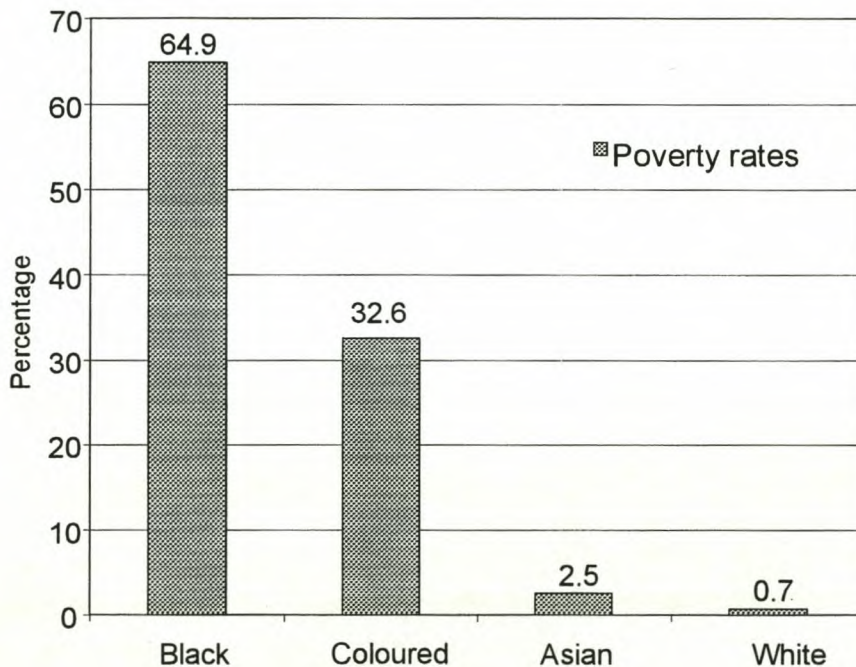
Due to our political history, poverty also has a strong racial dimension and policy makers know that one of the biggest challenges lies in the eradication of poverty amongst blacks, particularly in rural areas. However, significant



rates of poverty can also be found in large portions of the coloured<sup>1</sup> community. In the same study done by the World Bank, in which they used the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile of households ranked by their adult equivalent income as a poverty line, it was calculated that 64.9% or about two-thirds of blacks are poor, while 32.6% or about one-third of coloureds are poor. This is shown in Figure 1.1. Similarly, it can be seen that poverty rates among Asians and whites were negligible, compared to those of coloureds and blacks.

**FIGURE 1.1**

**POVERTY RATES BY RACE, 1993**  
(% OF EACH RACE GROUP WHO ARE POOR, BASED ON 40<sup>TH</sup> PERCENTILE POVERTY LINE)



**Source:** World Bank, 1995: 12

Due to the magnitude of the poverty problem and because of the heterogeneity amongst different groups of poor people, this thesis will focus on coloured poverty.

<sup>1</sup> The term coloured is not uncontroversial when used as a group identification name. In this study the term is merely used to provide clarity on the topic and not within a specific ideological framework.



The fact that roughly one-third of all coloureds are still poor today, must be understood in the proper context. In the first place it must be remembered that during the apartheid era, coloureds were not subjected to the same levels of economic and socio-political discrimination as blacks (Van der Berg, 1998). In addition to this dubious advantage, coloured people also have cultural and language ties with whites, which could have served as a lubricator in the process of reaching middle class status. Furthermore, the economic development of poor coloureds has been on the government agenda since the appointment of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to the Coloured Community (better known as the Theron Commission) in 1973. Against this background, the question arises why poverty is still such a widespread phenomenon amongst coloured people.

It is the aim of this thesis to gain an understanding of the dimensions of poverty in the coloured community and how it has changed since the era of the Theron Commission. In the process some poverty policy aspects will also be analysed.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework, scope and methodology**

The conceptual framework used by the Theron Commission will be used as the starting point to analyse the socio-economic changes that have taken place in the coloured community over the past three decades. The Theron Commission suggested that the broad layer of poverty stricken coloureds was trapped in a subculture of poverty, or as they called it, in a state of chronic community poverty. This was the result of long term downward socio-economic forces and the subsequent development of "stretched values" (which surfaced in high crime rate, poor family values, delinquency, etc.) in order to cope with these forces. The commission suggested drastic and widespread policy measures in order to eradicate this state of chronic community poverty. By using the concept of chronic community poverty as defined by the Theron Commission as a starting point, this thesis will seek to answer the following questions:



1. Were the theoretical assumptions on which the Theron Commission based its policy recommendations appropriate?
2. What happened to the socio-economic development of coloureds in the period since the Theron report?
3. What happened to the culture of poverty in the coloured community?
4. What policy suggestions can be made to enhance the upward socio-economic mobility of poor coloureds in future?

The different chapters of the thesis focus on these four aspects. Chapters Two and Three examine the soundness of the culture of poverty theory and its application by the Theron Commission. Chapter Two will start with an analysis of the role of cultural determinants in poverty studies. The second part of Chapter Two will contain an examination of the development of the culture of poverty theory as well as the most important points of critique that have been raised against the theory. Chapter Three will look at the different commissions of inquiry into poverty related matters in South Africa, from the first Carnegie investigation into the Poor White problem in the 1930's up to the second Carnegie investigation into poverty in the 1980's. The main focus of the chapter will, however, be on the Theron commission's analysis of the socio-economic position of coloureds and their usage of the subculture of poverty as a theoretical framework.

Chapters Four and Five will look at the socio-economic changes that have taken place in the coloured community over the past three decades and interpret them in terms of the culture of poverty approach. Chapter Four presents and interprets data on demographic changes, trends in education, income and job status and the incidence of poverty. Chapter Five provides a social perspective on the socio-economic changes reported in Chapter Four and a critical analysis of what happened to the culture of poverty in the coloured community in the 25 year period since the Theron report. Chapter Six contains a summary and some final conclusions and policy recommendations.

### **1.3 Contribution**

It is hoped that this thesis will make a contribution towards a better understanding of the socio-economic development of the coloured community over the past three decades. As this will also be the first attempt at making an assessment of the Theron Report from an economic point of view<sup>2</sup>, this study may provide some new perspectives on poverty research in South Africa. Lastly, it is hoped that some policy measures that could have an important impact on eradicating poverty in the coloured community can be identified and that this will also inform the wider poverty debate in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Nexus database there has so far only been one completed study which contained any element of research on the Theron Report (Ferreira, 1983). A study that is currently being conducted focuses on the historic significance of the Theron Report.



## **Chapter Two – The culture of poverty hypothesis in context**

### **2.1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

During the late 1950's and 1960's anthropologists in the USA developed the culture of poverty theory in order to explain poverty within certain communities. Within a few years the culture of poverty hypothesis gained much popularity among some economists, but since then it has again lost some of its appeal in the mainstream economic debate. This chapter will attempt to explain the culture of poverty theory within a broader context of poverty policy. This will be essential in understanding the Theron report, as the commission's findings regarding coloured poverty leaned heavily on the culture of poverty thesis.

The first section will provide a framework to deal with the concept of culture, which is central to the discussion. This will be followed by a discussion of the relative importance of cultural considerations in development thinking. The third section will give a chronological view on the evolution of the culture of poverty approach. The last section will give an overview of critique against the culture of poverty approach as well as complementary and opposing approaches when dealing with culture and poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all literature cited in this chapter, are publications of American origin. While this might be a possible weak point as far as the attainment of a balanced view is concerned, it is also unavoidable: the culture of poverty hypothesis was developed in America and basically all subsequent literature springs from American soil. For a European perspective a starting point might be: Mingione, E., (ed), 1996. *Urban Poverty and the Underclass*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA.



## **2.2 The concept of culture**

### **2.2.1 The problem of defining culture**

Culture is not an easily definable concept. Several studies have focused on simply trying to condense the wide range of definitions of culture into a few workable approaches.<sup>2</sup> Probably the biggest source of confusion when dealing with culture is that the concept cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Text books on cultural studies would typically include diverse topics such as the role of television, subcultures related to music, technological change, power, race, consumer patterns and globalisation, to name a few.

Many obstacles remain, such as the difficulty of measurement. Culture is qualitative and not quantitative and therefore does not fit neatly into the positivist tradition. The three most commonly used proxies are race, language and religion (e.g. Lian and Oneal, 1997: 64), but even this can still fail miserably to lay bare even the most basic differences in culture, let alone finer nuances.

Another point of contention is how culture gets carried forward through generations. Some scholars maintain that the family is the most important instrument, while others feel that the family plays a negligible role and one should rather look at various other forms of cultural "education". It is also debated to what extent adults still change their cultural identity.

When dealing with diverse cultural manifestations within a larger cultural community, namely subcultures, some more questions arise. Often people equate a subculture with a distinguishable group of people, showing a certain specific pattern of behaviour, which deviates from the norm of the larger society or which is absent from the rest of society. This does not mean that such a group has a different cultural identity than the larger society. In other



words, while the group might show some very unique patterns of behaviour, they might still have the same overarching pattern of behaviour as the society at large. What are the reasons for subcultural behaviour in a society and how does one treat these different patterns of behaviour?

Lastly different theories exist regarding the overlap between culture and economy. This question in particular will be tackled explicitly and implicitly in the rest of the thesis. We will now first provide a clear and concise framework, which can assist us in following a systematic approach to culture.

### **2.2.2 A framework to deal with culture**

Allen (1992: 344-346) provided a useful framework to deal with culture. He identified different approaches, which did not necessarily exclude one another and which can be helpful to capture some of the different dimensions of the interplay between culture and the economy. We will use his basic framework for the purpose of this study, adding some relevant observations by other authors.

#### **2.2.2.1 The generalised view**

The generalised view "encompasses the whole range of human activities which are learned and not instinctive, and which are transmitted from generation to generation through various learning processes" (Allen, 1992: 344). When using culture in such a generic sense it refers to all aspects of human life that are not biological. Culturalisation is thus a product of what happens to people after their birth. A classic definition of culture is: "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871: 1, Quoted from Valentine, 1968: 3). The shortcoming of

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading see: Kluckhohn, C. & Kroeber, A. (1952). *Culture*. Peabody Museum Papers, Vol 67 no1 Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.



this approach is that it is not geared for the analysis of more specific and unique problems in different societies.

#### 2.2.2.2 The expressive approach

Many people, when asked to define culture, would refer to the arts, might it be music, literature, theatre, painting or traditional dancing. In this sense culture is also not seen as the motivator of human action, but as something that is derived from it. This represents an expressive approach to culture. This approach often focuses on the physical manifestations as such and not on the creators. Therefore it does not necessarily have to comment on the *life-style* of the people themselves, but more often on creative techniques or aesthetic principles. Nevertheless, when analysing culture as a form of expression it can create a wealth of information about people's attitudes and aspirations. Currently, there is a strong focus on different types of music as a way to communicate cultural values, especially in third world countries. In one such study, Middleton (1992: 362-378) strikingly shows how music in South African townships was used as a form of political expression during the anti-apartheid struggle.

#### 2.2.2.3 The hierarchical approach

The dominant approach of Victorian times, the hierarchical approach, uses a stratified conception of culture in which one culture is seen as superior to another. This was enhanced by Darwin's theory of evolution. In the Western academic world this was articulated in the notion of 'high' culture (Western, Christian, democratic societies) and 'low' culture (traditional tribal communities). Unfortunately, the hierarchical approach has often been used as a mode of destruction of different cultural entities. Within the hierarchical tradition, even a neutral definition of culture can open the way for élitism and ethnocentrism, as is illustrated by the following quotation:



“For the social scientist there are no uncultured societies or even individuals. Every society has a culture, no matter how simple this culture may be, and every human being is cultured, in the sense of participating in some culture or another”

(Weber, 1958)

One might ask whether the hierarchical approach has any value for science. Allen (1992: 344) suggests two reasons why it should not be discarded. Firstly he remarks that “it is worth bearing in mind that it is common for human groups of all kinds to assert their superiority over others”. Secondly he argues that: “it is necessary to accept some hierarchical notions in order to avoid excessive cultural relativism”. He adds that cultural relativism, if taken too far: “can render any discussion about how life might be improved almost meaningless” (Allen, 1992: 4). This can be illustrated as follows: As economists we know that it will be very unlikely for a culture that does not place a high premium on the education of its working force to survive in the capitalist environment, and therefore we can say that such a culture is inferior to one with a culture of learning. These points of argument pave the way for an exciting use of the hierarchical approach, which stands in stark contrast to the more traditional interpretation. In other words, the hierarchical approach can be used to identify positive elements in different cultures and apply it to the rest

#### 2.2.2.4 The superorganic approach

According to this approach, culture is relatively independent from day-to-day life, but is rather seen as having an overarching influence on behavioural patterns. When using this approach, the observer “attempts to highlight the essential, aggregated characteristics of a particular group, and will look at how these characteristics have a bearing on what people do” (Allen, 1992: 345). This approach helps to understand the different ways people experience things and points out the logic behind certain ways of behaviour.



A danger of this approach lies in applying it in a simplistic manner, which might lead to misinterpretations.

#### 2.2.2.5 The holistic approach

The holistic approach realises that social phenomena of all kinds are interconnected (Allen, 1992: 345). As such it is impossible to divorce economics from kinship, religion or conceptions of gender. The obvious shortcoming of this approach is that "it is difficult to systematise the complex data produced, and it is hard to draw a line between what is relevant and what is not" (Allen, 1992: 345). This can be avoided by focusing on the inner logic of lifestyles as in the case of the superorganic approach. Therefore these two approaches are often combined.

#### 2.2.2.6 The pluralistic approach

Another relevant approach to culture is found in the pluralistic use, which highlights the "existence of multiple cultural forms within political or socio-economic units" (Allen, 1992: 345). The strength of the pluralistic use is its accommodation of subcultural behaviour (see Section 2.2.1). It does not assume that there is necessarily a boundary between society and culture and therefore focuses on the process by which shared values are constantly being negotiated and are always changing. This approach is often used in a complementary way to other approaches.

#### 2.2.2.7 The hegemonic approach

The hegemonic approach focuses on the relationship between *culture* and *power*. It holds the basic assumption that cultural forms are pluralistic, i.e. that multiple cultural forms exist, but adds that social institutions reinforce the values of the dominant group. The power of the dominant group is often linked to a hegemonic cultural ideology. Allen (1992: 346) states that "social



dominance of all kinds, whether political, economic, aesthetic, ethnic, religious or sexual, is not simply maintained by force, but involves the consent of the subordinate". This approach might sometimes be useful when analysing an apparent master-servant situation of different cultural groups within one political boundary.

### **2.3 The relative importance of cultural considerations in economic development**

When reading recent publications in the field of development studies, it seems that cultural considerations play a subordinate role. Vernon Ruttan described the current state as follows:

"Cultural considerations have been cast into the 'underworld' of developmental thought and practice. It would be hard to find a leading scholar in the field of developmental economics who commit herself or himself in print to the proposition that in terms of explaining different patterns of political and economic development ... a central variable is culture."

(Quoted from: Lian, & Oneal, 1997: 61)

This does not mean economists never valued the role of culture in poverty very highly. In fact, many commentators maintain that the current "undervaluation" of culture is a reaction against the "overvaluation" of culture, which was prevalent in the first half of the century (Allen, 1992: 331). It is more correct, though, to say that there was a popular misinterpretation of the role of culture in the first half of the century. This remark calls for further explanation.

In modern economic thought, one can distinguish two opposite viewpoints regarding the role of culture, namely conservatism and liberalism (Wilson, 1987: 3-19 and Le Roux, 1978: 8-9). Before we continue using these two terms it is necessary to put their usage in the proper context. Conservatism



and liberalism are widely used terms in the capitalist world to describe different political frameworks within which people work. In different countries and in different situations, both terms can carry rather different meanings. For instance, in the UK and in Europe liberalism is commonly associated with a belief in free markets and *homo oeconomicus*, while in the USA it refers to people that are positioned left on the political spectrum and belief that the government should help the poor. In this thesis, however, conservatism and liberalism are first and foremost being used to classify the two main analytical approaches to the role of culture in economic development and not to describe political views (see Le Roux, 1978; 8-9). Unfortunately in the literature the terms are often also used to describe political viewpoints, to the effect that it becomes virtually impossible to make a clear distinction between the two usages. As the bulk of the literature was written from an American viewpoint, the political meaning of liberalism and conservatism must also be seen from this perspective.

The conservative view assumes that culture plays an important role in determining the socio-economic position of an individual or group of people. This view was predominant right through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The liberal view on the other hand, assumes that culture plays a relatively small role in economic life and rather looks at a variety of other influencing factors. This view became increasingly popular in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is currently dominating the debate.

Within the conservative paradigm there are a number of different approaches towards culture and poverty. The harshest version, which is based on racial differences, was prominent in the conservative paradigm right up to the 1950's. This view, called biological determinism, simply stated that some racial groups, e.g. African Americans or Black South Africans, would never be able to reach the same socio-economic status as whites due to their genetic inferiority (Le Roux, 1978: 9-10). The extent to which this theory was supported is illustrated by Robert Cherry (1995: 1119) when he remarks about the situation in the USA in the early 1940's: "...there was a broad consensus within the economics profession that the inferior status of African Americans



reflected genetic inferiority." Today, such a theory would be equated to blatant racism and it is therefore not surprising that biological determinism is totally rejected in the mainstream economic debate.

It seems that with the rejection of biological determinism, economists also rejected the broader conservative paradigm, albeit unconsciously. This has led to a situation where more acceptable and more relevant approaches within the conservative paradigm are being ignored. But what are the other theories within the conservative framework?

With biological determinism out of contention, many scholars opted for a cultural inferiority approach. (The term cultural inferiority must not be confused with genetic inferiority or biological determinism.) This implied that people, although not genetically inferior, might have such an inferior culture that they simply did not have the ability to integrate into the society. This theory was extremely popular as an attempt to explain the poverty problems of the large numbers of European immigrants in different parts of the New World. It was asserted that these people represented the poorest stock of their home countries and this led to their poor economic performance (Cherry, 1995: 119-120).

Closely related to the cultural inferiority approach, is the prisoner of culture approach. Within this framework "it is . . . claimed that once a people has acquired a pattern of behaviour more suited to the past, once they have been imbued with values and norms of a bygone era, they can simply not adapt themselves to a modern economy" (Le Roux, 1978: 11). Like the cultural inferiority approach, the prisoner of culture approach is often contested. Allen (1992: 338-343) convincingly shows how the prisoner of culture approach, often used to describe North African pastoralists' state of underdevelopment, fails miserably.

In other instances, culture is seen as a handicap instead of a prison. This implies that people might not be able to integrate fully into the economy, due to *generic differences* in their cultural values and practices and that of the



dominant group or mainstream economy. Language differences and the wrong vocational training could for instance hinder a group from taking part in the mainstream economy.

Lastly, we can distinguish conservative theories, which, apart from pointing towards cultural problems, also emphasise the importance of cause and effect. These theories normally try to lay bare exploitative relationships, and a vicious circle of prejudice and impoverishment which has led to the backward situation of a group. This group of theories includes the culture of poverty theory and other related theories on the economic underclass.

Let us now turn to the second paradigm, namely Liberalism. It is safe to say that the bulk of contemporary poverty theory can be placed squarely within this paradigm. Centrally stands the belief in *homo oeconomicus*, or the rational economic agent. Liberal views most often simply omit any discussion on cultural determinants when dealing with poverty differences among groups. But how does the liberal paradigm react to the very significant correlation that sometimes exists between culture and socio-economic position? The answer lies in the way it treats cause and effect. Culture is never seen as the primary cause of poverty. Poverty is rather perceived to be caused by factors such as racial discrimination, language barriers or vocational training, which influence a certain cultural group (e.g. Model, 1993: 191-194).

A third paradigm, which stands somewhat loose from the two opposing paradigms just discussed, is the dependency theory (Le Roux, 1978: 8-9). This model more or less rejects the conservative and liberal models and states that economic underdevelopment should be viewed as the result of a dependency or exploitative relationship between underdeveloped and developed groups or nations. This approach is often used to describe the dynamics of colonialisation, which has left a wide gap between the socio-economic status of the colonial empires and their former colonies. In this process "the traditional economic activities of a people are destroyed, with the result that they become impoverished" (Le Roux, 1978: 64). This approach



has also been used to analyse the role of apartheid in the creation of poverty in South Africa.

It can be anticipated that theories stemming from the three different paradigms might often seem very close to each other. This is because they often touch on the same variables such as racial discrimination or language barriers. They might also use the same conceptual approaches to culture, as was discussed in the previous section<sup>3</sup>. The subtle differences in the different paradigms can then only be seen after evaluating, for instance, policy proposals. This can be explained using the case of social welfare. It will be shown in the next section that when confronted with an increase in poverty levels within the African American community in America, liberal and conservative writers suggested different social welfare solutions. Liberal writers made a plea for more social benefits for the poor, pointing towards the inadequacy of existing benefits. Conservative writers, on the other hand proposed less social benefits, claiming that social benefits has led to a culture of dependency.

The following section will make use of a chronological approach to show the evolution of thinking on culture and poverty, with special focus on the culture of poverty hypothesis.

## **2.4 The culture of poverty hypothesis**

### **2.4.1 Background**

As noted earlier, racial prejudice was at the order of the day among economists during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the extent to which especially American development writing was dominated by racial prejudice, still comes as a surprise. The culture of poverty approach was

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<sup>3</sup> It must be added though, that some of the conceptual approaches fit more neatly into the conservative paradigm, e.g. the hierarchical approach, while others fit better into the liberal paradigm or the dependency paradigm, e.g. the hegemonic approach.



developed towards the end of this period. The question arises whether the culture of poverty approach was just a softer version of the racist approach, or whether it constituted a genuine leap forward into a non-racist approach. This section will use a chronological approach to show the evolution of the culture of poverty thesis, its academic roots and how it relates to both the conservative and liberal paradigms.

#### **2.4.2 Gunnar Myrdal and the vicious circle**

The most important contribution that prepared the way for the formulation of the culture of poverty hypothesis can be found in the work of Gunnar Myrdal. He developed the concept of a vicious circle of prejudice and exploitation that chained African Americans to poverty.

The British-American intellectual world of the early 1940's was still inundated with racial prejudice (Myrdal, 1944: 83-112). As far as they were concerned the African American was a sad case of genetic inferiority. The only chance of becoming a civilised human being, was to interbreed with the superior white race. According to Cherry (1995: 119) this consensus was already institutionalised in 1891, with the founding of the American Economic Association and was supported by association publications by especially Frederick Hoffman (1896) and Josef Tillinghast (1902)<sup>4</sup>.

The first steps toward the formulation of a culture of poverty thesis could also be found squarely within a framework of racial differentiation. Leading progressive intellectuals at the time, such as John R. Commons and Walter Wilcox, rejected the notion that (white) Southern and Eastern European immigrants were genetically inferior. Instead they offered a "culture of poverty" type of explanation for their socio-economic backwardness. This analysis did not extend towards African Americans. Cherry (1995: 1120) comments on this as follows: "While Progressives, such as Commons and

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<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, F., 1896. Race Traits and Tendencies in the American Negro. In: *American Economics Association Publications*, First Series, May 1896: 1-329. Tillinghast, J., 1902. The Negro in Africa and America. In: *American Economics Association Publications*, 3d (March 1902): 401-638.



Walter Wilcocks, were optimistic that these newer immigrants could be integrated into society once their *cultural inferiority* was overcome, they were pessimistic with regard to African Americans. Like Hoffman and Tillinghast, they believed that African Americans were *genetically inferior*" (own emphasis). It is also important to note that there was not yet a true culture of poverty hypothesis for the European immigrants, but rather one of cultural inferiority<sup>5</sup>.

Before we look at the role played by Gunnar Myrdal, we can name another contributor, Booker T. Washington. He was an African American intellectual, who was also respected among his white colleagues. Washington rejected arguments of the genetic inferiority of African Americans saying that the "Negro is behind the white man because he has not had the same chances, and not from any inherent difference in his nature or desires" (1902, quoted from Cherry, 1995: 1122). However, Washington still believed in the cultural inferiority of the African Americans. Although the theories of Washington were quite revolutionary, they did not manage to change the direction of thought of intellectuals.

The work of Gunnar Myrdal was extremely important in shaping race politics. Not only was he a very highly acclaimed scholar, but he was also one of the first to reject the genetic inferiority of African Americans (Cherry, 1995:1125). In 1944, Myrdal published a book that would change racial thought in America, called *An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. In this lengthy document, Myrdal convincingly showed how the problems found within the African American community were caused by problems of racial attitude and exploitation. About their socio-economic situation, Myrdal developed a hypothesis of a vicious circle of cumulative causation:

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<sup>5</sup> Commons, J., R. 1920. *Races and Immigrants in America*. Macmillan, New York. Wilcocks, W., 1908. Negro Criminality. In: *Studies in the American Race Problem*, edited by Alfred Stone and Walter Wilcocks. Macmillan, New York.



“There is a cultural and institutional tradition that white people exploit Negroes. In the beginning Negroes were owned as property. When slavery disappeared, caste remained. Within this framework of adverse tradition the average Negro in every generation has had a most disadvantageous start. Discrimination against Negroes is thus rooted in this tradition of economic exploitation. It is justified by false racial beliefs . . . This depreciation of the Negro’s potentialities is given a semblance of proof by low standards of efficiency, reliability, ambition and morals actually displayed by the average Negro. This is what the white man ‘sees’ and he opportunistically exaggerates what he sees. He ‘knows’ that the Negro is not ‘capable’ of handling a machine, running a business or learning a profession. As we know that these deficiencies are not inborn in him – or, in any case, in no significant degree – we must conclude that they are caused, directly or indirectly, by the very poverty we are trying to explain, and by other discriminations in legal protection, public health, housing, education and in every other sphere of life.”

(Myrdal, 1944: 207-208)

Myrdal concluded that the poor performance of the African American was caused by the “very poverty we are trying to explain” and “by other discriminations”. Poverty thus has two causes. Firstly, it is caused by external factors such as racial discrimination, and secondly, poverty tends to perpetuate itself over generations. This conclusion comes remarkably close to the culture of poverty thesis that was later proposed by Oscar Lewis and others.

### **2.4.3 The culture of poverty theory as developed by Oscar Lewis**

As was shown in the previous section, there has been a move towards a culture of poverty hypothesis even before Oscar Lewis first used the term in his book *Five families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (1959:2). However, this contribution forms a landmark in the debate<sup>6</sup>. His

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis was somewhat disappointed with the way in which his hypothesis has been misunderstood and restated his arguments clearly in later documents, such as: *LA VIDA, A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty*.



arguments stated in *LA VIDA, A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty* (1965: [xlii-liii]) and *Anthropological Essays* (1970: 67-80) will now be examined.

#### 2.4.3.1 Factors leading to a culture of poverty

Lewis found the impetus for the culture of poverty theory with the distinction between the poverty itself and the culture within which it existed. He therefore refrained from focusing only on the individual personality, but rather focuses upon the group – that is, the family and the community. He commented on this as follows:

“As an anthropologist I have tried to understand poverty and its associated traits as a culture or, more accurately, as a subculture with its own structure and rationale, as a way of life which is passed down from generation to generation along family lines...”

(Lewis, 1965: [xliv])

This statement might, if read without proper context, point towards a generalised framework that could be made applicable to all poor people. However, Lewis took great care to explain that his model only served to explain a rather specific set of circumstances:

“The distinction between poverty and the culture of poverty is basic to the model described here. There are degrees of poverty and many kinds of poor people. The culture of poverty refers to one way of life shared by poor people in given historical and social contexts. The economic traits that I have listed for the culture of poverty are necessary but not sufficient to define the phenomena I have in mind. There are a number of historical examples of very poor segments of the population which do not have a way of life that I would describe as a subculture of poverty.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlviii])



Although Lewis stated that a culture of poverty could develop within different historical contexts, he highlighted a combination of conditions, which may trigger a culture of poverty:

1. A cash economy, wage labour and production for profit;
2. A persistently high rate of unemployment and underemployment for unskilled labour;
3. Low wages;
4. The failure to provide social, political, and economic organisation, either on a voluntary basis or by government imposition, for the low-income population;
5. The existence of a bilateral kinship system rather than a unilateral one; and
6. The existence of a set of values in the dominant class which stresses the accumulation of wealth and property, the possibility of upward mobility, and thrift, and explains low economic status as the result of personal inadequacy of inferiority.

(Lewis, 1965: [xliii-xliv])

In an extreme generalisation, it can be said that a culture of poverty most often exists among poor (in the wider sense of the word), disorganised people living in a capitalist society. Lewis therefore excluded certain groups of poor people from a culture of poverty. Some of the examples he gave are:

“Many of the primitive or preliterate people...In spite of their poverty, they have a relatively integrated, satisfying and self-sufficient culture. Even the simplest food-gathering and hunting tribes have a considerable amount of organization – bands and band chiefs, tribal councils, and local self-government – elements which are not found in the culture of poverty.”

and;

“In India the lower castes ... may be desperately poor both in the villages and in cities, but most of them are integrated into the larger society and have their own ... organizations which cut across village lines and give them a considerable amount of power.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlvi-xxvii])



From these two examples Lewis' emphasis on organisational issues comes to the fore. A few paragraphs earlier he commented on this issue as follows:

“The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty are the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and who are already alienated from it. Thus, landless rural workers who migrate to the cities can be expected to develop a culture of poverty much more readily than the migrants from the stable peasant villages with a well-organized traditional culture.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlv])

Another example given by Lewis of an absence of a culture of poverty (though admittedly of a speculative nature), is that of socialist economies. He based this theory on limited experience in Cuba. Lewis argued that these people were highly organised and were not as hopeless and apathetic as slum dwellers in a capitalist environment. There is much resistance in the Western world against a Castro-type socialism/communism. One dubious advantage is probably the fact that it smoothes out class differences between the middle and lower class. Seen in context, Lewis did not attempt to propagate socialism or discredit capitalism, but rather tried to show that the culture of poverty was an unwanted side-effect of capitalist society which could not be left unchallenged.

Lewis concluded as follows:

“In effect, we find that in primitive societies, and in caste societies, the culture of poverty does not develop. In socialist, fascist, and highly developed capitalist societies with a welfare state, the culture of poverty tends to decline. I suspect that the culture of poverty flourishes in, and is generic to, the early free enterprise stage of capitalism and that it is also endemic in colonialism.”

(Lewis, 1965: [1])



#### 2.4.3.2 The culture of poverty as adaptive measure

The next important premise of the theory is that a culture of poverty does not exist within a community because of an inherent cultural inferiority of this group of people<sup>7</sup>. It rather exists on a cross-national level within poor communities, as an adaptation to their environment:

“The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalist society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xliv])

#### 2.4.3.3 The self-perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty

Another premise of Lewis' theory was that a culture of poverty is of a self-perpetuating nature:

“The culture of poverty, however, is not only an adaptation to a set of objective conditions of a larger society. Once it comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on the children. By the time slum children are six or seven years old, they usually have absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlv])

It does not matter which paradigm is used when analysing poverty, it is a rather obvious observation that the socio-economic position of a child plays an important role in the determination of his/her socio-economic position as

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis did not emphasise this notion when explaining the culture of poverty – it was rather assumed from the outset.



an adult. A child growing up in dire poverty, unable to attend school, is likely to eventually become a low-wage worker, and if he does, his children's chances of finishing school and reaching middle class status will shrink accordingly. In *Five families: Mexican Case Studies in a Culture of Poverty* (1959: 23-350), Lewis showed how families in different stages of rural-urban transition and in different stages of upward mobility serve as agents to perpetuate the culture of poverty<sup>8</sup>. A similar approach is used in *LA VIDA, A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty*, and in later studies

#### 2.4.3.4 The characteristics of the culture of poverty

We have identified the conditions that could lead to a culture of poverty and will subsequently look at the characteristics of the phenomenon. Lewis described the culture of poverty in four different categories, namely:

- The relationship between the subculture and the larger society;
- The nature of the slum community;
- The nature of the family; and
- The attitudes, values and character structure of the individual.

When looking at *the relationship between the subculture and the larger society*, Lewis' argued that

“the lack of effective participation and integration of the poor in the major institutions of the larger society is one of the crucial characteristics of the culture of poverty”.

(Lewis, 1965: [xlv])

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<sup>8</sup> The first case study represents a peasant-family living in a rural village. The second family is in transition from village to city live. The third family represents urbanised lower class citizens. The fourth family combines working-class and lower middle-class traits. The fifth case represents a new rich family, of whom the father has worked himself up from a slum childhood.



According to Lewis this lack of participation in the larger community can result from:

“...a variety of factors which may include lack of economic resources, segregation and discrimination, fear, suspicion, or apathy.../ Low wages, chronic unemployment and underemployment lead to low income, lack of property ownership, absence of savings, absence of food reserves in the homes, and a chronic shortage of cash. These conditions reduce the possibility of effective participation in the larger economic system ”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlv-xlvi]).

He went on to describe the situation of these people:

“They have very low levels of literacy and education, do not belong to labour unions, are not members of political parties, generally do not participate in the general welfare agencies, and make very little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums, or art galleries. They have a critical attitude toward some of the basic institutions of the dominant classes, hatred of the police, mistrust of government and those in high position, and a cynicism which extends even to the church.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlvi])

Another important observation made by Lewis is that people in a culture of poverty have developed a different set of values which, although reminiscent of the middle class, rather represents “...the development of local solutions to local problems”. Scholars often refer to this as “stretched values” (Rodman, 1963: 205-215). Lewis described this as follows:

“People with a culture of poverty are aware of middle-class values, talk about them, and even claim some of them as their own; but on the whole, they do not live by them. Thus it is important to distinguish between what they say and what they do. For example, many will tell you that marriage by law, by the church, or by both, is the ideal form of marriage; but few will marry. For men who have no steady jobs or other sources of income, who do not own property



and have no wealth to pass on to their children, who are present-time oriented and who want to avoid the expense and legal difficulties involved in formal marriage and divorce, free union and consensual marriage makes a lot of sense. Women will often turn down offers of marriage because they feel that marriage ties them down to men who are immature, punishing, and generally unreliable.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlvi])

According to Lewis, the second dimension of the culture of poverty can be found in the *nature of the slum community*. Here he pointed out poor housing conditions and other facilities, overcrowding and once again minimal organisation. There is no community participation in the normal sense of the word, although under certain favourable circumstances “there may be a sense of community and *esprit de corps*”. Lewis argued that regardless of the sense of community that exists, normally “a sense of territoriality develops which sets off the slum neighborhoods from the rest of the city” (1965: [xlvi-xlvii]).<sup>9</sup>

The third dimension that features in Lewis’ analysis is *family life*. He highlighted, among others, the following characteristics:

“... the absence of childhood..., early initiation into sex, free unions or consensual marriages, ...the abandonment of wives and children, a trend towards female- or mother-centred families..., a strong disposition to authoritarianism, lack of privacy, and competition for limited goods and maternal affection.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlvii])

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard he also commented on the situation among blacks in South Africa at that stage: “In South Africa the sense of territoriality grows out of the segregation enforced by the government, which confines the rural migrants to specific locations.” (1956: [xlv]) In another section though, he argues that the segregation of these migrants into separate locations together with repression and discrimination led to the development of a greater sense of identity and group consciousness. Where the first factor leaves room for the development of a culture of poverty, the second factor would inhibit this.



Lastly, we can look at *characteristics of the individual* living in a culture of poverty. A full description of the traits of such an individual can be found in Appendix 1. We will only discuss the most important characteristics that Lewis outlined. An individual in the culture of poverty would experience:

“a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, and of inferiority.../ Other traits include a high incidence of maternal deprivation, orality, weak ego structure, confusion of sexual identification, a lack of impulse control, a strong present-time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification and to plan for the future, a sense of resignation and fatalism, a widespread belief in male superiority, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlvii-xlviii])

Lewis also pointed out that the people live in tremendous ignorance of the larger environment: “They know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life” (Lewis, 1965: [xliiii]).

When analysing the characteristics or traits of the individual Lewis had important propositions (1970: 73):

- “The traits fall into a number of clusters” and are often “functionally related within each cluster”;
- “None of the traits, taken individually, is distinctive *per se* of the subculture of poverty. It is their conjunction, their function, and their patterning that define the subculture”;
- The subculture of poverty as defined by these traits, will have a statistical profile and “within a single slum there will probably be a gradient from culture of poverty families to families without a culture of poverty” and;
- “The profiles of the subculture of poverty will probably differ in systematic ways with the difference in the national cultural contexts of which they are a part.”



These propositions advise us not to generalise when looking for a culture of poverty within communities. One argument that Lewis did however carry right through his model is that a lack of participation in the larger community is typical to a culture of poverty. When trying to define the existence of a culture of poverty on a cross-national level, Lewis concluded that:

“Traits that reflect lack of participation in the institutions of the larger society or an outright rejection – in practice, if not in theory – would be the crucial traits. / When the poor become class conscious<sup>10</sup> or active members of trade-union organizations or when they adopt an internationalist outlook on the world, they are no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may be desperately poor. Any movement, be it religious, pacifist, or revolutionary, which organizes and gives hope to the poor and which effectively promotes solidarity and a sense of identification with larger groups, destroys the psychological and social core of the culture of poverty.”

(Lewis, 1965: [xlviii])

To round off his arguments, Lewis stated that there are also some positive elements in a culture of poverty. He finds this especially in the way these people “develop a capacity for spontaneity, for the enjoyment of the sensual, the indulgence of the impulse...” and in the way they can adapt to anything that life throws at them. But then he adds:

“However, on the whole it seems to me that it is a thin, relatively superficial culture. There is a great deal of pathos, suffering, and emptiness among those who live in the culture of poverty. It does not provide much support or satisfaction and its encouragement of mistrust tends to magnify helplessness and isolation. Indeed, the poverty of culture is one of the crucial aspects of the culture of poverty”

(Lewis, 1965: [li-lij]).

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis argued that people living in a culture of poverty are not so much class conscious, as they are conscious of status symbols.



#### 2.4.3.5 Eradicating the culture of poverty

Lewis saw the culture of poverty as very problematic and concluded that “it is easier to eliminate poverty than the culture of poverty”. Therefore, “...improved economic opportunities, though absolutely essential and of the highest priority, are not sufficient to alter basically or eliminate the subculture of poverty” (1970: 79).

Lewis suggested that the percentage of the population living in a culture of poverty would make a difference to the way the problem is tackled. In a country like America where only a small number of people are living in a culture of poverty it would be best to “raise their level of income and incorporate them into the middle class”. This should be accompanied by a “reliance on psychiatric treatment” in order to help eradicate the culture of poverty traits (1965: [lii]).

This strategy may seem futile in a country where a large percentage of the population is living in a culture of poverty. The resources would simply not be enough to both raise their level of income and to do social work on such a large scale. Here Lewis suggested that:

“...people within a culture of poverty may seek a more revolutionary solution. By creating basic structural changes in society, by redistributing wealth, by organizing the poor and giving them a sense of belonging, of power, and of leadership, revolutions frequently succeed in abolishing some of the basic characteristics of the culture of poverty even when they do not succeed in abolishing poverty itself.”

(Lewis, 1965: [lii])

Whatever the type of solution Lewis suggested, he was rather pessimistic about a “quick fix”, saying that the elimination of the subculture of poverty “is a process that will take more than a single generation, even under the best circumstances...” (1979: 79).



#### 2.4.3.6 Summary of Lewis' arguments

The model of Lewis can be summarised as follows:

- There is a distinction between poverty and the culture of poverty;
- The culture of poverty exists only under a certain set of conditions, which mostly, but not always include physical deprivation;
- The culture of poverty is an adaptive measure to external factors;
- Once in existence, the culture of poverty has a self-perpetuating nature;
- People within a culture of poverty are always poorly organised;
- People within a culture of poverty are not fully integrated into the larger society;
- People within a culture of poverty generally have harmful family patterns;
- Individuals within a culture of poverty have adopted certain distinctive traits which deviate from middle class values and normally tend to aggravate their socio-economic position; and
- It is not easy to eradicate a culture of poverty. Apart from an improvement in the socio-economic position of the people, psychiatric treatment, and in some cases even a revolution, will be necessary.

At first sight Lewis' theory seems very attractive and neatly worked out. Unfortunately, other writers have pointed out a number of conceptual and methodological weaknesses. The validity of the theory will be discussed in the remainder of this section, as different perspectives are added to this basic approach set out by Lewis.

#### **2.4.4 Popularisation of the culture of poverty**

After Lewis first proposed a culture of poverty in 1959, it took only a few years for his theory to gain wide acceptance. The main proponent was undoubtedly Michael Harrington. In his book, *The Other America*, which was published in 1962, he claimed that roughly 25% of the American population or 50 million people were living in poverty (Harrington, 1962: 175). This book raised a lot of public interest in the poverty question and played a major role in instigating



the National Antipoverty programme in the United States (Lewis, 1965: [xlii]). He used the culture of poverty concept to describe the problem, and it quickly became a buzzword in academic circles.

His main focus was to present the problem of poverty to the affluent part of America in such a way that they could recognise both the magnitude of the problem and the fact that much of these people's misery were caused by factors out of their control. Therefore he used the concepts of the vicious circle of Myrdal and the culture of poverty of Lewis to describe their relative helplessness. He highlighted the different groups of people that were plagued by poverty, such as the unemployed and underemployed, blacks, rural people and elderly people and dealt convincingly with typical middle class "misconceptions and prejudices that literally blind the eyes" (Harrington, 1962: 14). Unfortunately, in the process he stumbled over some extremely important theoretical issues of the culture of poverty concept. We will now take a closer look at how he dealt with the culture of poverty.

When explaining his view on the culture of poverty Harrington (1962: 14-18) incorporates the ideas of Myrdal and Lewis. He starts out by describing the vicious circle of Myrdal:

"But the real explanation of why the poor are where they are is that they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry, or in the wrong racial or ethnic group. Once the mistake has been made, they could have been paragons of will and morality, but most of them would never even have had a chance to get out of the other America. .../ The individual cannot usually break out of this vicious circle. Neither can the group, for it lacks the social energy and political strength to turn its misery into a cause. Only the larger society with its help and resources, can really make it possible for these people to help themselves."

(Harrington: 1962: 14-15)



Harrington then expands the idea towards that of a culture of poverty:

“There is an even richer way of describing this same, general idea: Poverty in the United States is a culture, an institution, a way of life. .../ There is, in short, a language of the poor, psychology of the poor, a world view of the poor. To be impoverished is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates the society. .../ The family structure of the poor, for instance, is different from that of the rest of the society. There are more homes without a father, there are less marriage, more early pregnancy and, ...markedly different attitudes towards sex. As a result of this, ...hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, of children in the other America never know stability and ‘normal’ affection.”

(Harrington, 1962: 16-18)

Apart from these introductory remarks, Harrington does not give much more attention to defining the concept as such. The most important failure of Harrington is to ignore the critically important distinction between poverty and the culture of poverty. This can already be seen in his definition of the culture of poverty: “Poverty ... is a culture, an institution, a way of life” (1962: 16). Harrington also refers to the different groups of poor people, such as the aged or African Americans as “every subculture of the other America” (1962: 169). In other places he would talk about “the citizens of the culture of poverty” (1962: 191) or simply “the culture of poverty” (1962: 158) when referring to the poor. By using poverty and the culture of poverty as interchangeable, Harrington creates the idea that the culture of poverty is endemic to all situations of poverty. It can also be seen from the above quotations that Harrington had no proper grasp of the different nuances of culture and subculture. These points will all prove to be later points of critique against the culture of poverty theory.

Harrington’s failure to distinguish between poverty and the culture of poverty also makes it difficult for him to get a good grip on the other theoretical aspects of the culture of poverty as set out by Lewis. In spite of this he still gives a very clear description of the factors contributing towards the poverty of



the different groups and also of the self-perpetuating nature of poverty. It must be added that the weak point of *The Other America* - its apparent theoretical misconceptions - did not necessarily undermine the important role that the book played. Harrington avoided extensive theoretical issues and tried to make the book accessible to the layman. He wanted to give facts and figures regarding poverty that would catch the eye of the public, and that would stir national action against poverty. In this he succeeded.

In conclusion it can be said that Harrington's contribution towards the conceptualisation of a culture of poverty model can be questioned. Harrington used the concept in a general, unscientific way, causing the theory to lose much of its analytical strength. Later on, Lewis commented on Harrington's work in *The Other America* as follows: "... he used it [the culture of poverty concept] in a somewhat broader and less technical sense than I had intended" (1965: [xlii]). These misinterpretations of the culture of poverty by Harrington and others led Lewis to comment further: "The phrase [the culture of poverty] is a catchy one and has become widely used and misused" (1965: [xlii]). Lewis also felt that although the concept gained a lot of popularity, it had not been discussed in detail in professional journals. Very soon afterwards the first critical assessments started appearing. Before we look at the criticism of the culture of poverty, we need to analyse one of the important sources of critique, namely its relationship with the conservative paradigm of development thinking.

#### **2.4.5 The relationship between the culture of poverty hypothesis and the conservative paradigm of development thinking**

As stated earlier, there are areas of convergence between the conservative and the liberal paradigm. It is certain that with the culture of poverty hypothesis, both Lewis and Harrington tried to move away from strong conservative visions on poverty. Lewis later gave his own view on this: "There is nothing in the concept that puts the onus of poverty on the character of the poor" (1970: 79). However, it seems that the culture of poverty



hypothesis did not pose any threat to conservative writers. This was possible due to the concept of interaction between structural downward forces and the perpetuating nature of poverty itself. This left room for conservative writers to focus on the perpetuating nature of poverty and hence blame the cause of poverty on the poor themselves. Katz comments on this as follows:

“Lewis and others...hoped to put the idea to liberal political purposes [in the USA this would imply leftwing political purposes] as a force energising activist, interventionist public policy...Nonetheless, others with more conservative agendas turned the concept’s original politics on its head. The culture of poverty became a euphemism for the pathology of the undeserving poor, an explanation for their condition, an excuse,...for both inaction and punitive public policy.”

(Katz, 1993:12-13)

The biggest landmark in the relationship between the culture of poverty and the conservative paradigm was the leak of a confidential governmental report, written by Daniel Moynihan (Leacock, 1971: 11; Katz, 1993: 13 and Miller, 1993: 258). Katz wryly states that with this report “the culture of poverty fused with racial politics”. Although Moynihan never used the term culture of poverty explicitly, he did work within the framework. Moynihan concluded that the perpetuation of black poverty was by and large due to bad family structures of African-Americans. Although he admitted that initial factors such as slavery and racial discrimination led to the impoverishment of black people, it was downplayed by the self-perpetuating nature of their poverty. Out of the Moynihan report followed that the culture of poverty hypothesis was interpreted together with other stronger versions of radical conservatism. One of the most controversial books of this kind was *Permanent Poverty: An American Syndrome*, by Ben Seligman (1968). He concluded that due to the culture of poverty, it would be impossible to eradicate poverty:

“The poor had become a hidden subculture of America, a culture that perpetuated itself in endless cycles, a culture beyond the reach of the contemporary welfare state. /... Those traits that accompany the subculture of



poverty...will pass from generation to generation to create unseen chains that constitute a social syndrome”.

(Seligman, 1968: 217)

Seligman was convinced that even the anti-poverty programme of the government was not a worthwhile exercise, as it would not be able to penetrate the culture of poverty. According to Valentine (1971: 216-218), this strong focus on the social pathologies of the poor steered the national anti-poverty programme to focus more on destroying the perceived culture of poverty, i.e. the African-American culture, than poverty itself.

#### **2.4.6 Critique by Charles Valentine and other liberal writers**

The liberal writers at that time reacted very strongly against the culture of poverty theory of Lewis and its interpretation by other writers. In 1966 the American Anthropological Association held a critical symposium on the culture of poverty concept. The series of papers that was presented at the symposium eventually led to the publication of a book, *The Culture of Poverty, A Critique*, edited by Eleanor Burke Leacock in 1971. Prior to this publication, Charles Valentine also published a book *Culture and Poverty, Critique and Counterproposals* (1968). We will now discuss the main points of critique, put forward in these and other writings.

##### **2.4.6.1 Research methodology**

A lot of the criticism against the culture of poverty theory concerns the research methodology. Valentine (1968: 51) points out that Lewis repeatedly provides only a few short introductory remarks and then continues with a large amount of material on the life-styles of poor families, without giving any further explanation. This allows Lewis to make statements regarding the culture of poor people without giving real evidence. Valentine points towards a number of inconsistencies between Lewis' abstractions and data (1971: 194-203). For instance, there were serious doubts regarding the representativeness of the



different families that were chosen for the study. He was concerned that the way in which data was obtained, processed and finally presented, could also have led to a total misrepresentation of family-life. Valentine shows how Lewis describes the Rios family, analysed in *La Vida* (1965), on some pages as typical of the culture of poverty, while he concludes on other pages that they constitute a deviant extreme. Adding to the confusion is the fact that his description of the family often spans the gap between the culture of poverty and middle class behaviour. Leacock (1971:22-24) identified similar methodological problems, both in the analyses of Lewis as well as other writers on the topic. She also points out that samples taken were often unrepresentative or biased. Sometimes the only data used was that of the police and welfare organisations, creating an obvious overrepresentation of "problem cases".

Another inconsistency could be found in some of the supposed determinants of a culture of poverty. According to Lewis the culture of poverty only existed where there was basically no community organisation, beyond the level of the family. But then he describes La Esmeralda, the slum in which the Rios family lived as follows: "La Esmeralda forms a little community of its own with a cemetery, a church, a small dispensary and maternity clinic, and one elementary school" (Valentine, 1968: 55).

Similarly, he describes a general lack of relation to the outside world as a key component of the culture of poverty, but this is contradicted by the fact that members of the Rios family show a very thorough knowledge of national and international society and politics and even a healthy participation in politics.

Lastly, Lewis concluded that the culture of poverty potentially exists on a cross-national basis in the early free stage of capitalism and also in a colonial regime (Lewis, 1970: 74-76). Furthermore, he suggested that it might be absent in socialist countries. The first problem with this notion was that Lewis did not have enough cross-national data to draw such conclusions. The second question arises regarding the 'early free stage of capitalism and colonialism', which would imply that a country like America should not have



had a culture of poverty, as it already had a very advanced capitalist society. Lewis also speculated on the absence of the culture of poverty in socialist countries. It seems like this area of Lewis' theory was indeed contradictory and without much scientific backing.

#### 2.4.6.2 The self-perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty

According to Lewis' model, the culture of poverty was caused by two factors, namely external downward forces, which forced people to adapt their lifestyles, and the perpetuation of these lifestyles, mainly through the influence of family life. A large part of the debate on the culture of poverty revolved around the relative importance of these two factors (Terreblanche, 1977: 73-74 and Leacock, 1971: 11). Most liberal writers like Valentine (1971: 195-211), Leacock (1971:12) and Leeds (1971: 228-281) were of the opinion that the perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty was poorly conceptualised and misleading in explaining poverty. They insisted that the focus should only be on the external forces afflicting the poor. They were confident that, if analysed properly, all "deviant" behaviour would prove to be necessary adaptations to the socio-economic environment faced.

A related point of debate was the role of the family structure among African-American families (Katz, 1993: 13). Both Lewis and Moynihan emphasised that the family played an important role in perpetuating the culture of poverty. This was strongly rejected by, among others, Valentine (1968: 64), Leeds (1971: 230) and Miller (1993: 254-289). Miller argued that the family structure of African-Americans was in fact normal and healthy, given the circumstances of socio-economic deprivation. Valentine and Leeds argued that the family is but one of many ways in which culture can be taught and, furthermore, that much of an individual's cultural education only happens at a later stage of life, and not before the age of six or seven as Lewis suggested.

It is interesting to note that Lewis (1969), in reaction to the heavy criticism on this point, changed his argument to say that the self-perpetuation of the



culture of poverty plays only a minor role and that socio-economic circumstances played the major role. This is a very important conceptual change. Unfortunately the self-perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty was already so clearly associated with the culture of poverty theory that Lewis' later contribution had little effect in changing the analytical framework used by culture of poverty writers. Lewis' conceptual change ironically served as a further point in argument for opponents to discard the model in total as they argued that the model was not relevant any more when the self-perpetuation is given a less prominent position.

As noted earlier, the culture of poverty theory was quickly incorporated in the stronger conservative view of poverty. This was mostly evident in its emphasis on the self-perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty. The association with conservative and even racial views, probably did more harm to the culture of poverty approach than any of the other points of critique.

#### 2.4.6.3 The value of trait analysis

Both Valentine (1968: 77) and Leeds (1971: 243-277) concluded that the trait analysis of Lewis was the weakest link in his argument. Leeds showed that many of the traits identified by Lewis (see Appendix 1) could not even be considered lifestyle or cultural determinants, but merely demographic, or generic circumstantial behaviour:

“The behavioral characteristics ...that stimulated Oscar Lewis to posit a culture of poverty are largely interpretable as direct consequences of the operation of some specific aspect of capitalist societal systems, especially the labor market and its control by capitalist elites, the capital flow and control system, and the structure of profit management. One does not have to postulate a social state of mind, or culture, carried by structured social systems by means of characteristic sociocultural processes, to account for them.”

(Leeds, 1971: 278)



Furthermore, the logic of the process of identifying these traits was questioned and serious questions also remained as to their universality. There was a constant inconsistency between the supposed traits and the evidence from the data. Lastly, Leeds (1971:244) remarked that traits analysis as done by Lewis formed a dead end in cultural studies and was made redundant by better approaches (see Section 2.2).

#### 2.4.6.4 The distinction between a culture and a subculture

Lewis' treatment of culture and subculture gave rise to further critique. (Valentine, 1968: 107-113). According to Lewis (1970: 68), he intended the culture of poverty to refer to a subcultural phenomenon, but later threw away the prefix for ease of writing. Other scholars followed this trend and consequently it has been treated as a separate culture instead of merely a subcultural phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> When treating the culture of poverty as a culture, it immediately leads to an undervaluation of the areas of common ground that exist between the subculture and the society at large. This again, shifts the focus away from evidence on adaptive and circumstantial behaviour towards problems inherent to different cultural groups. When this is combined with a failure to distinguish between poverty and the culture of poverty, as was the case with Harrington (1962), it can easily lead to a situation where all poverty problems are simply relayed to cultural inferiority (see Section 2.2).

#### 2.4.6.5 Middle class values as a yardstick of measurement

Most liberal writers rejected the notion that middle class values should in all cases be used as the yardstick of measurement of the health of lower class culture. Two reasons can be identified. Firstly it has been argued that it is not always possible to make value judgements on the appropriateness of cultural values. The different cognitive styles or language usage of African-American children was used as examples of different but not necessarily inferior cultural

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<sup>11</sup> This situation creates a range of technical and methodological problems, which will not all be discussed here. For a more detailed discussion see Valentine (1968).



phenomena (Drucker, 1971: 57-61, John, 1971: 63-78 and Castro, 1971: 81-94). The second reason could be found in their belief that the bulk of "deviant" cultural traits was rational behaviour in the face of extreme socio-economic conditions. Looking from this viewpoint the distinction between middle class and lower class values can be seen as dangerous terrain, which if overemphasised might eventually lead to the wrong policy measures.

#### 2.4.6.6. An alternative to the culture of poverty

The points of criticism against the culture of poverty hypothesis are strong. Valentine (1971: 210-211) concluded that "the 'culture of poverty' must be discarded as a theoretical guide. It is certainly not convincing, and it is probably seriously misleading". Katz (1993: 14) attributed its demise to a "lack of intellectual polish". Almost all the other liberal writers cited so far had similar conclusions. The problem, however, was that the critics could not really come up with a convincing alternative, other than cultural imperialism or racism. Racism certainly played a very important role in American society at that time and even today, but to reduce the whole debate to such a singular variable did not satisfy the intellectual world (Wilson 1987: 10-11). This situation is present even today - the concept of a relation between culture and poverty is often avoided, either because it is feared that it might convey a hierarchical or racial approach, or simply because of a lack of any useful explanations, apart from those already subject to heavy criticism.

#### **2.4.7 From the culture of poverty to the underclass debate**

Mainly due to the heavy critique by liberal writers, the culture of poverty approach became less popular. After the initial cluster of writings that appeared in the 1960's, from the 1970's onwards very few works focused on the culture of poverty as the main model for describing poverty. Those writers who did try to write within the model had to bear the brunt of the liberal onslaught (Katz, 1993: 13).



This did not mean that theories on culture and poverty disappeared totally from the academic scene. In the 1970's scientists started to use the term "underclass" to describe poverty problems<sup>12</sup>. The culture of poverty debate was quickly replaced by an "underclass" debate, especially because it was not yet surrounded with strong ideological differences or analytical flaws, as in the previous debate. Interestingly enough, the debate had a very similar life-cycle as the culture of poverty debate (Katz, 1993: 3-23). The initial proponents of an underclass such as Myrdal and Rainwater tried to steer the debate to liberal territory, and other liberal writers soon followed suit. But with the appearance of new conservative interpretations<sup>13</sup>, the debate again saw a strong divergence of ideological standpoints. And once again liberal writers gradually distanced themselves from the term underclass and any possibly pejorative views on the poor (Gans, 1996: 142). But, as in the case of the culture of poverty, they failed to give satisfying alternatives. Probably the most influential book in the debate was *The Truly Disadvantaged*, by William Wilson (1987). Wilson showed how liberals avoided some obvious problem areas by insisting that no underclass exists, by avoiding any analysis that might be unflattering towards the poor, or by using only racism as scapegoat. These shortcomings in their arguments were accentuated by the fact that problems of urban poverty in America increased dramatically during the late 1970's and early 1980's (Wilson, 1987: 6-13). As in the case of the culture of poverty, much of the underclass debate was still centred around the weight that should be given to the self-perpetuating nature of poverty. (In the underclass debate it was extended to the role of social welfare in the perpetuation of poverty.) Wilson incorporated both family structure (which he related to problems of male joblessness) and culture into his analysis of the problem.

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<sup>12</sup> In 1963, Gunnar Myrdal used the term for the first time to describe people cut off from the labour market in America, in his book *The Challenge of Affluence* (Pantheon Books, New York). In 1969, Lee Rainwater pointed towards a relation between the emergence of an underclass and the intensification of poverty in the otherwise successful American economy in the article: *Looking Back and Looking Up*, in: *Transaction* 6, February 1969.

<sup>13</sup> A strong case was made by Charles Murray and George Gilder for the abolition of social welfare. Murray, C., 1984. *Losing Ground: American Social policy, 1950-1980*. Basic Books, New York. Gilder, G., 1981. *Wealth and Poverty*. Basic Books, New York.



His main proposition was that the social and cultural problems in the poverty-stricken areas were related to the wider socio-economic framework within which they existed:

“The key theoretical concept, therefore is not *culture of poverty* but *social isolation*. Culture of poverty implies that basic values and attitudes of the ghetto subculture have been internalised and thereby influence behaviour... Social isolation, on the other hand, not only implies that contact between groups of different class and/or racial backgrounds is either lacking or has become increasingly intermittent but that the nature of this contact enhances the effect of living in a highly concentrated poverty area...in terms of access to jobs and job networks, availability of marriageable partners, involvement in quality schools, and exposure to conventional role models.../ The concept *social isolation* does not mean that cultural traits are irrelevant in understanding behaviour in highly concentrated poverty areas; rather it highlights the fact that culture is a response to social structural constraints and opportunities. From a public-policy perspective, this would mean shifting the focus from changing subcultural traits to changing the structure of constraints and opportunities.”

(Wilson, 1987: 61)

The above quotation highlights the close similarity between the two debates. While the current underclass debate managed to rid itself of some analytical and ideological problems of earlier approaches, it still seems that there is much uncertainty in different areas.

## **2.5 Summary and conclusions**

It was shown in this chapter that there are a number of different approaches to culture and to the role of culture in poverty. There is specifically a strong ideological divergence between conservative thinkers, emphasising the role of culture, and liberal thinkers, negating the role of culture as a cause of poverty.



In terms of the different approaches to culture that were identified in Section 2.2 and based on the rest of the discussion, it can be concluded that a hierarchical approach should be used with great care, while the generalised and expressive approaches do not really inform the debate. A creative use of the remaining approaches is needed. There is no single correct answer as to the most appropriate paradigm to use when analysing the relationship between culture and poverty. Both strong conservative and strong liberal approaches fail to give a clear view on poverty problems, since the former tend to fall into the ideological trap of blaming poverty on the poor and the latter fail to recognise the role of culture at all. The third alternative, namely the dependency theory, can be useful to describe some of the dynamics of the impoverishment of a group of people.

The main part of the chapter was used to show the evolution and popularisation of the culture of poverty theory. This theory rests on two pillars, namely that a culture of poverty is firstly caused due to adaptations to external structural downward forces and secondly through an internal process of perpetuation. The theory was very popular among conservative writers, but was unfortunately also misinterpreted in a number of ways. The theory was very strongly criticised for a range of conceptual and methodological weaknesses which included aspects such as the research methodology, the self-perpetuating nature of poverty, the value of trait analysis, the distinction between a culture and a subculture and the use of middle class values as a yardstick of measurement. This caused the culture of poverty to lose some of its validity.

The subsequent shift in focus towards the underclass debate provided some relief from previous analytical and ideological problems, but shows a lot of resemblance to its predecessor.

It must be recognised that culture cannot be left out in the analysis of poverty. A moderate liberal approach, which incorporates cultural determinants, without using it as an ideological weapon to blame poverty on the poor, seems most appropriate.



The culture of poverty theory as perceived in the mainstream economic debate contains too many weaknesses to be applied as a whole. A further use of the theory can only be justified after a revision that eliminates conceptual problems and contradictions between theory and data. The following guidelines may be followed:

- There should be a stronger focus on the culture of poverty as an adaptive response, rather than focusing on the self-perpetuating nature of the culture of poverty. This would improve understanding of the apparent differences between middle class values and those values that are associated with the culture of poverty. It would also help to clarify the role of the family in the perpetuation of the culture of poverty. Lastly it would serve to give a more realistic view of the personality traits of individuals living in a culture of poverty;
- The assumption that people living in a culture of poverty do not participate in the institutions of the society, have no sense of community (i.e. have no community organisation) and do not have any awareness of the outside world, might be too rigid. It would be more correct to assume that this would still be possible to some extent.

This chapter provided an introductory framework within which the role of the Theron commission in reshaping poverty policy with regards to the coloured community can be analysed. The debate can for obvious reasons not be transplanted in an identical form from American ghetto life to the South African subcontinent, and specifically, the Western Cape. Chapter Three will therefore provide a relevant reinterpretation of the results of this chapter.



## **Chapter Three – The Theron Commission**

### **3.1 Introduction**

When analysing the history of poverty policy in South Africa, one can distinguish a few landmarks. The government appointed several commissions to investigate poverty. The first major investigation into poverty started in 1929, with the work of the Carnegie Commission. They had to look into problems of impoverished whites – the so-called poor white problem. But as Professor E.G. Malherbe (1973:82-83), one of the members of the commission, later remarked, already then the commission realised that even bigger problems were looming within the increasingly marginalised non-white community of South Africa. In 1934, shortly after the Carnegie Commission, the government appointed the Wilcocks Commission to investigate coloured development. The Tomlinson Commission's investigation of black development followed in the 1950s and the Theron Commission's investigation of coloured development in the 1970s.

In this chapter we will apply the knowledge on the role of culture in poverty, which was gained in the previous chapter. The specific focus will be on the Theron Commission and its relationship with the culture of poverty theory. We want to answer the following questions:

- What role did the commission see for culture in its analysis of the problem?; and
- Did the commission's use of a culture of poverty approach lead to a misunderstanding of the poverty problem in the coloured community?

It will not be possible to come to definite conclusions in this chapter, seeing that the actual change in the socio-economic position of coloureds over the past 25 years will first have to be analysed in the following chapters. Nevertheless, this analysis of the Theron report, complemented by that of the Carnegie, Wilcocks and Tomlinson reports, can go a significant way to finding answers.



## **3.2 The poor white problem and the Carnegie Commission**

### **3.2.1 Background**

The discovery of gold and diamonds towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changed the face of South Africa's economic, political and social life. However, the benefits of the mining industry did not reach everybody. Within a few years there emerged a class of poor whites, mainly Afrikaners. This trend continued and by 1929 it was estimated that more than a quarter of all Afrikaners were in a condition of abject poverty (Le Roux, 1978: 9). With the financial support of the Carnegie Endowment the Dutch Reformed Church appointed a commission who had to analyse the problem of the poor whites from an economic, psychological, educational, health and sociological perspective. The final report, published in 1932, contained several aspects that may lead to a better understanding of the Theron report. This is important as many people tried to use the poor white problem as a blueprint to treat the problem of coloured poverty. We will now analyse some of their main conclusions and recommendations.

### **3.2.2 Main findings and recommendations of the Carnegie Commission**

#### **3.2.2.1 The scope and different causes of the poor white problem<sup>1</sup>**

The vast majority of the estimated 300 000 poor whites were Afrikaners. This was out of a total white population of 1.8 million. These poor Afrikaners were located in the "platteland" or rural areas or had migrated from the farms to the poor suburbs in the towns and cities.

The commission ascribed white poverty mainly to the inability to adapt to the changing socio-economic environment following the discovery of diamonds and gold in the former Boer Republics. The white settlers had been living in isolation from Europe for centuries already. They were mainly focused on hunting and subsistence agriculture. By the time of the discovery of gold and



diamonds, many of them did not feel the urge to take part in the new economy. The Afrikaners had a strong tie with the land and reluctantly let go of their lifestyle. Those that did, mostly went to the alluvial mining fields. Unfortunately this source mostly failed to secure a good living.

The previous paragraph may convey the message that white Afrikaners were caught in traditionalism and that they were unable to utilise the economic opportunities to the full, but according to Le Roux (1978: 11-12) such an explanation would be too simplistic. He adds that those that try to explain the poor white problem in terms of a prisoner of culture approach, interpret it wrongly. There was a whole range of factors, which led to their eventual backward socio-economic position.

The majority of poor whites were previously or still engaged in hunting and farming. Unfortunately this economic regime was not sustainable. The first problem was that the availability of land became an increasing problem. The population was growing and no new frontiers were available to trek to. Many farms that were split up between sons simply became too small to be viable units. The game resources also declined rapidly, taking away an important source of subsistence to most farmers. Furthermore, the land had to carry a large number of "bywoners", or people residing on the farm owners' land with the right to share-cropping and share-grazing, normally in exchange for labour. Due to these factors, many farmers and bywoners were forced off the land. Some of them found a quick relief in the transport industry, but as soon as the railway infrastructure was completed, they were once again without a job.

Other developments in the agricultural sector contributed to the poor white problem. The rapid increase of the mining population also increased the demand for fresh produce and other foodstuffs.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless where other authors are cited, all information in section 3.2.2 is based on a summary of the Carnegie report, in Joubert (1972: 7-53).



Interestingly enough this did not stop the growth of the poor white problem, as very few farmers capitalised on this. Transportation problems made it very difficult for most farmers to participate in these new opportunities (Le Roux, 1978:12). Especially after the railways were laid, the importation of agricultural products could largely fill the gap. For those farmers that were favourably situated to provide foodstuffs for the new urban areas the opportunity costs of not utilising land increased. This factor combined with the availability of cheaper black labour, prompted many landowners to force even more bywoners off the land. Thus, apart from a few wealthy landowners, the majority of the rural community was marginalised.

The combined role of the Anglo Boer war, some serious droughts and disastrous livestock epidemics must also not be underestimated. In the end thousands of farmers and bywoners ended up in the towns and cities, where their pitiful existence continued.

The question that comes to mind is why these migrant whites did not integrate into the mainstream economy of the cities. The main reason for this was their lack of proper education and technical training. The schooling system in the farming areas was not very good and most children dropped out of school at a very early age, and virtually none completed their high school education. On the farms they learned a few elementary skills, but this was not nearly enough to secure a steady well-paid job in the towns.

The role of culture was certainly also very important (Le Roux, 1978). The language of the new business was English. Afrikaners' negligible knowledge of English certainly barred even those who had proper education from well-paid jobs. In some cases, employers discriminated wilfully against Afrikaners. Did the psychological make-up of the Afrikaner also inhibit his integration into the mainstream economy? According to the Carnegie report certain aspects did play a role. Firstly, many Afrikaners clung to their traditional lifestyle to a point where it inhibited their judgement and ability to grasp new economic activities. Secondly, the increased impoverishment of the whites created certain negative attitudes, which further inhibited their abilities. Many had a



low self-esteem, present time orientation, and even a fatalistic outlook. A vicious circle of prejudice and impoverishment could certainly be identified. Could these factors have contributed to a complete culture of poverty? This will be discussed after analysing the remedies proposed for the poor white problem.

### 3.2.2.2 Remedies for the poor white problem

The first broad policy measure proposed by the Carnegie Commission was aimed at improving the situation of whites engaged in agriculture. This had to entail a system of agricultural extension enabling farmers to improve their profitability and engage in a more sustainable system of agriculture. The commission also suggested an improvement in the tenure rights of the many bywoners.

The second broad policy proposal was aimed at educational, technical and cultural barriers. The commission had several recommendations to improve the education system. This involved better facilities and better teachers, as well as improvement in the contents and the variety of subjects. Furthermore there had to be a better utilisation of resources to support poor rural children. Hostels run by the church and the state had to be improved and multiplied in order to counter the process of impoverishment that was prevalent in the homes. The integration of adults into better paid economic activities was more problematic; the commission suggested giving them practical technical training, which would eventually lead to more skilled workers. In order to facilitate this, there had to be some form of job reservation for poor whites.

The third broad policy proposal was to improve the whole welfare and support system. The commission suggested the creation of a national welfare agency to co-ordinate the whole process. In combination with a university, such an institution had to ensure a scientific approach towards the poor white problem. There also had to be better co-operation between the different levels of aid-organisations on local and provincial level. The commission suggested local



committees, which could help in the identification of areas of need, as well as an increased involvement of the church. However, the commission was concerned about a culture of entitlement and suggested that some reciprocal performance be made by recipients.

### **3.2.3 The Poor white and the culture of poverty**

In the analysis of the poor white problem the distinction between the conservative and liberal paradigm comes in handy. Within the conservative paradigm the traditionalism of the Afrikaner played a very big role in his impoverishment. E. G. Malherbe, a member of the Carnegie Commission, remarked as follows:

“We saw that the poor white was often a victim of his environment. But just as often he was the cause of his deteriorating environment. Outworn traditions and mental attitudes played an important role, especially mental attitudes which militated against his being helped, let alone helping himself.”

(Malherbe, 1973: 83)

When focusing on the liberal paradigm different aspects of culture come to the fore. According to Le Roux (1978: 74), the cultural barrier and cultural discrimination played a more important role in the process than the traditionalism or cultural imprisonment of the Afrikaner.

The basic assumptions of the culture of poverty approach is that it is both an adaptation to external downwards forces as well as an internalised self-perpetuation of poverty and the associated life-style. The prisoner of culture or traditionalism explanation is problematic, because it refers to some conditions that prevailed even before the new mining economy. In other words, had minerals not been discovered, a poor white problem would still have developed. Furthermore, it has already been shown in Section 3.2.2.1 that there were a number of factors that inhibited poor whites from joining the mining economy, and many of these were wrongly interpreted as indicative of culture as a prison. It is thus best to see the traditionalism of the Afrikaner as



a separate factor and not as part of a culture of poverty. The poor educational system and the cultural barrier give a much better explanation of the structural downward forces.

The commission says little about the self-perpetuating nature of poverty apart from mentioning traditionalism. The commission does point to some characteristics that could typify a culture of poverty, such as a present time orientation. Le Roux (1978:20) believes there can be no doubt that some impoverished individuals developed a fatalistic attitude and were unable to make the most of economic opportunities, but that these traits should not be seen as a central cause of the poor white problem. Terreblanche (1977:133) points out that the impoverishment of the poor whites happened over a relatively short period of time, leaving less room for the self-perpetuation of poverty. He also identifies other factors which make it difficult to apply the culture of poverty theory to the poor whites: the whites had strong political power, strong cultural organisations and churches, strong leaders and a very strong cultural identity.

Thus it becomes clear that the poor white problem developed under very unique circumstances, which differed from the circumstances to which culture of poverty theories are normally applied, such as African-American poverty. In drawing a comparison between the poor white problem and coloured poverty, the Theron Commission comes to a similar conclusion:

*“...die Kommissie (is) van mening dat daar sulke groot verskille tussen die twee vorme van armoede bestaan dat hulle nie in algemene oppervlakkige terme met mekaar vergelyk kan word nie.”*

(Theron Report, 1976: 472)



The commission also suggested that no culture of poverty (or chronic community poverty, the term used in the Theron report) existed amongst the poor whites:

*“Dit is waarskynlik korrekter om te beweer dat die armlankes destyds nie soseer in ‘n toestand van chroniese gemeenskapsarmoede vasgevang was nie, maar hoofsaaklik in die greep van ekonomiese tradisionalisme en landelike isolasie was wat die aanpassings by die eise van ekonomiese modernisering bemoeilik het.”*

(Theron Report, 1976: 473)

Although a culture of poverty approach might be helpful to explain some aspects of the poor white problem, it will have to be subjected to thorough research, which falls beyond the scope of this thesis. It is common knowledge that the poor white problem as it existed at the time of the Carnegie investigation, has since all but disappeared from the South African society. It was therefore important for the Theron Commission to investigate the possible similarities between the poor white problem and coloured poverty. This will be dealt with in more detail in Section 3.6.4.6.

### **3.3 The Wilcocks Commission**

#### **3.3.1 Background and main findings of the commission**

The Theron Commission was not the first major investigation of poverty problems in the coloured community. As early as 1934 the government appointed a Commission of Inquiry regarding the Cape Coloured Population of the Union, better known as the Wilcocks Commission. The commission had to look at economic and social conditions of both rural and urban coloureds. The work done by the Wilcocks Commission was not on the same scale as the Theron commission, neither did it create as much public debate as its successor. However, an analysis of the findings of the Wilcocks Commission gives valuable insights into the Theron report.



The socio-political situation of coloureds in 1934 was different from that in 1973, when the Theron Commission was appointed. Although racial segregation and labour repression had already formed part of the South African society in 1934, the apartheid ideology was not yet institutionalised and in some aspects coloureds were still living more or less equally with whites. They even still had partial representation on the common voters' roll (Joubert, 1976:170-171). By 1973, coloureds had already experienced decades of grand apartheid, with the effects of the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, laws providing for separate public services and amenities and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. Although these two reports came at two very different stages of white rule in South Africa, both dealt with exactly this question: should the socio-economic subservience of coloureds be sustained or not? Choosing to bring an end to white favouritism would also mean that apartheid had to be driven back. Thus, where the Theron Commission later focused strongly on apartheid laws and other forms of discrimination that had already been institutionalised, the Wilcocks Commission had tried to persuade government not to go into that direction.

In their report the Wilcocks Commission gave attention to the same broad aspects as the Theron report later did (Joubert, 1977: 18-30):

- *Poverty*: Although the Wilcocks report placed much less emphasis on poverty problems, they also came to the conclusion that poverty was a very important factor in the causation of the subservient position of coloureds in society. Although the categorisation was not as sophisticated as that of the Theron Commission, they mentioned very strong class differences within the coloured community.
- *Social problems and facilities*: Alcoholism and crime, among other problems, were big concerns. Housing, recreational facilities and other social services were inadequate. The commission pleaded for the removal of the "dopstelsel" (which entailed that farmers provided alcohol to their labourers as part of their wage) and free access for coloureds to public facilities.



- *Political and other discrimination*: The commission suggested that political discrimination be reduced or even totally removed, that discriminative labour practices be removed and that other segregation measures such as the prohibition of mixed marriages between coloureds and whites (which was at that stage still discussed) not be enforced.

### 3.3.2 The Wilcocks Commission and the culture of poverty

According to Joubert (1977: 20-21), the Wilcocks Commission failed to give a proper analysis of poverty. Very little was said about the relationship between poverty and other aspects of social life. One of the only explicit links that was made was between poverty and alcoholism. Terreblanche (1977: 83) points out some evidence of a move towards a culture of poverty explanation, where the Wilcocks Commission described the position of Cape coloureds as follows:

“’n Aansienlike gedeelte van die Kaapse Kleurlinge behoort tot wat die maatskaplike versonke bevolking genoem kan word. Hoewel die beperkte wetenskaplike kennis van die betreklike belangrikheid van oorerwing en omgewing wat vandag beskikbaar is, dit onmoontlik maak om met enige mate van presiesheid te konstateer tot watter mate hulle posisie aan ingebore neigings en tot watter mate dit aan omgewingsinvloede te wyte is, kan daar geen twyfel bestaan betreffende die buitengewoon ongunstige omstandighede wat dikwels vir geslagte agtereen op hulle ingewerk het en waaraan groot gedeeltes onderwerp is nie.”

(Wilcocks Report, 1937, cited in Terreblanche, 1977: 83)

The commission suggested that the extremely unfavourable circumstances, to which coloureds had been subjected through generations, had undoubtedly played a role in creating their backward position. This view is also evident when looking at the commission's policy proposals. The commission saw the elimination of poverty as the most important solution to the wider problem of socio-economic backwardness.



In spite of its inadequate poverty analysis, it can still be argued that the commission made a healthy contribution towards a better awareness of poverty problems in the coloured community. A further contribution of the Wilcocks Commission was that it paved the way for and gave more validity to the proposals made by the Theron Commission.

### **3.4 The Tomlinson Commission**

#### **3.4.1 Background and main findings of the commission**

The Commission for the Socio-economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa, or the Tomlinson Commission, had the unenviable task of advising the government on the development of the so-called Bantu areas at that time. The major difference between the Tomlinson Commission and the other commissions discussed so far, is that it very strongly supported a separate path of development for the different racial groups, or more specifically blacks and whites. Therefore the Tomlinson Commission is sometimes referred to as one of the cornerstones of grand apartheid.

Apart from the separate development paths for blacks and whites, the Tomlinson Commission made the following important policy proposals (South-Africa, 1956, p13-28):

- The creation of a strong agricultural class. This also implied some land reform and considerable investment in improvement of agricultural conditions in the black areas;
- The creation of a strong industrial base in the homelands, focusing on consumables of the black population. It also implied an independent urbanisation process in the black areas;
- The development of a tertiary sector, especially providing the necessary financial services and entrepreneurial back-up;



- An improvement in social and health services. Unfortunately education for blacks, in particular secondary and tertiary education, was not prioritised. The role of the church in the overall social programme was also emphasised;
- Various measures to reorganise the administration of the black areas. The idea was that blacks should gradually take over control in these areas.

From the report it can be seen that the commission had foreseen opposition to this spending and therefore motivated very strongly why it was necessary (see Chapter 49 of the Tomlinson report). The commission realised that the development of the black areas was doomed to failure without a considerable financial investment. The irony is that the government embraced the idea of separate development, but failed to develop the black areas as suggested by the commission. It must be added, however, that the commission itself was too optimistic about the potential of separate development and even if the government invested more money into the homelands this development strategy would still have been unlikely to succeed.

### **3.4.2 The Tomlinson Commission and the culture of poverty**

The role of the Tomlinson Commission in shaping the understanding of the poverty problems can be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand there was a very clear racial and cultural prejudice present in the whole idea of separate development. This is evident from the way the commission saw the process of integration between whites and blacks. Cultural integration was seen as the first step, followed by economic unity and only then by political and social equality (South Africa, 1956, p14). In the mind of the Tomlinson Commission, the process of economic development of the blacks was clearly subject to their cultural development. So why did the commission not foresee a full economic integration for blacks into the white society? The only logical conclusion that can be drawn is that they believed that blacks were culturally inferior or unable to compete on even par with the Western culture. The commission commented on this as follows:



“ A question which frequently arose in compiling the Report, was whether the Bantu would be able to ‘absorb’ the (economic) development, that is to say, whether they can adapt themselves rapidly enough to the demands of (economic) development.”

(Tomlinson-report, 1955: 210)

The commission came to the conclusion that the “human development” of blacks is likely to “lag behind their economic evolution” and therefore saw it as necessary that blacks should be developed separately (Tomlinson-report, 1955: 211).

A second viewpoint might be found in the commission’s realisation of the need for the economic development of blacks. The commission emphasised that without proper economic development it would be very difficult to create a stable community. This implies that the commission also associated poverty problems in the black community with economic discrimination and not only with a problem of culture.

In the rest of this chapter we will analyse the Theron Commission as a landmark in South African poverty analysis.

## **3.5 The Theron Commission – background and main findings**

### **3.5.1 Background**

As was already indicated, the Theron Commission had to do its investigation at a time when the apartheid ideology was still very strongly supported by the National Party government, but this ideology was also met with increasing resistance by other interest groups. By 1973, when the government



appointed the nineteen-member Commission<sup>2</sup>, it was already clear that apartheid was causing a very fundamental polarisation between different race groups. However, coloureds had never been subjected to the same extent of economic and political discrimination and labour repression as blacks and due to cultural similarities between coloureds and whites, the question whether or not the coloured community should be integrated with whites had always been heavily debated. Goldin identifies three important eras in history where there was a repositioning of coloureds with respect to white society. The first important era spanned the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this time the identification of a separate coloured identity, came to the fore for the first time (Goldin, 1987: 157-164). This was very important for coloured intellectuals in order to escape the racial discrimination against blacks. During the Anglo-Boer War the denial of coloured rights in the Boer Republics, formed part of the British war propaganda. Ironically, the British compromised on the reinstatement of coloured rights in the Republics, at the signing of the Vereeniging treaty, which ended the war.

The second important era started with the coming to power of Hertzog in 1924 (Goldin, 1987, p163-166). He tried to establish a strategic alliance with coloureds in order to avoid an anti-white front in South Africa. The appointment of the Wilcocks Commission must be seen within this framework. Therefore the policy proposals of the commission (albeit on a divided vote in some cases) clearly advised the government not to alienate the coloured and whites communities further, and even to restore the rights which coloureds had already lost. However, eventual policy measures went in a different direction. During this era, apartheid laws increasingly marginalised coloureds, although not as much as blacks.

The third era can be found during the reign of the NP-government. According to Goldin:

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<sup>2</sup> Further comments refer to an eighteen-member commission, as one of the members passed away during the investigation.



“The ...Coloureds..., posed a dilemma for the Nationalists; they shared a common language (Afrikaans) and historical homeland (the rural areas of the Western Cape). Many, although this was never publicly admitted, shared a common ancestry. In addition, due to the close involvement of Coloureds in Cape politics and to the language bond, many Cape Nationalists were well disposed to Coloured intellectuals and considered Coloureds to be ‘brown Afrikaners’, ‘a part of Western civilisation’ and deserving a closer association with the whites.”

(Goldin, 1987: 168)

However, this view was not shared by everybody, and more fundamentally this posed a very serious threat for the ideology of racial particularism and apartheid. While this debate went on in intellectual circles and in the government, albeit behind closed doors, the reality and uncompromising style of implementing apartheid, certainly did not improve the situation of coloureds. It was during this time, when apartheid was at its peak and the tension between the different factions regarding the position of coloureds was very high, that the Theron Commission was appointed. The Theron Commission had no choice but to take a stand in the debate. Unsurprisingly, quickly a polarisation arose within the commission itself, between those members wanting a closer association between coloureds and whites and others who still clung to racial particularism and white favouritism.

### **3.5.2 The approach of the commission**

The Theron Commission had to investigate the following aspects related to the coloured population group:

- a) the progress made since 1960 on social, economic and statutory grounds, as well as in local councils, and in sport and culture;
- b) inhibiting factors in various fields which could be identified as issues of contention; and
- c) any related matters



They had to use 1960 as the date of departure mainly because there were censuses in 1960 and 1970, which could provide a good basis for evaluation. It was also a good starting point, seeing that the main apartheid laws affecting coloureds were already instituted before 1960 (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 1). However, according to Terreblanche (1999), the failure to include an extended historical analysis might be seen as a point of criticism against the report. This would have created a better understanding of the structural forces that had led to the backward socio-economic position of coloureds.

Due to the size of the commission, they appointed different task groups, each with a convenor, to investigate the following areas: culture and religion, economy and labour, agriculture, education, social problems and welfare services, health, sport and recreation, housing and community development, and government and administration. The different chapters in the final report reflected the views of the different task groups, and eventually all the members of the commission did not support the different chapters. The commission did very intensive research, utilising a wide range of research techniques. They also used the help of other institutions like the Bureau for Market Research of the University of South Africa, as well as a number of academics to do some of the research (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 2-3).

### **3.5.3 The contents of the report**

The final report was organised in five analytical units, and a sixth part with 178 recommendations. The first part consisted of different chapters on the position of coloureds in South African society. The second part presented an analysis of their economic position. The third part reported on socio-cultural matters. The fourth part contained an analysis of statutory matters and the fifth part gave some perspectives on statutory and socio-economic matters (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 4). The focus of this thesis is on the second part which gave an analysis of the economic position of coloured and which also incorporated a culture of poverty theory in its explanation. This will be examined in Sections 3.6 and 3.7, after a brief overview of the other parts of the report.



### 3.5.3.1 Part one: The position of coloureds in South African society

Some important demographic patterns of coloureds community at that time were identified (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 6-12). According to the 1970 census, the coloured community as one of the minority groups in South Africa, comprised 9.4 % of the total South African population. High mortality rates were still exceeded by very high birth rates and this caused a rapid population growth rate. However, this growth rate was already past its peak and was expected to decrease in future. Due to birth and mortality patterns, coloureds had a very young population and also a very high dependency ratio. The average size of a coloured household was 5.2 in 1970. Another feature was a very high rate of illegitimate births - at least one third of all children were born outside the framework of legal marriage or *de facto* marriage where couples lived together. More than 50% of all coloureds were resident in the South Western Cape area and 87.3% in the former Cape Province.

The commission identified different statutory problem areas, which inhibited coloureds from full participation in the society (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 13-25). Firstly, they found the Population Registration Act discriminatory on several levels. The commission did not suggest the abolition of the act, but suggested several measures to make it more acceptable to coloureds. Secondly, they found that there were too many restrictions on social life and marriage. The majority of the members supported the abolition of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts. Thirdly they found the Group Areas Act as well as the Separate Amenities Act discriminatory<sup>3</sup>. In both cases the majority of the members recommended a more lenient approach by the government. Fourthly they found the political and other rights of coloured citizens lacking. Some recommendations included equal salaries for whites and coloureds employed on the same level and more open

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<sup>3</sup> In a study done by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 1986 (Rhode, *et. al.*, 1987: 7) coloureds were asked which of 7 different apartheid measures had to be abolished by the government. The 5 measures concerning coloureds which were included in the survey, were prioritised as follows: the Separate Amenities Act was identified as the most pressing apartheid measure, followed by the Prohibition of Mixed Public Schools, the Separate Parliamentary Voters' Rolls, the Population Registration Act and lastly the Group Areas Act.



access for coloureds to different guilds and organisations. Further political and statutory proposals will be discussed together with part four and five of the report. Lastly the commission suggested that there should also be a system of compulsory national civil service for coloureds in order to give them the ability to get access to training programmes.

### 3.5.3.2 Part three: Socio-cultural matters

The commission concluded that although the situation was improving, coloured education facilities and standards were still inadequate (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 26-40). There had to be a greater financial commitment towards physical infrastructure, as well as the provision of proper teachers and adequate study materials. The schooling system had to try and combat the high drop-out rates and give attention to the different educational needs that existed, from children with learning problems to adult education and university programs.

A lack of proper housing was identified as a very urgent matter, which had to be addressed by providing adequate government funding (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 41-50). The Group Areas Act played an important role in dislocating community life. Not only was there a lack of proper housing, but also of recreational facilities and sporting facilities, which led to further frustrations.

The commission identified the causality between the general health conditions of the coloured community and their poor socio-economic condition (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 51-58). Poor nutrition, over-consumption of alcohol and the spread of diseases like tuberculosis impeded any rapid improvement in their health position. The high rate of infant mortality was still the biggest concern. The commission concluded that medical and hospital facilities differed much, in some cases it was as good as for any other racial group, whereas in other cases it was totally inadequate. Especially health services in rural areas were a concern. A very important related issue was that of family



planning. The commission gained evidence that there was still an inadequate knowledge about family planning as well as an improperly co-ordinated education system, which culminated in a very high rate of unwanted pregnancies.

In the analysis of the social life the commission identified unhealthy family structures, high crime rates, alcoholism and aversion to work as the most important factors (Theron and Du Toit: 1977: 59-68). The commission pleaded for the improvement of welfare facilities. The commission recognised that poverty played an important role in creating social problems. This relationship will be explored further in Section 3.6.

Also in terms of cultural life, the commission concluded that the poor socio-economic position of coloureds gave them a huge disadvantage (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 69-84). They did not have the necessary facilities, and could seldom afford to pay for cultural activities. Further problems were identified as a lack of cultural leaders and poor job opportunities for coloured artists. The majority view of the commission was that the separate cultural development of the whites and coloureds was illogical, seeing that the cultural identities of the two groups were basically the same.

Aspects of religion were also investigated. The rapid urbanisation process combined with the forced migrations and other apartheid regulations caused the church to have a waning influence. Many of the churches in coloured areas were dependent on the white community for funding and the provision of qualified preachers. This affected their level of autonomy and hampered their activities with regard to poverty reduction. The commission concluded that the church should play a more prominent role in the improvement of overall living conditions in the community.



### 3.5.3.3. Part four and five: Statutory and socio-political perspectives

The report shows how the political rights of coloureds have gradually been stripped away by different white governments (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 85-106). The commission pointed out the widespread opposition against the Coloured Representative Council, which had been the main government structure since 1969, as well as against local councils. The feeling among coloureds was that these different forms of government did not have adequate power and autonomy to improve their situation.

As already indicated, the participation of coloureds in government was a seriously debated issue. It is evident that there was a divergence in ideological stance between commission members. The majority of the commission did not believe that coloureds should be treated differently from whites on a socio-political level and recommended a full representation of coloureds in government. A minority believed that coloureds should be seen as a separate nation and that they should also have separate representation in government. In order to support the various positions, lengthy arguments about the socio-political identity of coloureds were published.

## **3.6 The Theron Commission and the socio-economic position of coloureds**

### **3.6.1 Background**

The analysis of the socio-economic position of coloureds gave rise to hefty debate, both within the commission and by other interest groups. Professor Sampie Terreblanche was convenor of the task group on the economic position of coloureds. Chapters on income and consumption spending (Chapter Three), entrepreneurship (Chapters Four), coloured labour (Chapter Five) and transport (Chapter Six), were included. Professor Terreblanche was also asked by Professor Theron to give a socio-economic perspective (Chapter 22). In this chapter he gave an in-depth analysis of the poverty



problems and the culture of poverty visible in the coloured community. In his book *Gemeenskapsarmoede*, which was published in 1977, Terreblanche summarised the findings of the commission and provided additional explanations. We will now look at the way Terreblanche and other members of the task group interpreted poverty in the coloured community.

### **3.6.2 The participation of coloureds in the economy**

Two features distinguished economically active coloureds from their white counterparts. Firstly, due to the youthfulness of the coloured population the economically active formed a smaller proportion of the total population than in the case of whites. Secondly, their level of economic activity was lacking behind whites. Unemployment was relatively high and those that did work, were mainly unskilled labourers. In 1973, only 13.0% of the male labour force and 15.3% of the female labour force were doing skilled white-collar work. The main reason for this could be found in their poor education. The agricultural sector, a very large employer, also contributed to the low quality of jobs (Terreblanche, 1977: 8-11).

The personal income distribution and consumption spending of coloureds had improved relatively to other racial groups since the 1960's but it was still on a much lower level than that of whites. In 1974/1975 the average *per capita* income of coloureds was R496 against the R2534 of whites. However, this was still more than double the income of blacks at R237. An interesting fact was that coloureds spent almost 40% of all their consumption spending on food. Savings rates were very low at 5%, where the national average was at 11%. The distribution of income between households was rather skew. An average of 38.3%, of all persons lived under the adjusted poverty line, but in the rural areas it was almost 75% (Terreblanche, 1977: 11-14).

Tax contributions of coloureds were roughly 50% of the amount they received from the fiscus (Terreblanche, 1977: 14). According to Van der Berg (1998: 9) this could be seen from different perspectives. If based on the apartheid paradigm of fiscally autonomous units, it could be argued that fiscal



distribution was already favouring coloureds. If seen from a needs based approach or unitary society paradigm, coloureds still received far less *per capita* than whites and were therefore discriminated against.

In the light of the huge variations in the socio-economic position of the coloured community, the commission decided to treat them as consisting of three different socio-economic groups (Terreblanche: 1977: 15-17). The first group or the upper 20% consisted of middle class households where the breadwinners were employers and professional people. These people had a living standard and life-style that were on par and very similar to that of the white middle class. At the other end of the socio-economic stratum existed the poorest 40%. Within this group breadwinners normally had no consistent or adequately paid jobs. In the rural areas, especially in the agricultural sector, they formed a significantly higher percentage of the community. These people lived in utter deprivation and despair; the commission felt that they had a life-style that was removed from middle class values. The middle 40% spanned the wide gap between the upper 20% and the lowest 40%. This group could once again be divided into two groups. The upper 20% had relatively stable jobs and if all discriminatory factors were removed they could have been incorporated into the upper group within 10 to 20 years, while the lower 20% were extremely vulnerable and could very easily fall back to the lowest stratum. This classification shaped the rest of the discussion, and the following sections will also use this division.

### **3.6.3 Factors affecting the top-layer**

The commission did much to emphasise that the upper quintile was in no way different to white middle class South Africans. The frustrations that this group had with apartheid were therefore also different from other groups of coloureds (Terreblanche, 1977: 20-32):

- *Economic discrimination:* In various ways the top layer was restricted in practising entrepreneurial activities and in practising skilled and professional work. The Group Areas Act, restrictions on purchasing land



and the frustrations of petty apartheid created many grievances. The Coloured Development Corporation, which was founded in 1962, did help to address these problems to some extent. The other big discriminatory matter was the wage gap between coloureds and whites. Lastly, the commission identified inadequate housing as a pressing issue. The commission suggested that the Group Areas Act be altered to make it easier for coloured businessmen to engage in normal business activities. It was also suggested that coloureds should not be barred from professional organisations.

- *Culture and education:* There was a general discontentment with the regulations barring coloureds from effective participation in cultural activities. Coloureds did not have access to most cultural venues and were frustrated by the provision made for them as a group. The same problems were encountered in education. For this middle class group, access to university education was naturally a more pressing issue than for other groups. The commission suggested that the government lift these restraining regulations on a selective basis.
- *Statutory matters:* The richest layer was affected by statutory matters in a different manner than others. The Group Areas Act and the Separate Amenities Act caused many monetary losses for property owners and businessmen. Together with the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, these laws also had a very strong symbolic message and were condemned by coloured leaders in the strongest possible terms. The commission therefore proposed the easing of the Group Areas Act, as well as the lifting of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act.
- *Racism:* According to the commission the deeply ingrained racial prejudice that existed in the white community towards all other people of at least partial African or slave descent, affected coloureds in the richest layer even more than others, and made it increasingly difficult to continue with everyday life on par with white South Africans.



- *Political participation:* The obvious observation that coloureds did not have sufficient political representation prompted the commission to suggest that their political rights be improved. The majority of the members of the commission recommended that the government should provide for direct participation of coloureds in the government. The rest of the commission admitted that there should at least be an investigation to try and determine a more suitable form of representation for coloureds.

### **3.6.4 Development problems in the middle group**

The commission emphasised that the conditions in the upper half and the lower half of the middle group were in many respects very different. Therefore the commission took the view that the problems of the top layer could to a lesser extent also be made applicable to the upper half of the middle group. Likewise, the lower half of the middle group displayed many characteristics of chronic community poverty, as found in the poorest 40%. Apart from the analysis of both the richest and poorest group, the commission identified two main areas of concern (Terreblanche, 1977: 35-60):

- *Unfair employment opportunities and wages due to the institutional labour market:* At least half of all coloured wages were directly or indirectly influenced by arrangements on the institutional labour market. One of the most important regulations was that trade unions were not fully accessible for coloureds. Mixed trade unions between whites and coloureds were only permitted if the trade union decided on own accord to open up to coloureds. Coloureds could also not participate on an equal level in the management of trade unions. The commission suggested that the Industrial Reconciliation Act be cleared of these discriminatory clauses. A second important institutional arrangement was that of job reservation for whites. The majority view of the commission was that all forms of job reservation discriminating against coloureds should be scrapped. Another discriminatory institutional arrangement was evident in the preferential



treatment given to whites concerning occupational training. Opportunities for apprenticeship and occupational training both in the private and public sector were inadequate. The commission argued that all discriminatory regulations and practices be scrapped and that improved training of coloureds could assist in overcoming the general shortage of skilled labour. The wage gap between whites and coloureds was seen as a further problem. Although it had improved considerably in the preceding few years, the unanimous proposal was that it should be completely eliminated.

- *Transport:* The two main objections against the prevalent transport system was that it was very expensive relative to income levels and that it was extremely inconvenient and unreliable. One of the reasons for this situation was the influence of the Group Areas Act: relocation and new town planning often caused residential areas for coloureds to be located on the outskirts of the white parts of cities and towns and thus also far from the business centres. The commission proposed a reorganisation of the management of the transport system and also suggested different ways to improve the physical infrastructure.

### **3.6.5 Chronic community poverty in the lowest group**

From Terreblanche's book *Gemeenskapsarmoede*, it is clear that the culture of poverty was used as the basic theoretical framework to understand the poverty of the poorest 40% of coloureds (Terreblanche, 1977: 61-138). All the basic elements of the culture of poverty theory were visible in the analysis. However, the term "culture of poverty" was never explicitly used. Instead, Terreblanche used the term "chronic community poverty".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It was suggested that Terreblanche did this in order to avoid ideological problems and criticism, already associated with the term "culture of poverty". In a personal conversation with the author Terreblanche did not deny this, but also indicated that he preferred his own term because it described the problem more accurately.



Terreblanche<sup>5</sup> started out by explaining the difference between physical poverty and a poverty life-style (1977: 61) and qualified that not all poor coloureds had such a life-style. About this poverty life-style he commented as follows:

“Dit is nie ‘n weerspieëling net van armoede nie, maar van ‘n langdurige en chroniese armoede wat reeds deel geword het van die persoonlikheidsstruktuur van diegene wat in armlastige gemeenskappe gebore word en die res van hulle lewe daar moet slyt.”

(Terreblanche, 1977: 61)

This difference between the life-style and value system of the middle class and the community in a culture of poverty has been described in terms of stretched values. Terreblanche (1977: 71) uses the same term to describe chronic community poverty. Terreblanche then describes the chronic community poverty that exists in this group. Although he does not use exactly the same chronological organisation as Lewis, the basic arguments are largely similar.

#### 3.6.5.1 Characteristics of chronic community poverty

Terreblanche points towards characteristics of the individual such as present time orientation, lack of motivation and high crime rates (Terreblanche, 1977: 65-69). Poor family values are present, and are accentuated by a high rate of illegitimate and unwanted pregnancies. Another feature, identified by Terreblanche was the lack of community organisation. This was underlined by the very small percentage of these people that were part of any community organisation. Lastly he points out that this group lived on the periphery of the larger society. He concluded that individually these characteristics would not

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<sup>5</sup> Although Terreblanche did the analysis in collaboration with other members of the commission, he played the leading role in the conceptualisation of the state of chronic community poverty. Therefore, the author will in some cases refer to Terreblanche instead of the commission.



necessarily be an indication of chronic community poverty, but rather that the interaction and combined effect of the different factors would.

### 3.6.5.2 Factors leading to chronic community poverty

Terreblanche did a thorough review of factors leading to the situation of chronic community poverty. He identified different approaches, which were similar to the two different paradigms that were identified in the previous chapter (Terreblanche, 1977: 73-76). According to the first approach, chronic community poverty is due to a process of external downward forces on coloureds over the centuries, which had prevented them from making any significant economic progress. This situation could only be altered by a total reorganisation of the community and providing better income potential to coloureds. According to the second approach chronic community poverty had already been institutionalised in earlier generations and has become a self-perpetuating phenomenon. The improvement of socio-economic conditions was necessary but not enough. This approach also called for a treatment of the negative aspects of this life-style. Terreblanche opted for a third approach, by emphasising the interaction between the external forces and the self-perpetuating nature of chronic community poverty. Although Terreblanche was of the opinion that there should not be an overemphasis of one of the two different views, he definitely gave more attention to the external forces than to the self-perpetuating nature of poverty. Sections 3.6.5.3 and 3.6.5.4 continue to give a brief summary of his explanation of the two forces.

### 3.6.5.3 The self-perpetuating nature of chronic community poverty

Terreblanche regarded family life as one of the important ways in which chronic community poverty was transmitted across generations (Terreblanche, 1977: 76-78). Small children were not only physically in a poor condition, but were also emotionally neglected. Parents often avoided their parental responsibilities towards their children, and unleashed their frustrations on their children. Once these children went to school they tended



to have learning disabilities. This was often not properly corrected by the schooling system and eventually the weak ego structures and learning disabilities got carried through to adulthood. An early initiation into adulthood was another feature of chronic community poverty. Children dropped out of school at an early age and often had to help to stabilise the family income. These teenagers or young adults were easily initiated into gangsterism and criminal activities. Those that did enter the labour market, normally had to make a living out of poorly paid and insecure unskilled labour. Due to the low returns in terms of wages they became averse to labour and unreliable. Often people got drawn into alcoholism. With little exception, this pattern started to repeat itself when these young adults started to have children of their own. A vicious cycle of impoverishment developed out of which it was very difficult to escape (Terreblanche, 1977: 79).

#### 3.6.5.4 Unfavourable environmental factors

Terreblanche describes in detail how various unfavourable environmental factors had led to the situation of chronic community poverty:

- Historic context (Terreblanche: 1977: 80-84)

The early settlers at the Cape already discriminated against non-Europeans and non-Christians. Combined with the influence of slavery, it facilitated a very strong master-servant relationship. This relationship was kept intact after the freeing of the slaves. In the 1850's, various measures were implemented to differentiate between whites and coloureds. With the formation of the Union in 1910, coloureds lost their right to be elected to the white parliament on equal terms. But even worse were the problems in the labour market: coloureds were undercut by cheaper black labour and were barred from many higher "white" positions. This sequence of events was also pointed out by the Wilcocks Commission as important in putting coloureds in their backward socio-economic position. In the Union, especially as apartheid got institutionalised, the position of coloureds deteriorated further. Lastly, Terreblanche pointed out that solving the poor white problem involved



discrimination against coloureds. Most of these factors that influenced coloureds were already history at the time of the Theron investigation. Therefore Terreblanche went to great lengths to indicate that it was exactly this historical sequence of events that put the poorest section of coloureds in a position of chronic community poverty.

- The political framework (Terreblanche, 1977: 84-88)

The lack of effective participation in politics put coloureds in a disadvantageous position. This could be seen most clearly in fiscal redistribution. Although coloureds received more money from the government than they paid in taxes, this was still inadequate for proper education and other necessary community needs. Apart from the national budget that discriminated against non-whites, local councils were also unwilling to spend enough in coloured areas. The commission pleaded for a redistribution that would focus on needs and not on relative tax contributions.

- The economic framework (Terreblanche, 1977: 88-114)

The economy of South Africa has been dualistic for a very long time, with very few people sharing the bulk of the benefits. In the case of poor coloureds, institutional discrimination as well as the existence of a chronic community poverty syndrome, led to their marginal position in the economy. The commission argued that if these problems were not dealt with properly, unemployment and underemployment could escalate.

Terreblanche was of the opinion that both government and the private sector showed a lack of commitment to integrating poor coloureds into the consumer economy and suggested an improvement in employment conditions. The wage scale as determined by local organisations should at least make provision for a household income that would be above the poverty line. The commission also suggested that organised agriculture should monitor working conditions and wages of all farm labourers on a permanent level. The commission also saw the competition from cheaper black labour as a barrier and suggested a renewed commitment of employers in predominantly



coloured areas to use coloured labour. (From a national equity point of view this was an unsustainable argument, to which we will return in later sections.) The labour bureau that had to assist coloureds in finding employment did not function properly, as only a small fraction of the unemployed managed to secure a new job through these job centres. The fact that coloured towns were in many respects only dormitory towns and had very little economic activity of their own, meant that few job opportunities could be created in the coloured community itself.

Another observation was that poor coloureds were very vulnerable consumers. This was exploited by shop owners who sold items on credit terms that could not be met by customers, trapping them in a debt spiral.

Terreblanche provided an additional explanation for the lack of will that existed in the white community to improve the position of coloureds. He argued that the root of this problem lay in the conflict between the white Afrikaner and English elite groups. The Afrikaner elite, receiving the vote of about 60% of the white population, had the political power, while the English elite controlled the biggest part of the economy. According to Terreblanche (1977: 111-114), the English elite tried to shift the focus from their economic responsibility to their workers, towards the politically incorrect system maintained by the Afrikaner elite. This created a deadlock, as the Afrikaner elite were uncompromising in terms of their self-determination and political power. The result was that the efforts being made to improve the situation of the non-whites were simply not enough. This view is probably somewhat controversial.

- White attitudes and prejudices (Terreblanche, 1977: 115-125)

At the time of the Theron Commission a huge polarisation already existed between the white and coloured communities. Terreblanche argued that this distance was totally artificial and impossible to sustain, as coloureds and whites were fully integrated into one economy. The popular opinion of the whites that coloureds formed a separate nation, was not only incorrect but allowed them to overlook their responsibility to improve coloured poverty.



Many whites maintained that poverty was due to flaws in the personality of individuals and some even still linked coloured poverty to biological determinism. Van der Ross commented on middle class unwillingness to believe in a culture of poverty explanation as follows:

“It is not popular because to concede its validity would involve conceding that our society is unjust in the sense that it has produced and continues to maintain a subculture of poverty and a class of culturally deprived persons. White people refuse to concede this, because they consider that it condemns them as a group of Whites. Middle-class Coloured people refuse to concede it because they find it doubly damning – it condemns them for enjoying privilege over others, and it condemns them for being like whites in an indefensible respect.”

(Van der Ross, 1975: 144)

### **3.6.6 The view of the minority group on the subculture of poverty**

Six of the nineteen members of the commission rejected Chapter 22 in total. They were of the opinion that the subculture of poverty theory, or chronic community poverty as Terreblanche called it, was totally misleading<sup>6</sup>. They supported their arguments by quoting almost directly some critical remarks, which Charles Valentine used in his books and articles<sup>7</sup>. They were of the opinion that the chapter put too much emphasis on the role of the environment in the creation of poverty. They were especially afraid that such a view might lead to a Marxist-type of hatred against the regime that controls this environment. Other points of critique by this group included that there were generalisations in the theory, which undermined its validity. An example given was that the chapter generalises about white attitudes towards coloureds. The minority group continued their argument by stating that it was totally wrong to picture coloureds as the victims of an environment created by (Afrikaner) whites. Instead it should be understood that coloureds

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<sup>6</sup> They insisted on referring to the culture of poverty instead of chronic community poverty.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Valentine was a prominent anthropologist, who published various academic works, criticising the culture of poverty theory as developed by Oscar Lewis and other writers. See Chapter Two for a detailed analysis of the debate.



themselves, had played an important role in creating their own poverty situation.

The arguments of the minority group were of a very poor quality. Both Joubert (1976: 175) and Esterhuysen (1976, cited in Terreblanche, 1977: 129-132) reacted strongly to their unscientific arguments. The minority group failed to prove that the theory was grounded in Marxism. They failed to give a clear view on the interaction between environmental factors and natural potential. Esterhuysen and Terreblanche concluded that the minority group was still trapped in a hierarchical paradigm, believing that different groups of people had different inherent potentials. In other words, they were still racially prejudiced.

One can see an even more striking repudiation of the arguments of the minority group in the selective usage of Valentine's arguments. He lay bare some of the methodological and scientific flaws in the arguments of Lewis, but he combined this with an alternative approach that focused more on environmental factors than on personal potential (See Chapter Two). The minority group mentioned his critique on the soundness of the model, but then combined it with a focus on personal potential instead of environmental factors, as Valentine did. This was exactly the opposite reason to why Valentine criticised the culture of poverty and was critical abuse of his theory.

The arguments of the minority group were so incoherent that it can be ignored in the appraisal of chronic community poverty. However, it is important to note that the view of the minority group did weaken the position of the Theron report to some extent. This was because it opened the door for the government to criticise the soundness of the report and to reject many of the policy proposals of the commission. (See Section 3.6.8).



### **3.6.7 A comparison between the poor white problem and coloured poverty**

In Section 3.2.2.4 we have already looked at several reasons why the poor white problem was not comparable to coloured poverty. An important qualification that needs to be made lies in the way the problem should be solved. There was the common belief among Afrikaners that the poor whites pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps. The fact is that the poor whites formed a minority within the total white population and the initiative for their socio-economic upliftment came from their wealthier fellow whites. As whites also had the political power it was possible to use the full power of the state to secure the necessary reforms. In the case of poor coloureds any "rescue operation" would have had to focus on almost half of the total coloured population. Their wealthier counterparts simply did not have the necessary economic or political power to perform an operation of such a scale. Clearly the initiative had to come from the white community and the state, controlled by whites. To argue that coloureds had to do this on their own was, although very popular at that stage, rather shortsighted. Another point that was stressed by Terreblanche was that coloureds as a group did not have the same coherent identity as whites and also had much weaker developed cultural organisations. In the mind of Terreblanche, the role of culture and community organisation was thus important. However, the relative importance of this was overshadowed by the socio-economic and political reality (Terreblanche, 1977: 134-138).

### **3.6.8 Policy proposals**

A number of individual policy implications have been mentioned during the discussion of the different elements of the Theron report. Most of these focused on making apartheid laws more lenient or even scrapping them. The policy proposals also included removing other discriminatory practices, both in the private and public sector. Thirdly, there was an urgent call for the improvement of the living conditions of poor coloured people. In Chapter 22, Terreblanche gave a more general perspective on how the coloured problem



should be addressed. He stressed that there was a problem with the economic and political system as a whole and that there should be an evolutionary change to improve the power and participation of coloured people. In the first place it was necessary to have a multiple and differentiated strategy to target the problems in the three different socio-economic groups of coloureds. Together these policy measures should bring a fundamental change in the socio-economic position of coloureds and also serve to eradicate chronic community poverty. For the top layer, the biggest challenge was to remove discriminatory laws, which effectively barred them from normal societal life. For the middle layer, housing and equal job opportunities were most pressing. For the lowest level, the creation of a stable income had to be combined with a very strong focus on the education of children. Education was also very important in eliminating chronic community poverty. In order to achieve this, both the government and the private sector had to show a greater willingness to change the socio-economic position of coloureds. In other words, both the English elite and Afrikaner elite had to be willing to sacrifice their own privileged positions (Terreblanche, 1977: 139-161).

### **3.6.9 The interim memorandum**

The Theron-report, when presented in the House of Representatives, was accompanied by an interim memorandum of the government, containing preliminary commentary.<sup>8</sup> This memorandum lashed out at many of the policy proposals of the commission in terms of loosening the apartheid rules and regulations. The government insisted that its process of separate development of the coloured community was to their benefit. This situation, combined with the fact that very little time was given to analyse the report, probably caused an improper understanding of the contents of the report and very little desire to implement its broad policy proposals. This is a regrettable situation, as the amount of work put into the report certainly deserved a better

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<sup>8</sup> A comprehensive memorandum was only represented in April 1977. By that time it was however clear that the government saw the recommendations of the Theron report as too liberal.



appraisal. It also caused considerable discontent among political and community leaders in the coloured community. Terreblanche (1977: 160) commented that the Theron report was to some extent made redundant by the Soweto-uprising which occurred only two days before it was represented in parliament. According to Terreblanche the hatred against the apartheid system was even more than what the commission had expected and therefore called for an urgent implementation of the necessary reforms. Professor Theron (1977: 107) indicated that the policy proposals of the commission were very tempered, given their findings. But these reforms were still seen by the government as too far-reaching. In the following section we will draw conclusions on the soundness of the concept of chronic community poverty as developed by Terreblanche.

### **3.7 The Theron Commission and the culture of poverty**

This section will provide a critical analysis of the Theron Commission's use of the culture of poverty concept. In the previous chapter, it was seen that the culture of poverty theory as developed by Oscar Lewis had some conceptual and methodological weak points.. It was concluded that some changes had to be incorporated in the approach. We will now review the theory of chronic community poverty, in Section 3.7.1 – 3.7.5, by discussing individual points of criticism against the original culture of poverty theory and establishing to what extent the commission can be criticised on these points. Section 3.7.6 will provide additional points of critique, within the South African context.

#### **3.7.1 Research methodology**

It is evident from Chapter Two that the research methodology of Oscar Lewis, and thus the most important body of work regarding the culture of poverty theory, was under some suspicion. It is the opinion of the author that the commission managed to escape some of the same pitfalls. In essence, the critique against the *modus operandi* of Lewis and later contributors to the culture of poverty theory was that it had some theoretical flaws, based on



unrepresentative data. The commission relied heavily on questionnaires and interviews. The question we can ask is whether the samples used by the commission were representative and thus valid to support their perspective. The overall impression is that the commission did very thorough research. They used different ways of retrieving information and covered the whole socio-economic stratification. They also did an extensive demographic analysis. Professor Theron described their research methodology as follows:

“Die Kommissie het inligting verkry by wyse van vraelyste, memoranda, mondelinge getuienis, dokumentêre navorsing en besoeke aan plekke en instansies (onder andere is met 235 plaaslike owerhede en 89 bestuurskomitees of verwante liggame in verbinding getree). Daarbenewens is verskeie omvangryke opnames deur ander instansies vir die Kommissie gemaak, soos bv. oor die sosio-ekonomiese posisie van plaaswerkers, die sosio-politieke denke van stedelike Kleurlinge asook van Kleurlingleiers.”

(Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 2)

The result of this thorough research was that the commission made a clear and well-motivated distinction between the three different socio-economic groups. Where Lewis gave ethnographic evidence on a few selected families, the commission used a wider base of information.

A very important difference between the work of Lewis and the commission was that Lewis tried to apply his concept on a cross-national basis, while the Theron Commission only dealt with one group of people in one country. Therefore, when the commission described the characteristics of chronic community poverty, they had a much more manageable task. Their description of problems in the family, or with community organisation, or with the peripheral position of poor coloureds in society elicited very little criticism, as these were clearly recognisable phenomena among the poorest group of coloureds. It can thus be concluded that although the concepts of chronic community poverty and the culture of poverty were very similar, the research methodology as supplied by the Theron Commission in South Africa was more sound.



### **3.7.2 The self-perpetuating nature of chronic community poverty versus external factors**

The largest part of the debate regarding the culture of poverty revolved around the weight that should be given to its self-perpetuating nature. It was shown in the previous chapter that most critics of the theory felt that there was simply too little evidence to conclude that it played a major role.

The commission stated that there should be a balanced view on the interaction between the self-perpetuating and the external forces of poverty (Terreblanche, 1977: 76). However, in describing the dynamics of the problem, the commission definitely gave a more important place to the external forces. This was already evident in the way they described the self-perpetuation of chronic community poverty. Apart from the focus on psychological factors, they also referred to the physical poverty and underdevelopment of children. The self-perpetuation was thus partially due to physical poverty and not psychological factors. But even more important was that the bulk of the analysis revolved around the external factors that created the situation of chronic community poverty, and kept it intact. The commission identified historical events, the political dispensation as well as the economic environment as important external factors, which created the situation of chronic community poverty. Of these different factors they gave detailed accounts. They also referred to the prejudices held by whites against coloureds and which could be seen as a stumbling block in their development.

Further evidence of the different emphasis of the commission can be found in the changing of the name from "culture of poverty" to "chronic community poverty". The original term was strongly linked to life-style or cultural matters, i.e. to the factors of self-perpetuation. The new term better described the structural forces that created poverty in the community, and not only cultural matters. Lastly, it is interesting to note that the minority group, who rejected Chapter 22, was particularly upset by the majority view that external downward forces played an important role in creating poverty amongst



coloureds. This is indicative of the commission's focus on external factors. Given these factors, it would be difficult to blame the commission for putting too much emphasis to the self-perpetuating nature of chronic community poverty.

However, in their policy recommendations regarding the poorest group, the commission again focused strongly on social problems. Terreblanche even explored the possibility of raising children of poor parents in orphanages to break the cycle of chronic community poverty (1977: 142-144). The commission emphasised the role of education in eradicating the poverty cycle. They concluded that the removal of physical poverty would not be enough to break the chronic community poverty that existed.

It is difficult to make a clear assessment of the commission's stance with regard to the self-perpetuation of poverty. The fact that they always saw the eradication of physical poverty as a necessary factor even before addressing the social problems was encouraging. Furthermore, the recommendations regarding changes in the political and economic environment could have made a huge difference in eradicating physical poverty. On the whole, it can be concluded that the commission's analysis of the self-perpetuating nature of chronic community poverty left no way open for misinterpreting the problem as being caused by coloured culture. The eradication of physical poverty and the changes to the political and economic institutions were propagated without exception.

### **3.7.3 The value of trait analysis**

Trait analysis played a big role in the conceptualisation of the culture of poverty theory. When subjecting these supposed culture of poverty traits (see Appendix 1) to closer scrutiny, it is clear why many critics had serious doubts regarding the soundness of this trait analysis. Terreblanche (1977: 65-69) identified some traits such as present time orientation, high incidence of alcoholism and high crime rates. These descriptions were, however, not



nearly as all-inclusive regarding the total personality of the person living in chronic community poverty.

The question now arises whether it is possible to write within the culture of poverty framework without an elaborate trait analysis? A decreased focus on individual traits would also imply a decreased focus on the cultural or self-perpetuating forces. This was indeed a desirable improvement to the original culture of poverty theory and exactly what Valentine (1971: 209) had proposed. That the commission focused less on traits, adds to the evidence that they realised the importance of the external factors.

#### **3.7.4 The distinction between a culture and a subculture**

With the Theron report, the problem of not distinguishing between a culture and a subculture does not exist at all. Terreblanche spent several paragraphs to make sure that the reader understood that poor coloureds did not form a separate cultural entity (1977: 70-73). Instead, he made strong use of the concept of "stretched values". This implied that poor coloureds strove towards the same basic value system as other middle class people but that they had adopted stretched values as a response to their socio-economic position. There is much strength in this distinction as it basically rules out any pejorative view on the culture of the poor coloureds. Clearly this notion was a condemnation of the system of apartheid, which was propagated in terms of the perceived cultural differences between the different racial groups. This probably also played a role in the minority group's rejection of Chapter 22.

#### **3.7.5 Middle class values as a benchmark**

Middle class (i.e. Euro-American) values were used as a benchmark in the original culture of poverty theory. This theory was later heavily criticised for its assumption that African-American and Euro-American family structure and values should be the same. The Theron Commission also used middle class standards as a benchmark for family structure and values. The fact that there was in essence no cultural distinction between poor coloureds and the top-layer with a middle class existence has already been discussed in Section



3.7.4. This could support the usefulness of the measuring of family structures and values of poor coloureds against those of the middle class. It must also be kept in mind that the commission was confronted with evidence of an extremely high rate of unwanted pregnancies and other problems such as alcoholism.

When taking these factors into account, it can be concluded that the commission's use of middle class values as benchmark did not lead to a wrong diagnosis of the problem. What is important is that there should not be a singular focus on eradicating this "deviant" behaviour, but rather a holistic approach to provide the best socio-economic improvement in the long run, and this is what the commission did.

### **3.7.6 The Theron Commission, apartheid and black poverty**

The Theron Commission had the task to investigate the socio-economic progress as well as poverty and other problems in the coloured community. The commission pointed in the right policy direction by proposing reforms to the apartheid system, which could have improved the socio-economic and political position of coloureds. One might argue that the commission's failure to break totally with the apartheid ideology was a mistake. It must, however, be remembered that the hegemony of the apartheid ideology was still very strong at that stage and that some members of the commission were seemingly still strong supporters of apartheid. From the careful suggestions of the majority group of the commission, the impression arises that they chose to compromise, knowing that too radical policy proposals would have led to a total rejection of the report. Even so, the policy proposals were still negated to a large extent by the government, who viewed it as too liberal.

A second potential point of criticism against the commission was that they almost totally ignored comparisons with black poverty. One gets the idea that the commission tried to forge a stronger allegiance between whites and coloureds. They insisted that coloureds formed part of the Western society. Did they do this to try and extend privileges to coloureds at the cost of blacks



(the commission did support the entrenchment of coloured labour), or would they, if asked, have had more or less similar policy recommendations concerning blacks? More important, what would the fiscal implications have been for the development of the black community on the same level as was suggested for coloureds? Would it have been reconcilable with an egalitarian society, where all racial groups should get a more or less equal proportionate share of fiscal resources? Too little evidence exists to come to a final conclusion on this matter and although it is likely to have been true for some members of the commission, the Theron Commission can probably not be accused of coloured favouritism.

### **3.8 Summary and conclusions**

This chapter analysed the role of the Theron report as well as some of its predecessors in understanding and combating poverty in South Africa. The first major poverty investigation was the Carnegie investigation into the poor white problem. It was shown that a range of factors led to the eventual backward position of this group of people. Due to various reasons it was concluded that the situation could not really be described in terms of a culture of poverty. The second investigation into poverty concerned the coloured community. Although the Wilcocks Commission did not do a thorough review of poverty problems, it seems that they left the door open for a culture of poverty explanation, by emphasising the role of unfavourable environmental factors which caused poverty. The third important commission, which analysed black development, was the Tomlinson Commission. It was argued that the Tomlinson Commission realised the immensity of the economic challenges to develop the black community. Unfortunately, the commission proposed a separate path of development for the blacks, which strengthened the apartheid ideology. It also seems that the commission was still racially prejudiced and put much emphasis on possible genetic and cultural factors, which they believed could have inhibited the development of the black community.



The Theron Commission had to do its work at a time when there was still a widespread belief among whites that apartheid could work. The commission had to investigate the progress made by the coloured community since 1960 and had to identify problem areas. The commission appointed different task groups, which had to consider different aspects of the poverty problem. The eventual report consisted of five different sections on the position of coloureds in the South African society, namely economic issues, socio-cultural matters, statutory matters and some perspectives on socio-cultural and statutory matters. Many problems within the community were identified. Almost all facilities and services like education, housing and health were inadequate. Poverty in the coloured community also gave them a huge disadvantage in participating in cultural and recreational activities. The commission identified a whole range of apartheid laws and practices which served to perpetuate their backward position. Of these, the Population Registration Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Separate Amenities Act were very important. Equally important were the separate parliamentary voters' rolls which prevented coloureds from having political power on an equal basis with whites. The commission suggested that these laws should be adapted (or in the case of the Mixed Marriages Act, abolished) in order to give coloureds more equal rights and opportunities.

The analysis of the economic position of coloureds was marked by a differentiation between the three different socio-economic groups. The 20% richest coloureds had living standards comparable to that of middle class white South Africans. Apartheid laws that kept them from participating normally in economic and societal activities were their biggest frustration. The middle group spanned the wide gap between the poorest 40% and the richest 20%. They could again be divided into a richer and poorer quintile, which depending on their socio-economic status were more affected by problems of either the richest quintile or the poorest 40%. The biggest problems affecting them concerned jobs and housing. Unequal salary scales for the same gender and job grade as well as job reservations for whites, existed. This group made widespread use of transport services, which were very expensive and unreliable.



The poorest 40% lived in a situation of chronic community poverty. The commission made use of the same basic approach as found in the culture of poverty theory to analyse their situation. Firstly chronic community poverty was caused by several unfavourable environmental factors. A range of historical factors such as slavery and political marginalisation played a role. Their lack of political power and the unwillingness of the white government to spend enough to improve their standard of living were further drawbacks. White prejudices also played a role in keeping coloureds in a subjective position. Lastly, there were different negative economic factors. Discrimination on the labour market was a very important factor. The mentality evident of chronic community poverty resulted in employers often preferring not to make use of coloured labour. Coloureds were also very vulnerable consumers and often got caught in a debt-spiral. There was a lack of commitment from both the public and private sectors to change the situation.

Apart from the negative environmental factors, chronic community poverty also had a self-perpetuating element. This had much to do with the way children grew up in the midst of poverty and the wide range of social problems that prevailed.

The commission compared the poor white problem and coloured poverty, but came to the conclusion that there were too many differences between the two kinds of poverty to use the poor white problem as an example for policy proposals.

The commission concluded that there had to be a fundamental adaptation of the political and economic environment in order to reintegrate this group of coloureds into the mainstream of the economy. There also had to be a very strong focus on education in order to break the cycle of chronic community poverty. This whole effort would only have been possible with greater commitment from the white population to this end.



A minority of six of the nineteen members of the commission wholly rejected the notion of chronic community poverty. Their most important criticism was against the idea that external factors played an important role in creating the poverty situation. The government also rejected many of the policy proposals of the commission in an interim memorandum, distributed with the report, and was adamant that they would not change the basic apartheid system.

An evaluation of the concept of chronic community poverty showed that many of the pitfalls of the culture of poverty were avoided. The research methodology was sounder than in the case of Lewis' model. Although Terreblanche also used the much-criticised concept of the self-perpetuation of chronic community poverty, he left no room for misinterpreting its role. The eradication of poverty itself was not negotiable. Terreblanche did not lean so heavily on trait analysis as was the case with Lewis' model. He clearly distinguished between a culture and a subculture and pointed out that chronic community poverty was a subcultural phenomenon. In the last instance, it was concluded that Lewis' usage of middle class values as benchmark could not have led to a singular focus on eradicating the "deviant" behaviour of people living in chronic community poverty.

A possible point of criticism that has been raised is that of the reconcilability of the report with the ideal of an egalitarian society. It is uncertain whether the proposals of the commission would have been viable if also extended to the black community.

The following final conclusion can be drawn: The Theron Commission did not misinterpret coloured poverty by using the concept of chronic community poverty. The concept was better constructed and showed a closer relation to real life than the original culture of poverty theory. This improved theorisation ruled out any misinterpretations regarding the role of the culture of poverty in creating poverty. The policy measures that followed the analysis were also sound given the fact that the commission had to focus on coloured poverty only.



The Theron Commission's analysis provides a good basis for evaluating the change that has taken place in the socio-economic position of the coloured community in the past three decades. This will be analysed in Chapter Four.



## **Chapter Four - Changes in the socio-economic position of coloureds since the era of the Theron commission**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The face of the South African economy has changed much since the time of the Theron investigation. Van der Berg (1989: 187-203) identified three long-term economic trends that first became visible in the South African economy in the 1970's. Firstly, South Africa experienced a deceleration in economic growth and job creation, causing a rapid rise in unemployment rates. Secondly blacks gradually increased their economic power, as trade unions were able to secure a steady rise in black wages, relative to whites. Thirdly, a political crisis developed as the resistance against apartheid grew and government gradually started to recognise that apartheid was unsustainable. This was evident in the narrowing of the racial gap in social spending by the government.

The end of apartheid gave rise to new forces and challenges in the South African economy, such as the reintegration into the world economy after the apartheid isolation. However, the alarmingly high rate of unemployment is currently the most pressing socio-economic problem in South Africa. Different avenues to address this problem exist. It is widely recognised that affirmative action and an increase in welfare spending alone will not provide sufficient results and that the only sustainable solution is to attain a higher level of job creating economic growth.

How has all these socio-economic forces influenced the coloured community? We need to answer this question before we can form a sound opinion on the role of Theron commission and the validity of the culture of poverty theory in the effort to combat poverty. This chapter will assess the progress made by coloureds over the past 25-30 years by looking at the following areas:

- demographic change,
- education,
- income patterns and occupational status,



- the distribution of income and poverty levels, and
- the plight of coloureds in the rural and agricultural areas.

Naturally, the position of coloureds must be understood in the context of the South African society as a whole and this analysis will hopefully also create a better understanding of poverty on a countrywide basis.

## **4.2 Demographic change**

### **4.2.1 Population size**

According to the 1996 census, there were 3.634 million coloured people living in South Africa at that time. This represented 9% of the total population of South Africa. Although coloureds are a minority group in South Africa, their hinterland is the Western Cape where they are still the predominant racial group. According to the 1996 census, 54.2% of the total population of the Western Cape were coloured. Likewise, 59.6% of the total coloured population lived in the Western Cape. Of the remainder, the majority lives in the bordering provinces of the Northern and Eastern Cape.

**TABLE 4.1**

### **SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION IN VARIOUS YEARS FROM 1960-1996**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Asians</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Coloureds</b>	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Total</b>
In thousands					
<b>1960</b>	477	10 928	1 509	3 088	16 002
<b>1970</b>	630	15 340	2 051	3 773	21 794
<b>1980</b>	821	20 800	2 686	4 528	28 835
<b>1985</b>	894	24 549	2 918	4 819	33 180
<b>1991</b>	987	28 615	3 280	5 062	37 944
<b>1996</b>	1 055	31 418	3 634	4 476	40 584
	<b>Asians</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Coloureds</b>	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Total</b>
As percentage of total population					
<b>1960</b>	3.0%	68.3%	9.4%	19.3%	100%
<b>1970</b>	2.9%	70.4%	9.4%	17.3%	100%
<b>1980</b>	2.8%	72.1%	9.4%	15.7%	100%
<b>1985</b>	2.7%	74.0%	8.8%	14.5%	100%
<b>1991</b>	2.6%	75.4%	8.7%	13.3%	100%
<b>1996</b>	2.6%	77.4%	9.0%	11.0%	100%

**Source:** Institute for Futures Research, 1999: Table 2.33



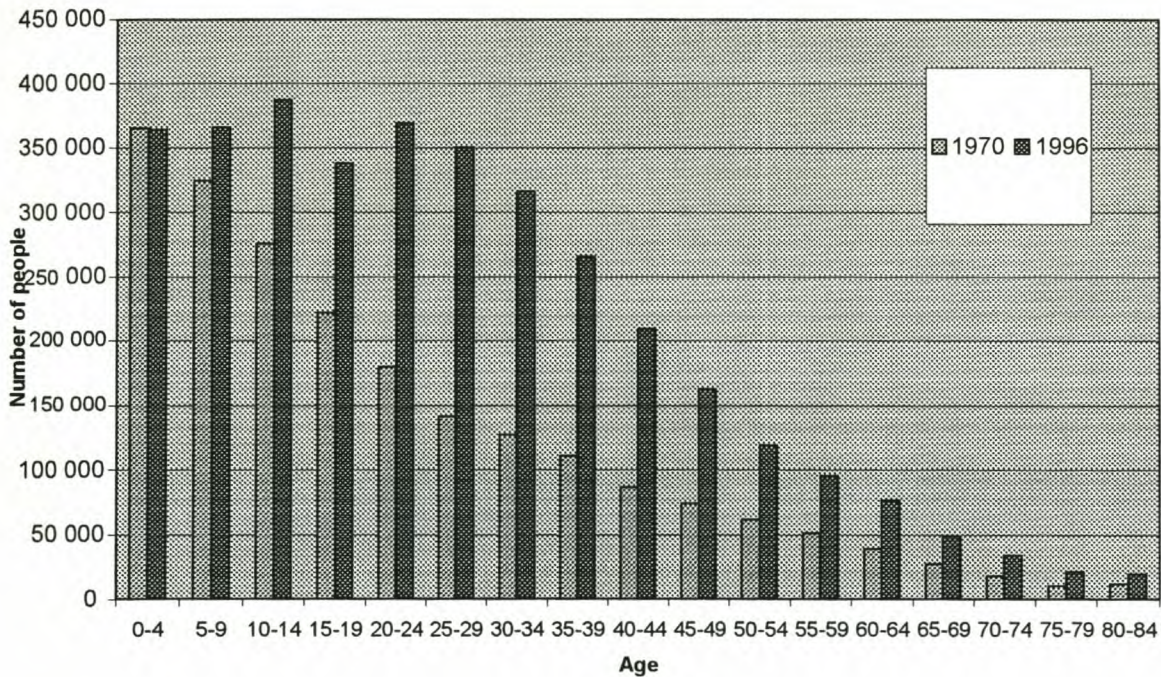
From Table 4.1 it can be seen that the size of the coloured population relative to the other racial groups has stayed more or less stable since 1960. At that time they made up 9.4% of the total population of South Africa and in 1996 they made up 9.0% of the total South African population. During this period the biggest relative shift occurred in the share of whites and blacks. In 1960 whites constituted 19.3% of the total population of South African and blacks 68.3%, while in 1996 whites only constituted 11.0% of the total population and blacks 77.4%.

#### **4.2.2 Distribution of age**

From Figure 4.1 it can be seen that the age distribution of coloureds has changed visibly in the period from 1970 to 1996. In 1970, the coloured population was relatively young as people in the younger birth cohorts formed a large proportion of the population. By 1996 the younger cohorts already formed a significantly smaller proportion of the total population. The number of people in the cohort 0-4 years was for instance the same in 1996 and 1970, in spite of the fact that the population has grown by 77% over the 26-year period. This is a clear sign of changes in other areas such as the birth rate and life expectancy.

Since the age distribution of coloureds showed such a dramatic change, it is worthwhile to look at the change that has taken place in terms of the dependency ratio. This ratio is calculated by dividing the sum of the age groups 0-14 and 65+ (those that are likely to be dependant) by the age group 15-64 (those that are likely to be able to earn a wage). The higher the ratio, the more pressure is exerted on the potential breadwinners. The Theron commission calculated that the dependency ratio for coloureds was 0.96 in 1975. In other words, for every person in the age group 15-64 there was 0.96 children or pensioners to be sustained. From the 1996 census it was calculated that this ratio has declined to only 0.58. This fact is very illuminating and will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.4.4.



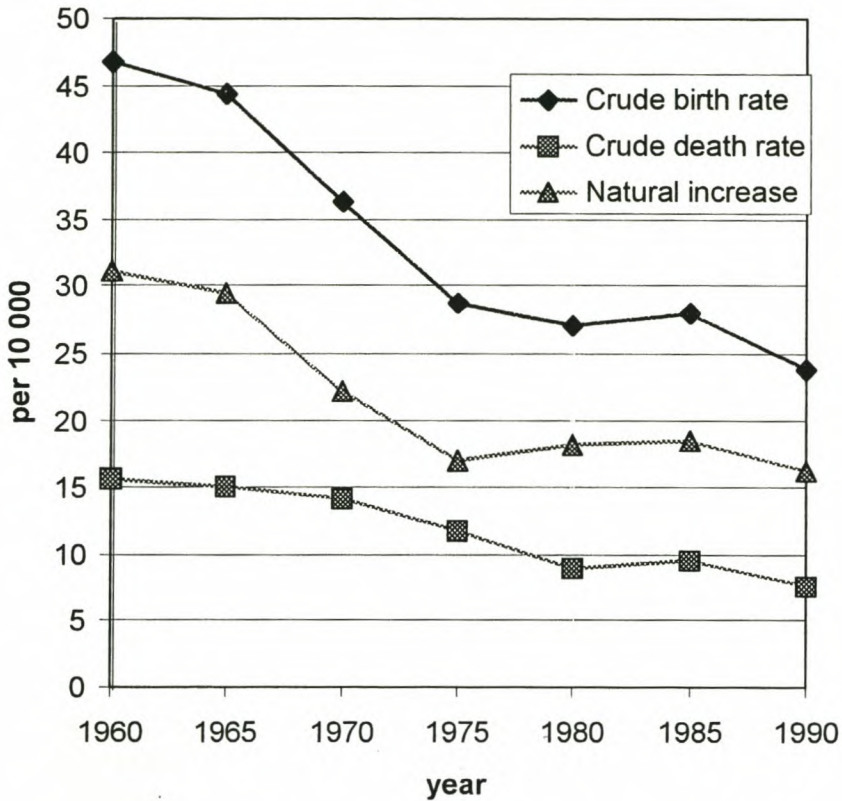
**FIGURE 4.1****THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF COLOUREDS, 1970 AND 1996**

**Source:** Sadie (1988:77) and Van Aardt & Van Tonder (1999:126)

#### 4.2.3 Crude births, crude deaths and natural rate of increase

The changes in the age distribution and dependency ratio point towards other demographic changes. The first trend to be considered is the natural rate of increase, illustrated by Figure 4.2. Here it can be seen that the crude birth rate of coloureds has declined from 46.7 per 1000 in 1960 to only 23.8 per 1000 in 1990. Similarly, the crude death rate has declined from 15.6 per 1000 in 1960 to 7.6 per 1000 in 1990. The result was that the natural rate of increase has virtually halved in 30 years from a level of 3.1% per year in 1960, to only 1.6% in 1990. These results give evidence of a rapid decrease in fertility and infant mortality rates, which we shall now investigate further.



**FIGURE 4.2****CRUDE BIRTH RATE, CRUDE DEATH RATE AND NATURAL RATE OF INCREASE OF COLOUREDS IN THE PERIOD 1960-1990**

**Source:** South African Statistics, 1994, 1986 and 1976.

#### 4.2.4 Total fertility and infant mortality

From Table 4.2 it can be seen that total female fertility and infant mortality have indeed decreased considerably. Total fertility has declined from 6.71 children per woman in the period from 1960-1965 to only 2.8 children per woman in the period from 1985-1990. This is a remarkable decrease of 58% in a quarter of a century. The then projected total fertility for the period 1996-2001 still showed a steady decline to 2.5 children per women.



**TABLE 4.2****TOTAL FERTILITY AND INFANT MORTALITY**

Year	TFR*	Infant Mortality
1960	6.71	128.6
1965	6.29	132.3
1970	5.43	132.6
1975	3.88	104.2
1980	3.24	60.7
1985	2.80	40.7
1990	-	39.4
1996	2.5**	-

\*in the case of TFR, each figure represents the average for the period, i.e. the figure for 1960 represents the average for the period 1960-1965.

\*\*Projected for the period 1996-2001

**Source:** Sadie, 1988: 35; Sadie, 1993: 19 and Van Aardt & Van Tonder, 1999: 53

Mostert (1981:26-27) attributed this rapid decline to the combined effect of some important factors. Firstly there was a steady rise in income which normally leads to a lower fertility rate. Secondly there was a huge improvement in medical services. Thirdly there was a very focused and successful birth control programme. Mostert adds that these factors were accompanied by a socio-cultural set-up in the community that was highly conducive to a lowering of the birth rate. Apparently, coloured women were very susceptible to the idea of lowering their birth rate and participated on a very large scale in birth control programmes (Mostert, 1984: 10-12). This finding is very strongly supported by evidence put forward in the rest of this chapter in terms of education and income status. Firstly consider the education levels of women. There is very strong evidence that there is a positive correlation between female education and fertility rates (Farooq & Degraff, 1988: 33; Psacharopoulos, 1995:9 and De Villiers, 1996:51-53). South Africa is rather unique among developing countries in that there are not large differences in the educational levels of females and males. It will be shown in Section 4.3.5 that the educational achievement of coloured girls started to surpass that of coloured boys during the 1970's and they are currently doing better in school than boys. Secondly consider income status. As the experience in industrialised and many developing countries has shown, higher



income leads to a lowering of fertility rates. Section 4.3.6 will show that income levels of coloureds have improved in the period of analysis.

The lowering in infant mortality is equally spectacular. In 1960, 128.6 out of every 1000 infants died, while in 1990 it was only 39.4. This represents a decline of 63.9% in a period of 30 years. This decline can, as in the case of the lower fertility rates, be attributed to better female education, rising per capita income and better medical facilities. In some studies in Africa, it was shown that infant mortality could decline by 1% for every 1% increase in female literacy (Psacharopoulos, 1995:9). In the normal demographic cycle, the mortality rate starts declining some time before there is a lowering in the fertility rate. This is also true for coloureds, but what makes their situation unique is that once the fertility rate started to decline, it did so very quickly, and therefore we did not see a significant population boom among coloureds.

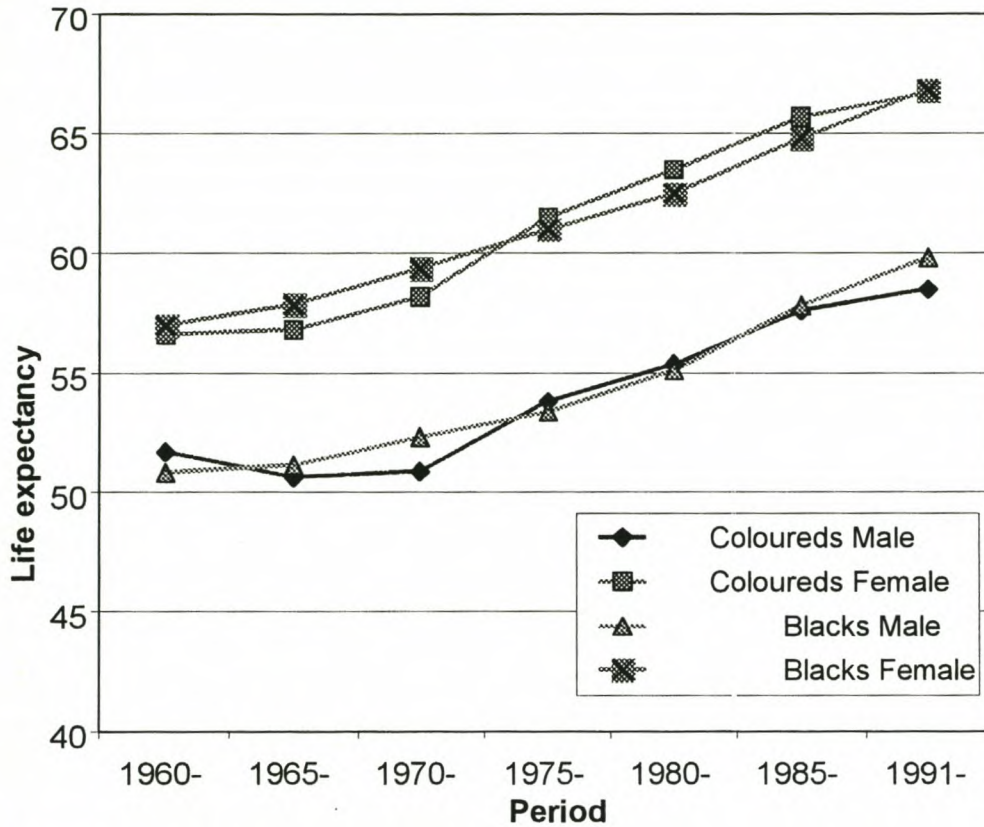
#### **4.2.5 Life expectancy at birth**

From Figure 4.4 it can be seen that the life expectancy of coloureds showed a marked increase in the period from 1960-1990. Coloured males' life expectancy rose from 51.7 years in the period 1960-1965 to 58.5 years in the period 1991-1996, while female life expectancy rose from 56.6 years to 66.7 in the same period. It is interesting to see that coloureds have been outscored by blacks in terms of the rise in life expectancy, and in the period 1990-1996, both black males and females lived slightly longer than their coloured counterparts. The reason for this probably lies in the very high incidence of tuberculosis in the poorer section of the coloured community. We will analyse this in more detail in section 4.5.3



**FIGURE 4.3**

**LIFE EXPECTANCY FOR COLOUREDS AND BLACKS ACCORDING TO GENDER, FOR THE PERIOD 1960-1996**



**Source:** Sadie, 2000.

### **4.3 Education**

#### **4.3.1 The role of education**

Education, if analysed within a broader socio-economic perspective, is a very useful measure of the development status of a population. The value of education has already been recognised by early economic writers and in modern economics it has been incorporated into human capital theory. The basic principal of this theory is that differences in levels of production are determined among other things, by the quality of the labour force, which in turn is influenced by the level of education (De Villiers, 1996: 20).



Due to its prominence in the human capital theory, many studies have been undertaken to try and establish the influence of education on economic growth and per capita income (Van der Berg, 1999:8-9). Although it is in general very difficult to establish its contribution accurately there is a wide consensus that it does improve economic performance and quality of life. Investment in education is therefore seen as a very important priority in any developing economy. The rest of this section is based upon this assumption.

#### **4.3.2 Educational status of different age groups**

An analysis of coloured education reveals very significant trends. The first and very encouraging trend can be seen in the steady improvement of the education levels for coloured individuals over the past five decades. Table 4.3 shows the educational status for 5-year cohort groups of coloureds, as recorded by the census of 1996. This is a very reliable way to see how levels of education have changed over time. Although the market value of a certain level of education may fall over time, the level of education does not erode over the years. This enables us to compare the educational status of different age groups as the census encapsulates much of educational history.

If one first considers the total figures, it can be seen that levels of schooling are much better in the cohort of 20-24 year olds than in the cohort of 75-79 year olds. In the cohort of 75-79-year olds, only 4% passed at least Matric, while in the cohort of 20-24 olds, 32% have passed Matric. (It is expected that slightly more than 32% of this cohort group will eventually pass Matric, as some are still in school.) In the cohort of 75-79 year olds, 43% have no formal education, i.e. have not passed Grade 1 and can thus be seen as illiterate, while in the cohort group of 20-24 year olds, this percentage has decreased to a level of only 6%. In the cohort group of 20-24 year olds, 82% have finished their primary education, or Grade 7, but from Grade 7 to Matric the success rate declines to a low 32%. Naturally, a Matriculation rate of 32% still leaves much to be desired and significant further improvement is needed. However the improvement in the educational status of coloureds in the period is a very positive factor.



**TABLE 4.3**

**PERCENTAGE OF FIVE-YEAR COHORT GROUPS OF URBAN AND RURAL  
COLOUREDS WHO ATTAINED AT LEAST CERTAIN LEVELS OF  
SCHOOLING, 1996**

		<b>Matric</b>	<b>Grade 10</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
Urban	20-24	36%	58%	87%	94%	95%
Urban	25-29	30%	54%	85%	93%	95%
Urban	30-34	21%	45%	80%	91%	93%
Urban	35-39	16%	39%	75%	89%	92%
Urban	40-44	12%	32%	71%	86%	90%
Urban	45-49	9%	28%	67%	85%	88%
Urban	50-54	8%	24%	63%	81%	85%
Urban	55-59	6%	20%	59%	78%	83%
Urban	60-64	5%	15%	52%	72%	77%
Urban	65-69	4%	12%	46%	67%	73%
Urban	70-74	4%	10%	42%	63%	69%
Urban	75-79	4%	9%	36%	54%	61%
		<b>Matric</b>	<b>Grade 10</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
Rural	20-24	10%	22%	59%	84%	90%
Rural	25-29	8%	19%	52%	79%	86%
Rural	30-34	5%	12%	42%	73%	82%
Rural	35-39	3%	9%	38%	66%	76%
Rural	40-44	3%	7%	31%	60%	71%
Rural	45-49	1%	5%	28%	55%	67%
Rural	50-54	2%	5%	25%	49%	59%
Rural	55-59	2%	5%	23%	45%	54%
Rural	60-64	1%	3%	18%	35%	44%
Rural	65-69	1%	2%	18%	34%	41%
Rural	70-74	1%	3%	18%	34%	40%
Rural	75-79	1%	3%	14%	27%	34%
		<b>Matric</b>	<b>Grade 10</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
Total	20-24	32%	52%	82%	92%	94%
Total	25-29	26%	48%	79%	91%	93%
Total	30-34	18%	40%	73%	88%	91%
Total	35-39	14%	34%	69%	85%	89%
Total	40-44	10%	28%	65%	82%	87%
Total	45-49	7%	24%	61%	80%	84%
Total	50-54	7%	21%	57%	76%	80%
Total	55-59	6%	18%	54%	73%	78%
Total	60-64	4%	13%	47%	66%	72%
Total	65-69	3%	11%	42%	62%	68%
Total	70-74	3%	9%	39%	59%	65%
Total	75-79	4%	8%	33%	50%	57%

**Source:** Own calculations, Census 1996, 10% sample

#### 4.3.3 Educational status of rural and urban coloureds

Apart from the improvement in educational status over time, other important trends can be identified. Firstly, by looking at the schooling levels of rural and urban coloureds in Table 4.3 separately, one can conclude that there is a huge

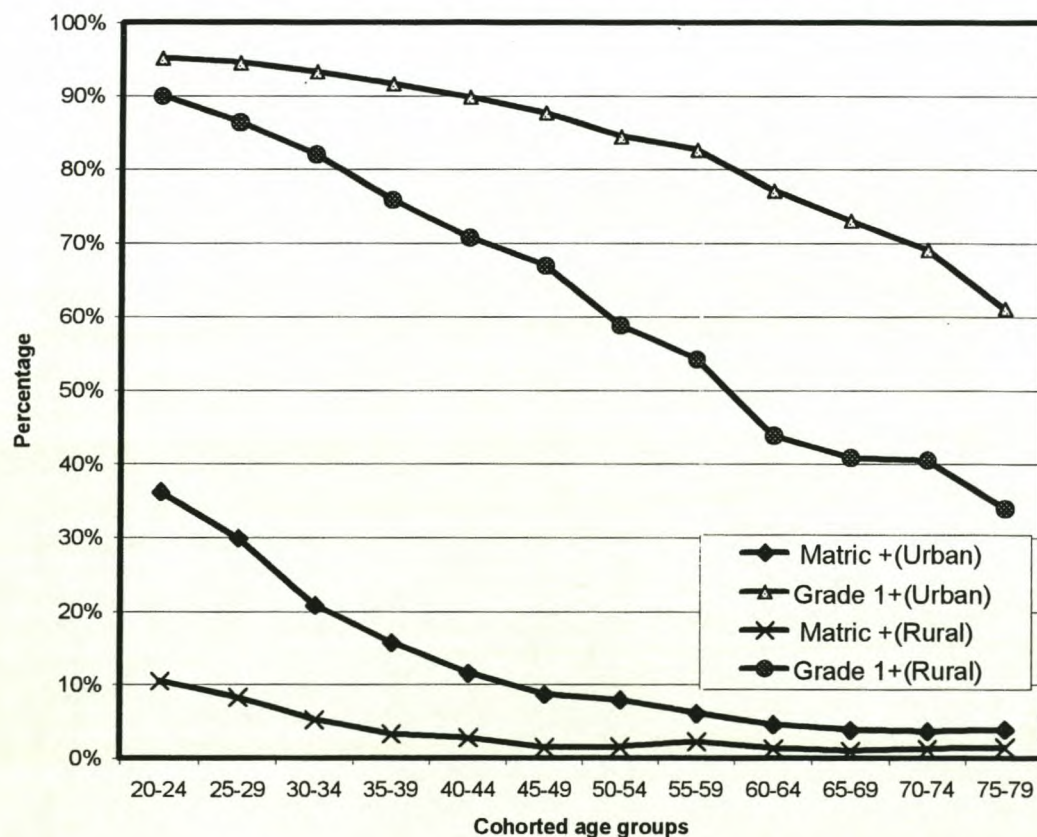


disparity between the progress of these two groups of pupils. Figure 4.4 shows the difference in pass rates between the rural and urban cohort groups for the levels of the Grades 1 and 12.

Consider the cohort of 20-24 year olds. It can be seen that the margin in the attainment of Grade 1 is not very large with rural children trailing the 95% of urban children by 5%. This means that there is not a considerable difference in the percentage of children that initially joins the schooling system. However, the number of children who pass Matric is alarmingly low in the rural areas, where only 10% of the 20-24 year cohort passed Matric, against the 36% of the urban cohort. Apart from the stark difference between the rural and urban levels of education, it can be seen that the progress of particularly rural children through the schooling system is very poor.

**FIGURE 4.4**

**HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED BY DIFFERENT COHORT GROUPS OF RURAL AND URBAN COLOUREDS, IN 1996**



**Source:** Table 4.3.



#### 4.3.4 Educational status of different income groups

The disparity in the educational achievement of rural and urban coloureds does not come as a surprise. A similar trend is visible when tabulating the educational attainment of the poorest and richest half of coloured households separately.

**TABLE 4.4**

**LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED BY COLOURED INDIVIDUALS IN POOREST AND RICHEST HALF OF HOUSEHOLDS, FOR DIFFERENT COHORT GROUPS**

Poorest half			
Age	Grade 12	Grade 10	Grade 7
20-24	19%	36%	85%
25-29	7%	23%	79%
30-34	4%	14%	74%
35-39	2%	13%	70%
40-44	1%	7%	66%
45-49	2%	7%	61%
50-54	2%	7%	55%
55-59	1%	3%	48%
60-64	1%	4%	47%
65-69	0%	3%	37%
70-74	0%	3%	35%
75-79	0%	1%	27%
Richest half			
Age	Grade 12	Grade 10	Grade 7
20-24	42%	66%	92%
25-29	38%	61%	88%
30-34	30%	55%	87%
35-39	23%	45%	80%
40-44	17%	34%	79%
45-49	14%	33%	73%
50-54	7%	27%	69%
55-59	8%	16%	56%
60-64	8%	17%	57%
65-69	5%	11%	46%
70-74	3%	10%	44%
75-79	8%	14%	29%

**Source:** Calculated from OHS, 1995

Individuals who form part of the poorest group of households have a much lower educational achievement than individuals in the richest half. The cohort group of 25-29 year olds is used as an illustration: In the poorest group only 79% of all



individuals have attained at least Grade 7, compared to 88% of their richer counterparts. In terms of Matric pass rates, only 7% of all poor individuals have a Matric certificate, while 38% of all rich individuals have passed Matric.

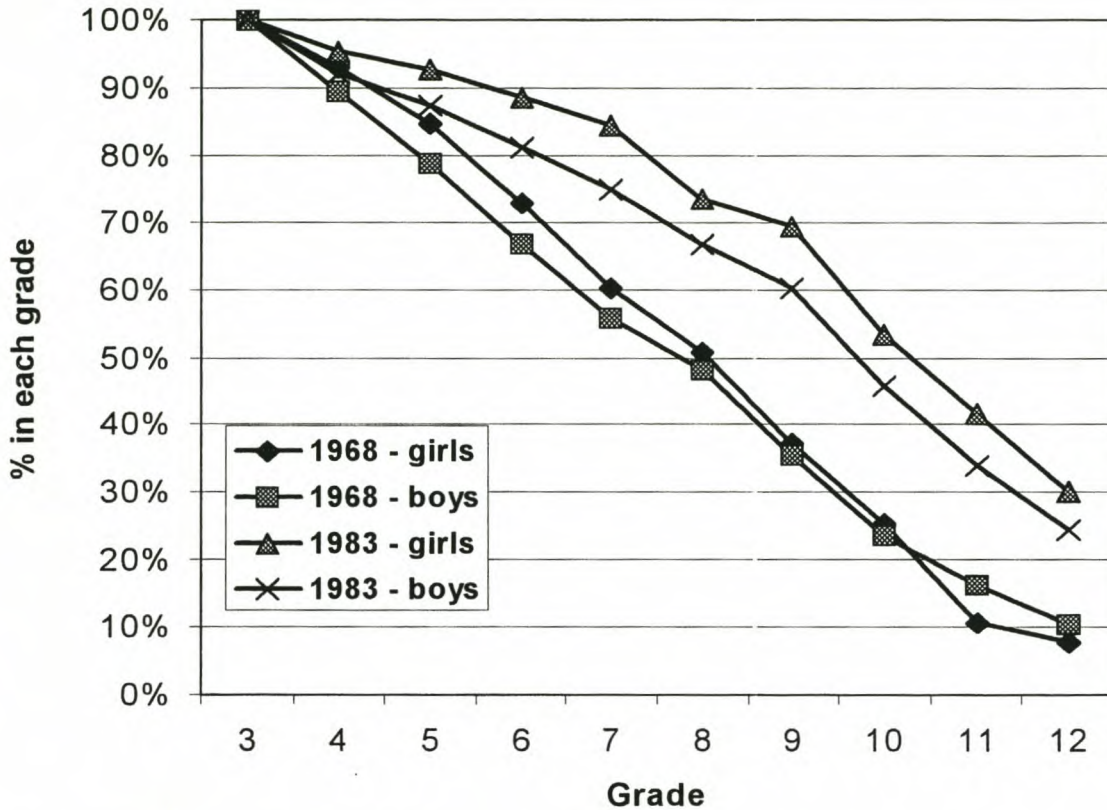
This trend is consistent with the literature which indicates that income levels are positively influenced by educational attainment (see Section 4.3.1.). This trend also tells us more about the nature of the South African labour market. As there is a large excess supply of unskilled labour, workers with a lower education are rarely well paid and they compete in the peripheral sectors as unskilled labourers or in the informal sector.

#### **4.3.5 The progress of male and female pupils**

Another trend that is visible is that the progress of girls in school have improved considerably and even surpassed that of boys. Both Figure 4.5 and Table 4.5 show this trend.

Figure 4.5 shows that for the group that started out in Grade 3 in 1968, only 8% of all girls reached Matric without failing a year, while 10% of all boys achieved this. Within 15 years there was a rapid improvement in pass rates. For the group that started out in Grade 3 in 1983, 30% of all girls reached Matric without failing while 24% of all boys reached Matric in the same time. Girls have thus overtaken boys in school progress.



**FIGURE 4.5****THE PROGRESS OF COLOURED BOYS AND GIRLS FROM GRADE 3 TO GRADE 12 FOR THE TWO PERIODS STARTING IN 1968 AND 1983**

**Source:** Calculated from South African Statistics, 1994, 1988 and 1976

Table 4.5 shows that 16.3% of all boys who enrolled for Grade 8 in 1970 reached Matric within four years, while only 8.7% of all girls achieved this. By 1994, 38.6% of all boys who had started their high school career in 1990 had reached Matric, while 45.1% of all girls had reached Matric in the same time.

It must further be kept in mind that more girls than boys started out in Grade 8. The year 1994 saw 37 181 coloured girls in Grade 8 compared to only 35 773 boys (SA Labour Statistics, 1995). This improvement in the pass rates of girls can be seen as a very positive factor as there is a positive correlation between female education and other aspects of development. Improvements in female education tend to lead to a decline in total fertility and infant mortality as well as a better



nutritional status of children. This also seems to be true in the case of coloureds (also see Sections 4.2.3).

**TABLE 4.5**

**THE THROUGHFLOW OF COLOURED IN HIGH SCHOOL ACCORDING TO GENDER**

Year	Percentage – boys					Percentage – girls				
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
1970	100	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-
1971	100	67.8	-	-	-	100	63.8	-	-	-
1972	100	66.0	46.3	-	-	100	62.5	46	-	-
1973	100	68.0	48.2	28.9	-	100	65.6	47.9	13.8	-
1974	100	73.7	49.1	28.7	16.3	100	72.9	51.3	15.9	8.7
1975	100	78.8	49.1	30.0	17.0	100	78.2	50.1	16.9	10.0
1976	100	80.7	51.4	33.6	16.1	100	79.7	52.8	20.7	9.9
1977	100	82.3	51.8	36.8	21.4	100	80.9	50.3	25.5	15.3
1978	100	86.0	56.2	40.1	25.9	100	84.5	56.3	29.9	18.7
1979	100	85.8	59.7	43.8	27.2	100	85.9	58.2	35.5	21.4
1980	100	88.0	58.2	49.2	27.3	100	88.5	57.9	42.8	22.0
1981	100	83.9	59.9	39.2	27.2	100	84.2	57.1	36.6	22.7
1982	100	84.2	61.4	38.1	25.5	100	85.7	60.4	34.4	23.5
1983	100	88.1	61.9	47.3	26.6	100	89.5	61.2	45.5	24.3
1984	100	90.9	67.8	50.6	31.2	100	93.6	68.2	49.9	30.1
1985	100	95.8	71.8	56.0	31.3	100	93.4	70.7	52.5	28.7
1986	100	82.8	70.6	56.6	37.7	100	87.5	68.7	55.5	35.1
1987	100	95.6	66.2	55.9	36.0	100	101.8	69.9	58.3	38.2
1988	100	94.5	75.1	51.0	38.8	100	97.5	78.0	56.6	41.1
1989	100	90.3	71.7	56.1	36.1	100	94.4	74.7	61.1	40.1
1990	100	90.4	68.8	52.7	36.5	100	96.1	72.7	56.1	42.0
1991	100	89.6	70.4	51.1	35.3	100	97.4	73.8	56.6	39.4
1992	100	89.2	70.9	52.9	36.6	100	93.6	75.2	58.1	40.9
1993	100	91.4	72.4	54.4	40.2	100	96.4	75.3	60.0	44.1
1994	100	93.3	73.8	54.3	38.6	100	99.3	78.8	60.4	45.1

**Source:** South African Labour Statistics, 1995



#### **4.3.6 The progress of coloured pupils relative to other racial groups**

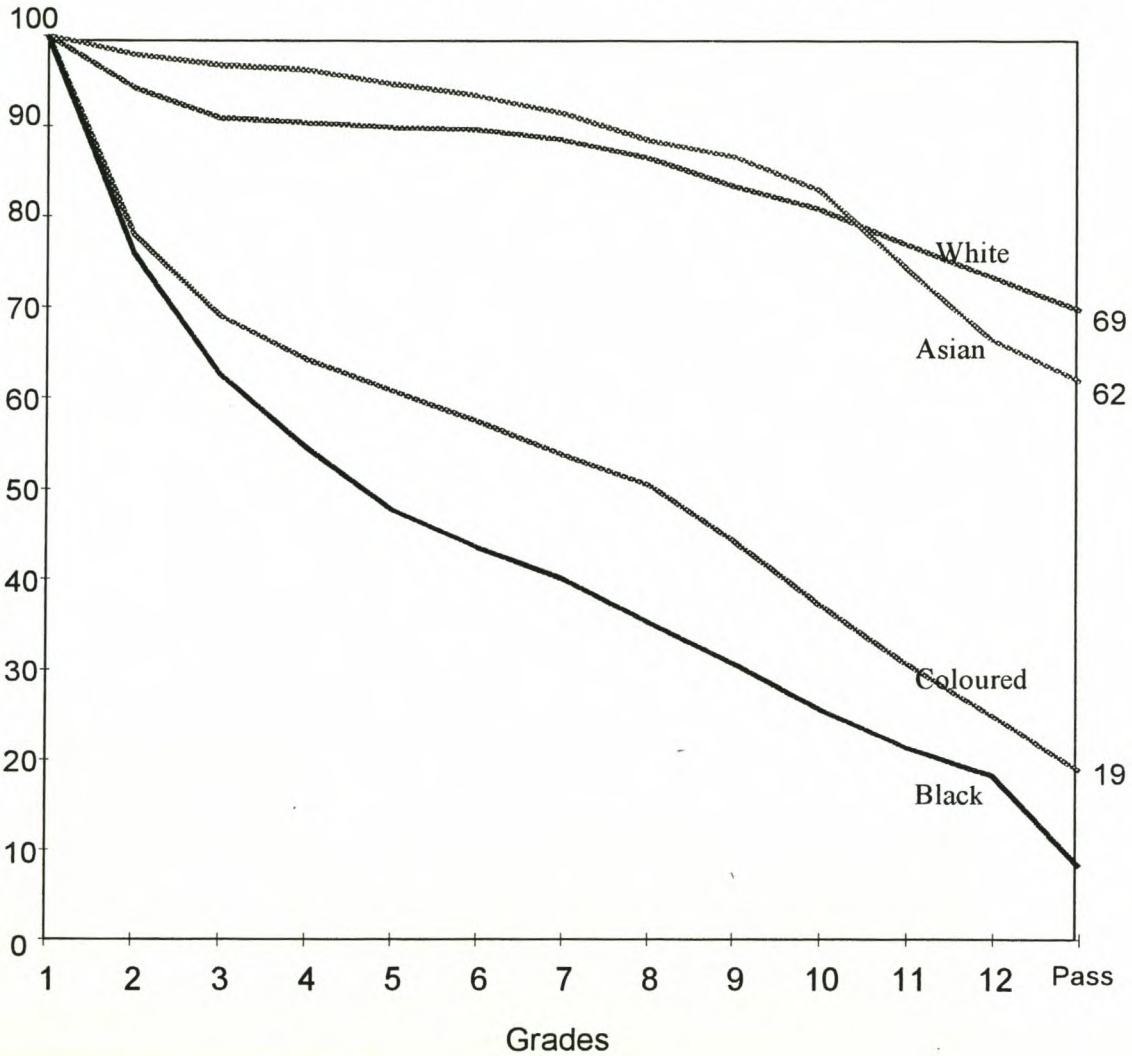
During the period of analysis, we have seen a substantial improvement in the progress of coloureds through the school system. However, it is important to put this progress in the right perspective. The performance of coloured pupils still leaves much to be desired. When looking at Figure 4.6, a very clear picture arises of the dilemma in the South African school system. Coloureds and blacks have similar and very poor pass rates. Asians and whites also have similar, but quite good pass rates.

For the period 1985-1993, 69% and 62% of whites and Asians, respectively passed Matric within 12 years after starting school. On the other hand only 19% and 8% of coloureds and blacks respectively passed Matric. The very high matriculation failure rate of blacks further indicates that the pass rate at lower standards is perhaps artificially high. Van der Berg (1999:6) attributes this to the poor quality of schools serving black and coloured pupils. What makes the poor performance of the coloured and black school systems even more acute, is the fact that the quality of the matriculation for those that do pass, is poorer than for whites. This is caused by many subjects taken on lower grade in stead of standard or higher grade, as well as very few pupils taking Mathematics or Science as subject (Van der Berg, 1999: 6). Unfortunately there is no quick fix for this situation. According to Van der Berg (199:11-12) the allocation of more resources towards education is probably not the answer to the problem, as the education budget is already substantial relative to fiscal capacity. It is rather suggested that the standard of teaching be improved by raising the productivity of teachers. Also, salaries make up a large proportion of the total education budget and it must be considered to reallocate some of the expenditure on salaries to the improvement of facilities and class-room aids. This will be discussed in more detail in further chapters.



**FIGURE 4.6**

**INDEX OF THROUGHFLOW FIGURES (WHOLE SCHOOL CAREER) FOR SIX- AND SEVEN YEAR OLD GRADE 1 COHORT GROUPS FOR ALL RACIAL GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA: 1985-1993**



**Source:** De Villiers, 1996: 274

#### **4.4 Changes in income patterns and occupational status**

##### **4.4.1 Per capita income**

There is usually a positive relationship between the demographic features such as fertility rates and level of education and income patterns of a population. Since all the demographic features of coloureds discussed so far paint a positive picture, it would be very surprising if incomes did not rise as well. It is known that



South Africa has always had a very skew racial distribution of income, with the income levels of whites being considerably higher than those of the other racial groups. However since the 1960's coloureds, blacks and Asians have had an increase in income levels, relative to whites.

**TABLE 4.6**

**A COMPILATION OF ESTIMATES OF PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME  
PER RACE GROUP, IN CONSTANT 1995 RAND**

Year	Whites	Coloureds	Asians	Blacks	Average
1960	22 389	3 568	3 828	1 815	6 006
1970	32 799	5 684	6 630	2 246	7 986
1975	35 757	6 945	9 095	3 075	9 102
1980	34 655	6 623	8 821	2 931	8 472
1987	32 854	6 862	9 910	2 781	7 643
1993	32 789	6 877	14 376	3 260	7 265
1995	28 436	5 682	13 766	3 835	7 388
Relative per capita personal incomes (% of white level):					
1960	100.0%	15.9%	17.1%	8.1%	
1970	100.0%	17.3%	20.2%	6.8%	
1975	100.0%	19.4%	25.4%	8.6%	
1980	100.0%	19.1%	25.5%	8.5%	
1987	100.0%	20.9%	30.2%	8.5%	
1993	100.0%	21.0%	43.8%	9.9%	
1995	100.0%	20.0%	48.4%	13.5%	

**Source:** Van der Berg (2000).

Table 4.6 shows how the income levels of different racial groups have changed from 1960-1995, both in monetary terms and relative to each other. The 1995 figures show a decline in white, coloured and Indian incomes, but are not fully comparable with the earlier figures. The sample sizes for coloureds, whites and Asians are much smaller than for the blacks and this reduces the reliability of the estimates. It must also be kept in mind that the per capita incomes are weighted in order to add up to the national accounts. Therefore a small change in the per capita income of the blacks could have a big effect on the estimated coloured incomes. The 1995 October Household Survey (OHS) also managed to incorporate more of the black informal sector than earlier surveys. We will therefore use the 1993 figures to make comparisons. In 1960, coloureds earned R3 568 in 1995 terms, which represented 15.9% of the white income of R22 389.

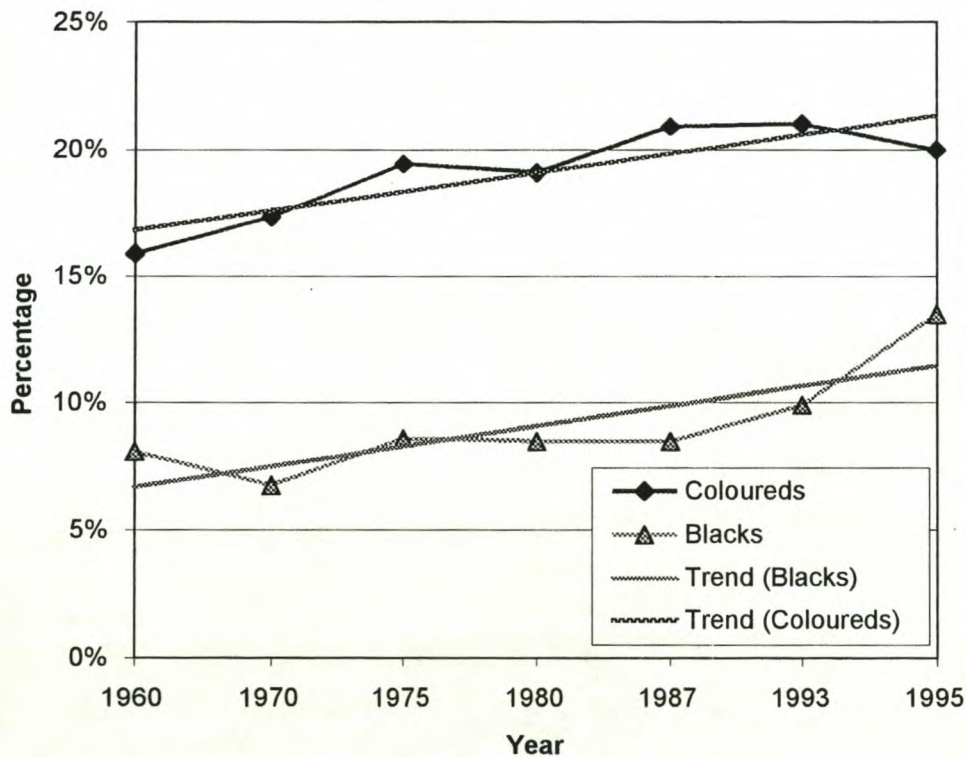


By 1993, their per capita income has risen to R6 877, which represented 21.0% of the white income of R32 789. This is a rise of 92.7% from the original 1960 level.

The increase in income levels of Asians, however, has exceeded that of coloureds and blacks by a large margin. Asians experienced a remarkable improvement in their income levels from R3 828 in 1960 to R 14 376 per capita in 1993. This is a rise of 275% from the original 1960 level.

**FIGURE 4.7**

**ESTIMATES OF PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME FOR COLOUREDS AND BLACKS, RELATIVE TO WHITES**



**Source:** Table 4.6

Figure 4.7 shows the income levels of coloureds and blacks relative to whites and to each other. The added linear trendlines show that coloured and black income levels have increased by more or less the same number of percentage points over the period compared. However, as the 1995 figures suggest, the rate of



increase in the per capita income levels of blacks has started to accelerate in the post-apartheid era and it is expected that the gap between the per capita income of blacks and other racial groups will narrow further.

#### 4.4.2 Salaries and wages

The rise in the per capita income of coloureds corresponds with the available data on the changes in relative wage levels and occupational status. Table 4.7 shows that average salaries and wages per month of coloureds in the non-agricultural sectors increased from 29% of white levels in 1970 to 48% in 1995.

**TABLE 4.7**

**AVERAGE SALARIES AND WAGES PER MONTH IN THE NON-AGRICULTURAL SECTORS ACCORDING TO RACE**

Year	Whites	Coloureds	Indians	Blacks
<b>In constant 1995 Rand</b>				
<b>1970</b>	4 997	1 443	1 610	742
<b>1975</b>	5 318	1 717	2 011	1 062
<b>1980</b>	5 124	1 697	2 245	1 269
<b>1985</b>	5 354	1 934	2 666	1 465
<b>1990</b>	5 145	2 068	2 862	1 690
<b>1993</b>	5 221	2 346	3 244	1 894
<b>1995</b>	4 958	2 367	3 070	2 077
<b>As percentage of whites</b>				
<b>1970</b>	100%	29%	32%	15%
<b>1975</b>	100%	32%	38%	20%
<b>1980</b>	100%	33%	44%	25%
<b>1985</b>	100%	36%	50%	27%
<b>1990</b>	100%	40%	56%	33%
<b>1993</b>	100%	45%	62%	36%
<b>1995</b>	100%	48%	62%	42%

**Source:** Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics, (1997), South African Statistics (1994) and SA Labour Statistics (1986)

This increase can stem from two possible sources: firstly there could have been an increase in relative wage levels for the same gender and job grade and



secondly there could have been a flow of workers from lower paid jobs to higher paid jobs. The evidence suggests that both these factors have played a role in raising the wage levels of coloureds.

**TABLE 4.8**

**RELATIVE WAGE LEVELS BY RACE FOR SIMILAR GENDER AND JOB GRADE (% OF WHITE LEVELS)**

Year	Whites	Coloureds	Asians	Blacks
1976	100.0%	62.2%	67.0%	57.1%
1985	100.0%	78.8%	87.3%	78.2%
1989	100.0%	79.9%	89.4%	84.7%

**Source:** McGrath, 1990: 97, cited in Van der Berg and Borat, 1999: 12

Table 4.8 shows that the relative wage levels of coloureds for similar gender and job grade have increased from 62.2% of white levels in 1976 to 79.4% in 1989. (It is interesting to see that in 1989, the black levels of 84.7% were already higher than that of coloureds.) Discrimination in the labour market in terms of salaries and wages has thus decreased significantly in the period from 1976 onwards. This illustrates that the reintegration of the different racial groups in South Africa had already gained momentum some time before the official end of apartheid (Van der Berg and Borat, 1999:11-12).

#### **4.4.3 Occupational status**

The flow of workers to higher paid job levels has also played a role in the increase in average salaries and wages in the non-agricultural sector. Table 4.9 shows the changes in the occupational status of the coloured labour force in the period from 1970 to 1991. Before looking at the different job levels, it is worthwhile to consider the change that has taken place in the dependency ratio. It was shown in Section 4.2.2 that the dependency ratio has declined from 0.96 in 1975 to 0.58 in 1996. This very strong improvement was effected by the decline in total fertility rates that has been ongoing since 1960. Since the relative size of the labour force has thus increased considerably, it means that even if wage



levels and occupational status had stayed the same over the period, welfare would have increased.

**TABLE 4.9**

**THE OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF COLOUREDS, 1970-1991**

	1970	1980	1985	1991
Total population	2 050 699	2 624 007	2 832 705	3 285 718
Total labour force	716 252	929 880	1 121 993	1 359 215
Professional, & semi-professional	26 766	55 740	70 360	87 751
Clerical & salesworker	59 561	106 394	136 079	183 718
Service worker	127 558	153 340	178 043	187 674
Agriculture, forestry and fishing workers*	121 047	158 565	183 408	200 980
Semi-skilled & unskilled workers & labourers**	319 217	382 508	462 897	493 878
Unemployed & not classifiable	62 103	73 333	91 206	205 214
Not economically active	1 334 447	1 694 127	1 710 712	1 926 504
<b>Occupational status as percentage of total labour force</b>				
	1970	1980	1985	1991
Total labour force	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Professional and semi-professional	3.7%	6.0%	6.3%	6.5%
Clerical & salesworker	8.3%	11.4%	12.1%	13.5%
Service worker	17.8%	16.5%	15.9%	13.8%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing workers*	16.9%	17.1%	16.3%	14.8%
Semi-skilled & unskilled workers & labourers**	44.6%	41.1%	41.3%	36.3%
Unemployed & not classifiable	8.7%	7.9%	8.1%	15.1%

\* The 1985- and 1991 figures include farmers for own account, which might cause a slight overestimation relative to the previous periods.

\*\* Due to the use of different datasets, the 1985 and 1991 figures might slightly overestimate the number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers and labourers at the expense of the first three categories. This means that the flow of workers from low paid jobs to higher paid jobs might even have been somewhat quicker than shown by this table.

**Source:** South African Statistics (1976, 1986 and 1994) and South African Labour Statistics (1986)

Occupational levels nevertheless did change over the period. In 1970 the three highest paid categories, namely professional and semi-professional, clerical and sales workers and service workers made up 29.9% of the total labour force, but by 1991 it had risen to 33.8%. Furthermore, within this group, the two lowest paid job levels lost ground against the professional and semi-professional occupations, which rose from 3.7% to 6.5%. During this period the two lowest paid occupational levels, namely agricultural, hunting, forestry, and fishing workers and semi-skilled and unskilled workers and labourers decreased from 61.5% to 51.1% of the total labour force. These lost job opportunities were split between the higher paid occupations, and the unemployed and unidentifiable



group of workers, which rose from 8.7% to 15.1%. We can conclude that there has been a general upward mobility among the employed. The rate of unemployment has, however, also increased.

The overall picture of income patterns and occupational levels paints a positive picture. Coloureds have experienced an increase in per capita income as well as in wage levels and occupational status.

## **4.5 Changes in the distribution of income and poverty levels**

### **4.5.1 Distribution of income**

The demographic and income changes that have taken place over the past three decades certainly point towards a large improvement in the development status of coloureds. However, it is important to try and estimate how the distribution of income and poverty levels has changed, both absolutely and relatively.

The Gini coefficient, which is a measure of the skewness of the distribution of income<sup>1</sup>, already provides some clues on the incidence of poverty. Few estimates exist of the Gini coefficients for the different race groups, the most reliable being based on the work done by Michael McGrath.

**TABLE 4.10**

### **GINI COEFFICIENT FOR THE DIFFERENT RACIAL GROUPS**

<b>Population group</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1991</b>
<b>Black</b>	0.47	0.62
<b>White</b>	0.36	0.46
<b>Coloured</b>	0.51	0.52
<b>Asian</b>	0.45	0.49

**Source:** Whiteford & McGrath, 1994:56

<sup>1</sup>The Gini coefficient can have a value between 0 and 1, where 0 points towards perfect equality and 1 towards perfect inequality.



Table 4.10 shows the Gini coefficient for the different race groups in South Africa in 1975 and 1991. The coefficients for blacks and whites have increased considerably in the period from 1975 to 1991. The coefficient for Asians did not increase much and for coloureds it only increased marginally. It can be deduced that if per capita income has increased, while both inequality and the pattern of distribution have stayed the same, poverty has decreased. In the same study by Whiteford and McGrath, they estimated how the income shares of the different deciles have changed over the period. This can be seen in Table 4.11. The change in the mean household income in the different deciles of the coloured population over the period 1975 to 1991 is illustrated by expressing the 1991 value as a percentage of the 1975 value. The changes that have occurred are illuminating. Of all the different deciles, only the lowest income group has experienced a decline in their income. Their income has declined to less than half the 1975 level. All the other deciles have experienced a rise in income levels averaging roughly at 25%.

**TABLE 4.11**

**MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF DECILES OF COLOURED POPULATION,  
1975 AND 1991, WITH 1991 AS PERCENTAGE OF 1975**

Decile	1975	1991	1991 as % of 1975
1	R2 960	R1 357	45.8%
2	R2 960	R3 620	122.3%
3	R5 365	R6 108	113.8%
4	R8 879	R9 049	101.9%
5	R8 879	R12 669	142.7%
6	R13 874	R16 515	119.0%
7	R18 499	R21 945	118.6%
8	R24 788	R31 673	127.8%
9	R34 223	R43 211	126.3%
10	R64 560	R80 087	124.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>R18 499</b>	<b>R22 624</b>	<b>122.3%</b>

**Source:** Whiteford and McGrath, (year?) p94

Whiteford and McGrath attribute the decline in the income levels of the lowest decile to the rapid rise in unemployment rates during the period. Thus, except for the lowest decile, coloureds have experienced a relatively even increase in per



capita income across the upper 9 deciles. The information shown in Tables 4.10 and 4.11 is unfortunately not necessarily accurate, as it is based on the 1991 census, which had some problems. It is useful to include estimates using the OHS or the 1996 census. This will be used to get estimates of the incidence of poverty

#### **4.5.2 The incidence of poverty**

Poverty lines are calculated to represent a minimum desirable level of income. The use of a single poverty line to determine who are poor and who are not has some disadvantages, especially as the line is always to some extent arbitrary (Woolard and Leibbrandt, 1999: 5). Nevertheless it is important that a line should be drawn somewhere to be used as a policy guideline. When setting a poverty line it is important to distinguish between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is not influenced by the living standard of the society. People are poor when they do not have the resources to meet some absolute needs. Relative poverty will move with standards of living. Here median income or the incomes of different quintiles are more often used. The high inequality in per capita income in South Africa accentuates the problem of relative poverty. However we will now focus on absolute poverty among coloureds.

In South Africa, two of the more commonly used measures of absolute poverty are the Minimum Level of Living (MLL) and the Supplemented Level of Living (SLL) as determined by the Bureau for Market Research (BMR) of the University of South Africa. The MLL refers to a basic income providing enough money for an adequate nutritional intake as well as expenditure on some basic non-food items. The SLL represents an income that is roughly one-third higher than the MLL.

Table 4.12 shows that when using the MLL and SLL as calculated by the BMR the situation has stayed virtually the same over the period from 1975 to 1995. (The MLL for 1995 was set at R2 621 per capita per year.) The percentage of people living under the MLL has declined slightly from 26.3% in 1975 to 25.8% in 1995, while the percentage of people living under the SLL rose marginally from



38.3% to 38.7% over the same period. This suggests that there has not been a large-scale move out of poverty and that the rise in per capita income of coloureds that is shown by Table 4.6 therefore benefited mostly the non-poor group. (If per capita income rose while poverty levels stayed the same it follows that the non-poor experienced a rise in per capita income while the poor stayed poor.) What this figure does not tell is how the severity of poverty changed over time. This will be analysed further in Section 4.5.4. The distribution of poverty between rural and urban coloureds will be discussed in Section 4.6.

**TABLE 4.12**

**PERCENTAGE OF COLOURED LIVING UNDER THE MINIMUM LEVEL OF LIVING (MLL) AND SUPPLEMENTED LEVEL OF LIVING (SLL)**

Year	MLL	SLL
1975	26.3	38.3
1995	25.8	38.7

**Source:** 1975-figures from Theron-report, 1976: Table 3.19; 1995-figures calculated from OHS, 1995

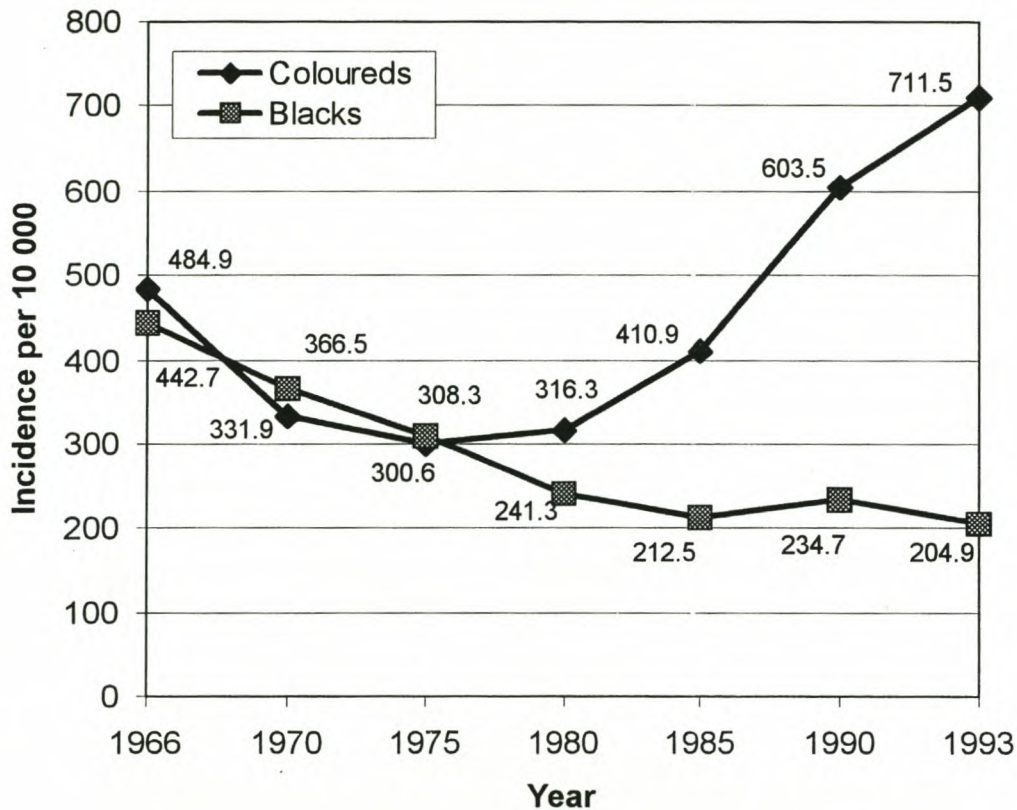
A disconcerting factor is the poor economic performance in the past two decades. Indications are that this has led to widespread job losses in the formal sector of the economy. It has certainly also influenced coloured workers, especially those in the lower paid occupations. It seems that the past 3-4 years have seen particularly poor employment opportunities for the lower paid occupations. For instance, according to the District Surgeon's office for the Paarl region (Koch, 2000), the number of applications from coloureds for disability payments (to a large extent associated with unemployment; the majority of applications are normally rejected) has increased by 105% from 1995 to 1999. The first six months of 2000 even showed a phenomenal increase of 87% (on a yearly basis) from 1999! This situation will only be altered once the economy starts showing more robust growth. There is, however, cause for concern, as the current economic environment and destabilising factors such as high crime rates, political problems in the region and the HIV/AIDS epidemic might influence the future growth potential of the economy.



### 4.5.3 Other indicators of poverty

When trying to draw a profile of poverty, non-monetary indicators can also provide useful information. Tuberculosis is often associated with poverty. Conditions of poverty, such as poor housing and sanitation, overcrowding and a poor nutritional status and immune system, are conducive to the spread of this disease. Figure 4.8 shows the incidence of tuberculosis among coloureds and blacks for selected years from 1966 to 1993. This figure provides very interesting information. For both coloureds and blacks the infection rate declined in the period from 1966 to 1975. From 1975 onwards the infection rate tended lower for blacks to a value of 205 per 10 000 people in 1993. The infection rate of coloureds, however, rose sharply from 301 in 1975 to a staggering 712 in 1993. This is considerably higher than the original rate of 484.9 in 1966. Looking at these figures in isolation would indicate that poverty rates in the coloured community increased considerably in the period from 1975 to 1993, while poverty rates among blacks decreased. The evidence that has been produced so far in this chapter clearly shows the contrary with regards to coloureds – poverty rates among coloureds did not increase. It might, however, be that the socio-economic conditions of the very poor deteriorated even further during this period, and are not picked up by the normal estimates of poverty. The more plausible explanation lies in the nature of the treatment of the disease. As with other diseases such as malaria, there has been a growing resistance against the cures in recent times. The spread of the disease has been enhanced by the ineffective use of medicine, especially when people fail to complete a full course of the medication. In a study done by Thomson & Myrdal (1984: 21) for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, it was found that in Cape Town clinics, 31.5% and in Paarl clinics 48.8% of patients did not complete at least 75% of the prescribed course of the medication.



**FIGURE 4.8****INCIDENCE OF TUBERCULOSIS AMONG COLOUREDS AND BLACKS PER 100 000 MEMBERS OF THE POPULATION, 1966-1993**

**Source:** South African Statistics, 1994 and 1976

Whatever the reason for the rapid spread of the disease in the past 25 years, it must be considered a matter of great urgency to combat the disease, as the current rates of infection have a serious social and economic effect. This effect is likely to be exacerbated by the increase in HIV/AIDS as tuberculosis is often the secondary cause of death in a person with AIDS.

#### 4.5.4 Coloured versus black poverty

To understand coloured poverty, it is useful to compare it with that of other racial groups. Woolard and Leibbrandt (1999) did this by using the household subsistence level (HSL) poverty line for a family of five, as set by the Institute for



Development Planning Research, University of Port Elizabeth. The HSL gives poverty estimates comparable with the MLL. These estimates are shown in Table 4.13. Poverty estimates were not included for the white and Asian communities, as their levels of poverty are negligible, in comparison to that of coloureds and blacks.

**TABLE 4.13**

**ESTIMATES OF POVERTY AMONG COLOUREDS AND BLACKS FOR 1995, WITH THE HOUSEHOLD SUBSISTENCE LEVEL (HSL) AS POVERTY LINE**

Race	P <sub>0</sub> (Headcount ratio)	P <sub>1</sub> (Poverty gap ratio)	P <sub>2</sub> (Severity of poverty)
Coloureds	0.279	0.089	0.039
Blacks	0.521	0.223	0.121

**Source:** Woolard & Leibbrandt, 1999: 22

P<sub>0</sub> measures the number of poor individuals. It can be seen that 27.9% of coloureds were poor when using the HSL poverty line, while almost double the number of blacks, or 52.1% were living below the poverty line. P<sub>2</sub> measures the poverty gap ratio, *i.e.* the average distance that all poor people's income is from the poverty line. The closer the poverty gap ratio is to one, the larger is the gap between the average income of the poor person and the poverty line. Here the poverty gap ratio for blacks is considerably higher at a value of 0.223, compared to a value of 0.089 for coloureds. The third measure, P<sub>2</sub>, gives extra weight to the very poor.<sup>2</sup> Once again, the closer the total is to one, the more severe poverty is. Also with this estimate, the severity of black poverty is much higher than for coloureds. Further analysis of black poverty shows that poverty is most severe among rural blacks, especially of the Eastern Cape, Northern Province and Kwazulu/Natal (World Bank, 1995:4). Policy makers who have to juggle

<sup>2</sup> The equation for the poverty measures looks as follows  $P_{\alpha} = \frac{q}{n} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^q \left( \frac{y_i - z}{z} \right)^{\alpha}$  with q = the number

of poor, n = the total population, y<sub>i</sub> = income of the poor individual and z = the poverty line income. α could have the values 0, 1 or 2, depending on whether the head count, poverty gap ratio or severity of poverty index is calculated.



scarce government resources, cannot ignore this profile of poverty in South Africa.

To complete the picture on coloured poverty we need to take a look at the situation of coloureds in the rural and agricultural areas. This will be done in the following section.

## **4.6 The socio-economic status of coloureds in rural areas and the agricultural sector**

### **4.6.1 Rural areas in general**

A distinctive feature of coloureds, is their strong presence in rural and agricultural areas. According to the 1995 OHS, 75.7% or 368 000 of the total rural population of 486 000 people in the Western Cape were coloureds. Of the total coloured population, both in the Western Cape and in South Africa as a whole, one out of five persons live in rural areas. It is a worldwide phenomenon that poverty is more common in rural areas than in urban areas, and South Africa is no exception. For these reasons it is important to look at the socio-economic position of coloureds in the rural areas of the Western Cape.

At the time of the Theron investigation, coloureds in the rural areas were significantly poorer than their urban counterparts. This commission asked the BMR to do an extended survey in the agricultural sector and the results were included in Chapter Seven of the report. The commission calculated that almost 75% of all rural coloureds had an income that was lower than the SLL.

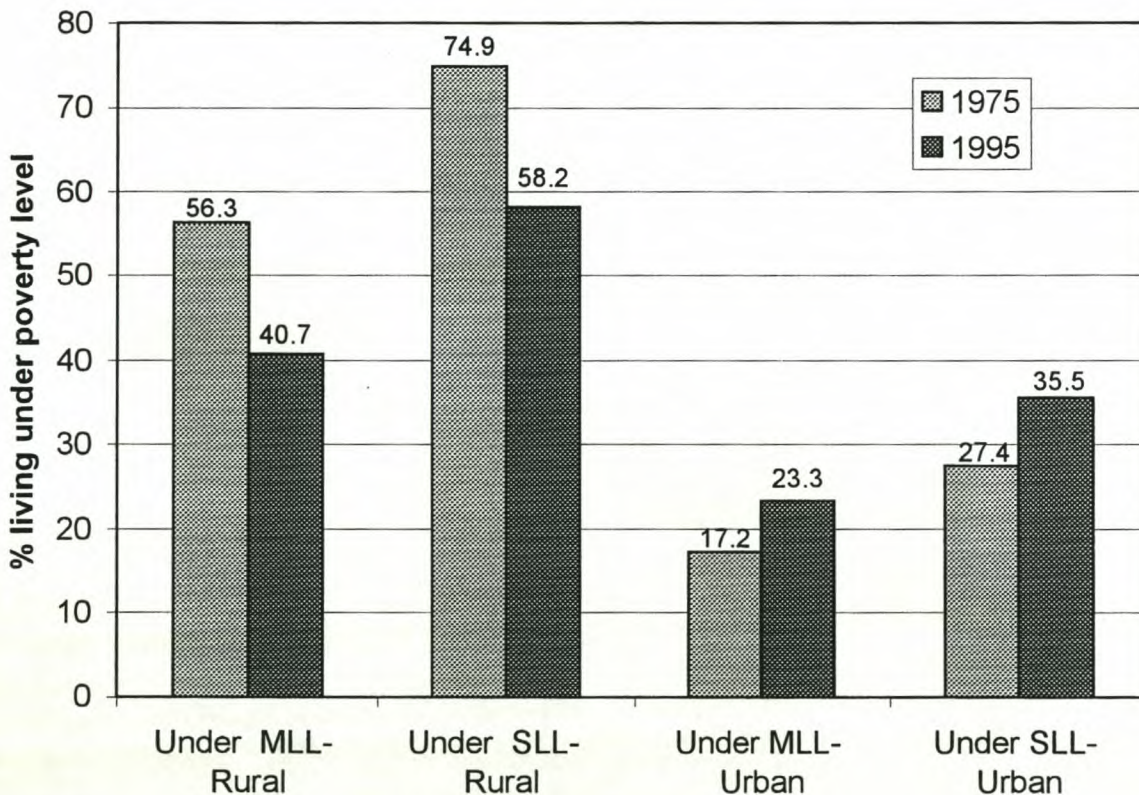
The big difference in the income levels of urban and rural households is still visible today. According to the 1995 OHS, the per capita income of rural coloureds was only 56.9% of the income of urban coloureds. Where rural coloureds received an annual per capita income of R4 442, urban coloureds received an income of R7 800. However, when considering how the situation changed over time it is very clear that there has been a considerable improvement in the living standards of rural coloureds. The Theron commission



did not give exact figures, but recalculations based on their work indicate that in 1975 the income of rural coloureds was more or less 50% of the income for urban coloureds (calculated from Terreblanche, 1977: 13). A comparison of the MLL and SLL figures shown in Figure 4.9 is very illuminating. Where the number of rural coloureds that lived below the SLL were 74.9% in 1975, it has declined to 58.2% in 1995. The number of rural coloureds that lived below the MLL in 1995, was 40.7%, against 56.3% in 1995. In contrast, urban poverty has increased.

**FIGURE 4.9**

**THE PERCENTAGE OF RURAL AND URBAN COLOUREDS LIVING UNDER THE MLL AND SLL IN 1975 AND 1995**



**Source:** 1975 figures from Theron report Table 3.19 and 1995 figures calculated from 1995 OHS.

The first possible reason for this narrowing gap would lie in a rise in the annual income of the breadwinners in the rural areas (either through rising salaries and wages or through an improved occupational status). This would mean that wages in the agricultural sector, the largest employer in rural areas, have also risen. However, another factor which was likely to have played a very important



role, is the urbanisation of the coloured community. Although coloureds have already been greatly urbanised in 1975, there did still occur a migration towards the cities since then. Where 22.8% of all coloureds lived in rural areas in 1975, this figure has fallen to 16.6% in 1995. According to Mostert (1984: 8-12) the depopulation of the rural areas had a specific dimension which could have contributed to the improvement in the socio-economic status of rural coloureds relative to those living in urban areas. Those coloureds that migrated to the cities had mostly been unemployed or underemployed and thus in the lowest income-groups, whereas the coloureds that stayed behind normally had secure and better paid jobs. Mostert (1984: 7) also indicates that the fertility rate and hence the family size of coloureds in rural areas were still about double that of urban coloureds until 1965, but this had evened out by 1980. This means that the dependency ratio for rural coloureds would have shown an even more dramatic decrease than for the total coloured population.

The department of sociology at the University of Stellenbosch has done studies in several rural towns<sup>3</sup> in the Western Cape to get a profile of the socio-economic status of the inhabitants. Their results are comparable to those presented so far in this chapter. It shows that the income and educational status of rural coloureds are lower than that of their urban counterparts. However, there is reason to believe that the quality of living has improved since the time of the Theron investigation. One such study was done in Heidelberg in 1996, which is likely to have similar conditions to most towns in the Overberg and Southern Cape. Respondents were asked what were negative aspects about living in the town. For coloureds, few job opportunities and insufficient housing only ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively and were outranked by problems such as gossiping and too few recreational facilities. The rate of unemployment among coloured citizens of Heidelberg was only 8%, compared to a countrywide figure of more or less double that proportion (Vorster, *et.al.*, 1997:63, 68).

Lastly, rural poverty must be put in context of the overall poverty picture in the coloured community. Calculations based on the 1995 OHS show that there were

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the towns that were studied were Zoar, Vanrhynsdorp, Zuurbraak, Heidelberg, Kylemore, Jamestown, Haarlem, Goedverwaght and Wittewater.



241 000 poor coloureds in rural areas compared to 694 000 in urban areas when using the MLL. When using the SLL the number of rural poor rises to 344 000 compared to 1 056 000 urban poor. In both cases the number of rural poor form a substantial proportion but there is still only about one rural poor individual for every three urban poor individuals. While rural poverty cannot be ignored, it should not be prioritised at the expense of urban poverty.

#### **4.6.2 Agricultural labourers<sup>4</sup>**

The remuneration of agricultural wage labourers has in the past been lower than for those employed in other sectors of the rural economy. At the time of the Theron report, the remuneration of agricultural wage labourers was about two-thirds of other rural workers (Terreblanche, 1977:13). The Theron commission pointed out that a large part of the poorest 40% of the coloured community were agricultural workers. It is likely that agricultural wage labourers still receive less on average than other workers.

It is, however, extremely difficult to give a correct estimate of wages in the agricultural sector as different factors may distort the revealed wages. Firstly there are both full-time and part-time farm workers as well as seasonal and domestic workers, which complicates the calculation of wage levels. Secondly it is very difficult to give a proper estimate of payment in kind, for goods such as housing, transport, food products and recreational facilities. Bearing these problems in mind, Table 4.14 shows that agricultural wages have decreased in the period from 1975 to 1992. Regular wages have decreased from R6 199 in 1975 to R5 743 in 1992. Note that the regular wages have been fluctuating over the period. Wages for casual workers have been fluctuating even more from R1 207 in 1975 to a high of R1 597 in 1980 and back to R1 135 in 1992.

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<sup>4</sup> In this section the author also relied on personal experience in the agricultural sector and on personal interviews with a large number of farmers, social workers, administrators, academics and other role players in agriculture to draw final conclusions.



**TABLE 4.14****AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARIES, WAGES AND VALUE OF RATIONS FOR COLOUREDS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, IN CONSTANT 1995 RAND**

Year	Regular employees	Casual employees
1975	6 199	1 207
1980	5 773	1 597
1983	6 102	1 379
1990	5 581	879
1992	5 743	1 135

**Source:** Calculated from South African Statistics, 1994 and 1986

It is likely that the amount of casual work that was done varies over the different periods and has on average been declining, rather than that there was a significant fluctuation in the hourly wage of workers. The decline in the remuneration of regular workers is more disquieting and against the expectation that wages in the agriculture would also have risen. As indicated earlier, these figures are suspect, due to the uncertainties associated with payments in kind. According to the Census of Agriculture, conducted in 1993, the remuneration of regular employees had improved to R6 768 in constant 1995 Rand. But due to the different datasets used, this estimate might not give the correct indication. The decline in wage levels shown in Table 4.14 also makes little sense given the fact that the number of rural people living under the MLL and SLL has decreased considerably (see Figure 4.8). It must be added that wage setting in the agricultural sector is problematic. According to Borat (1996:75), workers in the agricultural sector have historically had the least bargaining power in terms of labour organisations. He adds that there is a tremendous differentiation in the wage structure of farm workers in different regions of the country, and this will probably make it difficult to implement wage policies for farm workers in the future.<sup>5</sup>

The cyclical nature of agricultural production certainly also influences wage levels. The combined effect of particularly harsh seasonal droughts and South

<sup>5</sup> It is the aim of the government to extend minimum wage legislation to the agricultural sector in due course.



Africa's reintegration into the world economy with the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) have had a detrimental effect on some sectors of South African agriculture in the past decade. Profitability in especially the winter grain and sheep farming as well as in the deciduous fruit growing areas of the Western Cape is currently under tremendous pressure, and this has again put wages and employment opportunities for farm workers under pressure. It is expected that this situation will be rectified to some extent as farmers adopt new technology to be able to compete on the global market. The long-term effect of the globalisation process remains to be seen<sup>6</sup>. Muller (2000) adds that the recent trend in the farming sector to employ workers on a contract basis for the completion of seasonal activities and not as full-time workers who reside on the farm, has increased the incidence of poverty on a seasonal basis.

When considering various non-monetary aspects it seems that Table 4.14 might provide an underestimation of the progress that has been made in the agricultural sector and in rural livelihoods in general. Many progressive farmers have made genuine attempts to improve the living conditions of farmworkers. The most significant of these was the formation of the Rural Foundation (RF) in 1982. The RF was founded, mainly on the initiative of a group of farmers in the Stellenbosch region and according to Mr Okkie Bosman, former managing director of the RF, the Theron report could be seen as the main impetus for the formation of this development organisation. The aim of the foundation was to improve the living and working conditions of all agricultural labourers, and to facilitate the development of human capital in farming communities, to the benefit of farmworkers, farmers and the community in general (Landelike Stigting, 1994). According to Mr Bosman, the activities of the RF were very much driven by the willingness of the farmers to participate. The RF just played a facilitating role, providing expertise and managerial capacity while the development programmes had to be run by the farmers themselves. Although the RF started in the Western

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<sup>6</sup> The Department of Agriculture in the Western Cape is currently funding a research project to try and establish the effect that an increase in agricultural production will have on the Western Cape economy. The project entails the construction of a Social Accounts Matrix (SAM). This model establishes forward and backward linkages in the process of agricultural production and can also determine the effect on wages and per capita income of coloureds in the agricultural sector. The project is in its final phases, but at the time of the writing of this thesis, it has not yet been published.



Cape, the activities of the foundation quickly extended its activities to the whole country. According to Mr Herman Bailey, currently mayor of Wellington and successor of Mr Bosman as Managing Director of the RF, there was at one stage more than 1500 crèches on farms which increased the pass rates in the first year of school dramatically. Unfortunately, due to some shocking government bureaucracy, it ran into financial trouble and was liquidated recently.<sup>7</sup> The Rural Foundation was not the only organisation active in the agricultural areas – many NGO's were also involved in projects. Practical courses on different farming activities such as welding, pruning, wool sorting etc. have been introduced by farmer associations and other role players in the agriculture, such as the National Wool Growers Association, Capespan, CFG, etc. All these efforts caused an improvement in the skill levels of farm workers. It is very likely that the skill levels of farm workers also increased as an unintended side effect of increased mechanisation, as workers had to be trained to work with expensive and often technologically advanced machinery.

Access to health services and education has also improved since the era of the Theron commission. It was already shown in Section 4.3 (see Table 4.3) that the educational achievement of rural coloureds has increased markedly. The better access to medical facilities has come mainly through the establishment of more medical clinics, many of which were mobile in order to reach farming communities as well (See Mostert, 1984).

When adding all the available evidence it seems that the apparent stagnation of wages in the farming sector does not paint an accurate picture. Even if wages stagnated, other dimensions of farmworkers' socio-economic position improved. It must be remembered that the improvement in the socio-economic position of farmworkers was not necessarily uniform in different areas and on different farming units. Although the agricultural labour force is still less skilled and more

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<sup>7</sup>In an attempt to co-ordinate development on a national scale, the government decided that all international donor money had to be channelled through the RDP office. This meant that the RF could not receive any money directly from their donors as was the case previously. Clearly the RDP office had serious problems in implementing this strategy. According to Mr Bosman, after the implementation of the new strategy, they received insufficient funds from the government and their liquidation was inevitable. It must be added that the RF has been criticised for using a too paternalistic approach.



poorly paid than those in other sectors of the economy, their socio-economic position did on average improve over the past 25 years.

#### **4.7 Summary and conclusions**

It was shown in Chapter Four that the socio-economic position of coloureds has improved considerably since the era of the Theron commission.

- Demographic change

The demographic changes that have taken place among coloureds are truly remarkable. The age structure of coloureds has changed significantly with coloureds currently being an older population than at the time of the Theron report. Both total fertility rates and infant mortality rates have fallen considerably. The net effect was a decline in the natural rate of increase from 3.1% per year in 1960 to 1.6% per year in 1990. The life expectancy of coloureds also increased substantially during this period, by 7 to 10 years.

- Education

The educational attainment of coloureds has also improved considerably. For the youngest cohorts, illiteracy rates are very low, while they are much higher for the older cohorts. The most substantial improvement, however, has been in higher grade levels. The matriculation rate has increased at least threefold over the past 3 decades. Other trends are also visible: Firstly, there is still a very large disparity in the educational achievement of rural and urban coloureds. Secondly, there is a strong positive correlation between education and income status. Thirdly, it can be seen that coloured girls have improved their school performance and are currently attaining a higher educational status than boys. When comparing the educational achievement of coloureds with that of other racial groups, it is clear that there has been a dual system. Coloureds and blacks perform similarly and much worse than Asians and whites. Although the educational achievement of coloureds has improved much since the Theron commission, it is still not at a desirable level and much still needs to be done to rectify the situation.



- Changes in income patterns and occupational status

The per capita income of coloureds has almost doubled in the 3 decades since 1960. It has also increased relative to that of whites from roughly 16% to 21% of white income during that period. Coloureds still earn more than blacks, but have been left behind by Asians, who now earn roughly half the income of whites. The rise in per capita income of coloureds was due to a combination of factors. Average wages and salaries of coloureds in the non-agricultural sectors increased from 29% of white levels in 1970 to 45% in 1993. This could be attributed to both an increase in wage levels for the same job grade and gender (i.e. racial discrimination in terms of wages decreased) as well as mobility of workers from lower paid to higher paid occupations. An additional factor that influenced the per capita income positively was a decrease in the dependency ratio from 0.96 in 1975 to 0.58 in 1995. The only negative factor was the rate of unemployment, which almost doubled in the period from 1970 to 1991.

- Changes in the distribution of income and poverty levels

It was shown that the distribution of income in terms of the Gini-coefficient stayed very stable in the period from 1975 to 1991. The expectation was thus that poverty rates would have decreased over the period. Some estimates showed that except for the poorest decile that became even poorer, the rest of the coloured community experienced a steady rise in their income. Poverty measures such as the MLL and SLL, however, show that poverty rates did not decrease in the period. Other dimensions of poverty such as the incidence of tuberculosis confirmed this.

As the evidence regarding the change in poverty levels is somewhat contradicting it is difficult to come to a final conclusion. It is, however, likely that this situation is the result of problems with the data. Regardless of this fact, it is certain that the overall socio-economic position of coloureds improved markedly since the 1970's. Since it could not be established without doubt that poverty rates decreased it must be suggested that the biggest upward mobility took place from the middle income group to the higher income group.



It is also important to keep in mind that poverty in coloured ranks is much less severe than among blacks. For the poverty line used the percentage of coloureds who are poor is more or less half that of blacks, and measures of both the poverty gap ratio and severity of poverty are much smaller in the case of coloureds.

- The socio-economic status of coloureds in rural areas and the agricultural sector

The socio-economic position of coloureds in the agricultural and rural areas is of particular interest as one fifth of all coloureds live in rural areas, where agricultural is the main employer, and because the Theron commission concluded that their socio-economic status was much poorer than that of urban coloureds. It was shown that coloureds in the rural areas are still considerably poorer than their urban counterparts. However, the gap between the two groups did shrink in terms of per capita income, as well as in terms of other measures such as education. Although it is difficult to find reliable data on the income levels of agricultural workers, it was concluded that their socio-economic position increased, if not in terms of wages, at least in terms of other dimensions such as educational attainment, etc.

An additional and interesting trend can be seen when analysing all the different areas discussed in the chapter together – it seems that the pace at which the socio-economic position of coloureds improved decelerated from the 1970's to the 1990's (see for instance Tables 4.2 and 4.6). It can also be concluded that by the time of the Theron investigation their socio-economic position had already improved considerably from 10-15 years earlier. This reminds one of the poor white problem which had also been solved to some degree by the time that the Carnegie investigation took place.

Although it was difficult to obtain such recent data, it seems that the poor economic growth of the past few years has had a large effect on coloured workers, especially in the lower paid occupations. Poverty rates are currently higher than normal and will only decrease if economic growth accelerates in future.



Finally, the upward mobility of coloureds in the past few decades opens the door for an analysis of the role of the Theron commission and the culture of poverty theory in combating coloured poverty. It was already shown in Chapters Two and Three that the culture of poverty can be a useful theoretical framework to analyse poverty problems and that the Theron commission made a very accurate analysis of coloured poverty. As positive changes have taken place in the socio-economic status of coloured, it is necessary to look at the different factors which could have influenced coloured welfare. It will also be necessary to provide a social perspective on the changes that took place in the coloured community in order to make a clear assessment of the culture of poverty approach. These aspects will be further analysed in the final chapter.



## **Chapter Five - The culture of poverty 25 years after the Theron report**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Poverty and associated social problems can manifest themselves in different ways. The culture of poverty approach refers to a very specific set of circumstances which has led to an impoverishment of a community, which displays certain socio-cultural problem areas and which tends to be self-perpetuating once it has come into existence. Chapter Two has given a detailed account of this theory. Chapter Three analysed how the Theron Commission used the culture of poverty approach to describe the poverty problems in the coloured community. Chapter Four focused on the socio-economic changes that have occurred in the coloured community over the past three decades. This chapter will now make an analysis of poverty related problems in the coloured community within a culture of poverty framework. The essential question that needs to be answered is whether the culture of poverty is still present today.

Section 5.2 will provide some remarks on the Theron Commission's analysis of the culture of poverty problem. In Section 5.3 various factors which could have influenced the nature of the culture of poverty over the past three decades will be analysed. Section 5.4 will provide a perspective on social problems associated with the culture of poverty and how these have changed over the period. In Section 5.5 we will make an assessment of the culture of poverty in the coloured community at the time of the Theron Commission and presently.



## **5.2 Background – the Theron Commission and the culture of poverty**

Before assessing the current dimensions of the culture of poverty, it is helpful to refresh our memories on the analysis by the Theron Commission in this regard (For a detailed description, see Chapter Three, Section 3.6)

The Theron Commission argued that roughly the poorest 40% of coloureds lived in a state of chronic community poverty, i.e. a culture of poverty. This was primarily caused by a range of unfavourable external factors, but was also to some extent self-perpetuating. These people had a peripheral position in society and were normally not active in community organisations. Social problems were more acute in this group, most visibly in poor family values. Individuals living in chronic community poverty normally had a lack of motivation, a present-time orientation and were more often involved in criminal activities than the average citizen.

Several external factors were identified which led to the situation of chronic community poverty. These included a historical context of exploitation and racial discrimination as well as a political and economic framework which hampered their socio-economic development. The commission regarded a lack of stable family life as an important factor in the self-perpetuating nature of poverty.

The commission pleaded that the economic and political system as a whole should be changed to improve the power and participation of coloured people. For the poorest 40% the most important policy proposals were to provide a source of steady income and to improve the educational attainment of children. The commission was of the opinion that the improvement of income levels was necessary but not sufficient to eradicate chronic community poverty, and had to be combined with improved education and a strong focus on reducing social problems.



## **5.3 Factors which could have influenced the culture of poverty**

### **5.3.1 Political changes**

In the modern society it is imperative that people must be politically informed and participate in political processes on an equal basis, either through voting or through representing a constituency at a decision making level. The political marginalisation of a community might eventually contribute to their socio-economic marginalisation. During the apartheid era the majority of South Africans had been denied their political rights. The Theron Commission pointed out that the apartheid system played an important role in binding coloureds to a state of chronic community poverty and that coloureds had a very negative opinion regarding their socio-political status (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 103).

Since 1973 when the commission started their work, much has changed in South African politics. The first attempt at political reform came with the formation of the tri-cameral parliament. At the time of the Theron investigation the Coloured Representative Council (CRC) represented coloureds. The CRC had a subordinate position relatively to the Parliament and there was no proper interaction between the two bodies on legislation affecting coloureds (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 88-89). The CRC as well as its predecessors were not embraced with much enthusiasm by coloured voters. In 1975 for instance only 25.3% of potential voters participated in the election for the CRC. It was shown by the Theron Commission that the biggest percentage of non-voters was found among the poorest 40% of coloureds as well as in the highest income quintile. In the case of the latter it was mainly due to a rejection of the apartheid system, whilst in the case of the former ignorance and a lack of interest also contributed. Rural middle class coloureds showed most interest in voting (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 93).



The Theron Commission proposed an adaptation of the political system to give coloureds direct representation in parliament. It is difficult to say what influence this proposal had on the eventual formation of the tri-cameral parliament, but it is generally agreed that the Theron report challenged the Afrikaner establishment and that it improved the willingness of the government to launch political reforms. Van der Berg (1998: 6), for instance, is of the opinion that the Theron investigation "set in motion limited political reforms".

As was the case with the CRC, the tri-cameral parliament was not received with much enthusiasm in the coloured community. Human Sciences Research Council surveys among coloureds in 1984 and 1986 to determine their satisfaction with the tri-cameral parliament and their perceptions of socio-political change in South Africa showed that very few coloureds participated in the first elections for the tri-cameral parliament (Rhodie *et.al.*, 1986:9-19). The official figures show that 60% of eligible voters registered for the elections and that only 30.9% of registered voters actually participated in the election. This gives a voting percentage for eligible voters of 23.4%. In the 1984 survey only 21.1% and in the 1986 survey only 19.0% of respondents were satisfied with the political dispensation (Rhodie, *et. al.*, 1987: 1). This means that even after the implementation of the tri-cameral parliament coloureds still felt marginalised. A very important reason for the failure of the tri-cameral parliament was the exclusion of blacks and this also motivated many coloureds to reject it.

The tri-cameral parliament did not improve the political participation of poor coloureds directly. However, due to the rejection of the apartheid system the formation of the tri-cameral parliament acted as a stimulus for the organisation of new anti-government campaigns among coloureds (Goldin, 1987: 176-177). Thus indirectly the political awareness and participation of coloureds were improved in reaction to the tri-cameral parliament. The period between 1984 and 1990 was one of particular social turmoil as the pressure on the government to end apartheid intensified.



It is important to note that the tri-cameral parliament did give more socio-political power to coloureds. If the House of Representatives utilised this opportunity it is likely to have led to an improvement in the socio-economic position of coloureds. It is very difficult to assess to what extent this was the case. By also looking at other factors such as racial fiscal incidence it will be possible to draw some conclusions.

With the democratisation of South Africa in 1994 the socio-political emancipation of coloureds was finally achieved. Official statistics suggest that 86% of all eligible coloured voters participated in the first fully democratic election (Reynolds, 1994: 187, 189). The prominence of several coloured politicians in the post-apartheid era is also likely to have increased the socio-political awareness of coloureds. It is thus clear that the constraint of socio-political marginalisation that was present at the time of the Theron investigation is something of the past.

### **5.3.2 Public spending and taxes**

During apartheid, public spending and taxes for the different racial groups showed two trends. In the first place public spending was very skewed in favour of whites, who received much more per capita than the other racial groups (Van der Berg, 1998: 1,7). In the second place, however, the budget also had a redistributory effect. Whites received fewer benefits from the government than what they paid in taxes while the other racial groups received more benefits than what they paid in taxes. Despite this fact it was shown in Chapter Three that the Theron Commission as well as the Wilcocks and Tomlinson commissions proposed a larger net flow of fiscal resources to coloureds and blacks in order to improve their socio-economic position.

It will now be shown that there indeed was a shift of fiscal resources to the poor as apartheid lost its strength. Racial redistribution to coloureds, blacks and



Asians increased in the 1970's. Table 5.1 shows that in the five budgetary years from the 1972/3 to 1977/8 alone the level of redistribution towards coloureds increased markedly from R191m in 1972/73 to R566m in 1977/78. This could mainly be contributed to the increase in social expenditure from R166.2m to R456.7m (Van der Berg, 1998:7).

**TABLE 5.1**

**FISCAL INCIDENCE FOR THE COLOURED POPULATION, 1972/3 AND 1977/8**

<b>Year</b>	<b>1972/3</b>	<b>1977/8</b>
Contribution to direct taxes	R9.1m	R32.1m
Contribution to other government revenue	R65.5m	R158.2m
<b>Total taxes</b>	<b>R74.6m</b>	<b>R190.3m</b>
Social expenditures	R166.2m	R456.7m
Share of non-assignable expenditures	R100m+	R300m+
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>R266.2m+</b>	<b>R756.7m+</b>

**Source:** Terreblanche, as revised by Van der Berg, 1998: 7

Estimates of changes in racial fiscal incidence over a longer period are not easily attainable. From studies by among others McGrath (1983) and Van der Berg (1989 and 1998) it is, however, clear that the gap in social spending between whites and other racial groups decreased constantly through the 1970's and the 1980's and by 1994, with the first democratic elections, racial disparities were already much smaller.

Table 5.2 shows racial redistribution through taxes and aggregate government spending in 1993. Here it can be seen that social spending on coloureds was about two-thirds of Asian and white levels and about double that of black levels. Fiscal redistribution favoured coloureds and blacks while Asians and whites were negatively influenced.



**TABLE 5.2****RACIAL REDISTRIBUTION THROUGH TAXES AND AGGREGATE  
GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES, 1993**

	Per capita figures:					Effect of fiscal	
	Income (excluding social pension)	Social spending	All govt. spending	Taxes under assumption favouring:		Redistribution of income under assumption favouring:	
				Rich	Poor	Rich	Poor
<b>White</b>	R 26 580	R 2 125	R 3 547	R 11 906	R 11 276	-31.4%	-28.8%
<b>Black</b>	R 2 758	R 1 082	R 2 504	R 721	R 818	+64.6%	+61.1%
<b>Coloured</b>	R 5 088	R 1 473	R 2 895	R 1 582	R 1 681	+25.7%	+23.9%
<b>Asian</b>	R 10 921	R 2 144	R 3 566	R 3 893	R 3 885	-3.0%	-2.9%
<b>Average</b>	<b>R 6 305</b>	<b>R 1 278</b>	<b>R 2 701</b>	<b>R 2 333</b>	<b>R 2 333</b>	<b>+5.8%</b>	<b>+5.8%</b>

Note: The positive average redistribution was accounted for by the deficit, implying that taxes were lower than expenditures. The redistributive effect was calculated using all government expenditure.

Source: Van der Berg, 1998: 10

It is important to also consider the scope for further redistribution through the budget. Table 5.3 shows the effect of budgetary redistribution on welfare by race group in 1993. The income per capita of coloureds before the effect of redistribution through the budget is considered, was 18.9% of white levels and for blacks it was only 10.3% of white levels. After the budget, coloured secondary income per capita rose to 25.9% of white levels and that of blacks to 15.6% due to a net gain from fiscal incidence of R975 per coloured person and R895 per black person and a net loss of R3421 per white person. Even though the budget redistributed considerably, the racial post-budget gap in per capita income remained very large.



**TABLE 5.3****RACIAL REDISTRIBUTION THROUGH THE BUDGET, 1993, AND LIMITS TO REDISTRIBUTION**

	White	Black	Coloured	Indian	Average
Income per capita (excl. social pension)	R 26 850	R 2 758	R 5 088	R 10 921	R 6 305
<i>% of white level</i>	100.0%	10.3%	18.9%	40.7%	23.5%
Minus: Income tax per capita	R 5 546	R 187	R 500	R 1 320	R 941
Disposable income per capita	R 21 304	R 2 571	R 4 588	R 9 601	R 5 364
Plus: Social spending per capita	R 2 125	R 1 082	R 1 473	R 2 144	R 1 278
Secondary income per capita	R 23 429	R 3 653	R 6 061	R 11 745	R 6 642
<i>% of white level</i>	100.0%	15.6%	25.9%	50.1%	28.3%
Secondary income per capita assuming Equal social spending (R1 278 p.c.)	R 22 582	R 3 849	R 5 866	R 10 879	R 6 642
<i>% of white level</i>	100.0%	17.0%	26.0%	48.2%	29.4%
Effect of budget per capita: actual 1993	-R 3 421	R 895	R 973	R 824	R 337
Effect of budget per capita: assuming Equal social spending in 1993	-R 4 268	R 1 091	R 778	-R 42	R 337
Scope for redistribution	-R847	+R196	-R195	-R966	R 0

**Source:** Van der Berg, 1998: 12

It is also clear that the scope for further redistribution through the budget is rather limited. There is limited scope for increasing taxes as they are already high. Furthermore, the per capita social spending for the different racial groups is not on par yet, and it might take some more time before this goal is reached. Factors such as political resistance by the more affluent, the limited capacity of the government to deliver rural services and the fact that access to education is likely to remain differentiated for some time, all play a role (Van der Berg, 1998:12).

Table 5.3 further shows that even if parity in social spending were attained, the post-budget gap in secondary income between racial groups would not change much. The secondary income of coloureds would stay virtually the same relatively to whites at 26.0% and the secondary income of blacks would increase from 15.6% to 17.0% of white income. However if parity were to be obtained, only blacks would receive more from government social spending while whites, coloureds and Asians would all receive less. Thus, there is no realistic scope to increase the secondary income of coloureds further through the budget. This



fact does not mean that the amount of fiscal resources allocated to coloureds is enough to lift the poorest coloureds out of poverty. We can get a better understanding of this dilemma by analysing government spending on social security and education.

**Social security** (Van der Berg, 1999:12-26): The South African social security system has two main components, namely occupational or social insurance and social assistance. The former consists of retirement benefits for the formally employed labour force, workers compensation against injuries sustained at work, unemployment insurance and health insurance. The latter consists of social old age pensions, disability grants and child and family grants. The biggest shortcoming in this social security system is that unemployment insurance is totally incapable of addressing the country's structural unemployment problem. As South Africa's social security system is already well developed relative to per capita income and due to the fiscal constraints, it will not be possible to extend unemployment insurance to everyone. This means that among poor coloureds, who also have a higher than average rate of unemployment, poverty cannot be fought effectively.

**Education** (Van der Berg, 1999: 3-12): It was shown in Chapter Four that although there has been a significant improvement in the educational attainment of coloureds in the past three decades, the situation is still far from ideal. It was also shown that South Africa has a dual education system with white and Asian schools achieving much better outcomes than coloured and black schools. From a public spending point of view some important aspects come to the fore.

An important reason for the poorer performance of coloured and black schools is the very low per capita spending on coloured and black pupils that continued until less than a decade ago. This is shown by Table 5.4. Figures as early as 1910 are included to illustrate that the spending on education for the different racial groups had always been favouring whites. In 1910 the ratio of education



spending on white, Asian, coloured and black children was 272 : 11 : 2 : 1. In 1950, with the onset of apartheid, it was already considerably better at 21 : 4 : 5 : 1. By 1975 educational spending had again swung in favour of whites with a ratio of 47 : 13 : 9 : 1. From 1975 onwards, the apartheid fiscal paradigm quickly faded and by 1990 the ratio was 8 : 5 : 3 : 1. Although this was already much better than previously, the educational spending on blacks was thus only a decade ago, still only a fraction of that on whites. Coloureds also received only about one third of whites. Currently government spending is much more equal, but there is a tremendous backlog which will still take years to overcome. To put this backlog in perspective it must be remembered that children that joined the school system in 1990 will now only have reached grade 10 if they passed every school year.

**TABLE 5.4**

**PER CAPITA EDUCATION EXPENDITURE IN SOUTH AFRICA FOR  
PERSONS AGED 5-24 IN CONSTANT 1990 PRICES**

Year	White	Asian	Coloured	Black
1910	R296.34	R11.48	R2.72	R1.09
1915	R342.07	R16.57	R4.85	R3.99
1920	R512.37	R23.55	R7.57	R4.69
1925	R683.37	R32.99	R53.27	R11.43
1930	R764.55	R52.05	R78.82	R14.84
1935	R882.31	R74.91	R111.34	R16.23
1940	R881.93	R86.42	R132.91	R19.28
1945	R1044.99	R145.44	R206.57	R37.96
1950	R1203.39	R205.02	R282.44	R56.93
1955	R1490.84	R260.94	R315.15	R54.17
1960	R1740.87	R313.95	R340.79	R52.70
1965	R2152.06	R446.45	R489.92	R55.01
1970	R2886.50	R643.55	R567.25	R52.77
1975	R3310.52	R944.97	R600.81	R70.39
1980	R3219.19	R1122.57	R655.76	R93.24
1985	R3623.54	R1737.04	R1059.93	R133.46
1990	R3345.66	R2078.21	R1403.60	R435.39

**Source:** De Villiers, 1996: 204-206



It is also important to consider education spending relative to total public spending. The public education spending ratio is currently about 7 per cent of GDP, which is close to the highest in the world. A further feature of public education spending is that personnel expenses are high relative to non-personnel spending. From 1995/96 to 1997/8 personnel expenditure in real terms increased by 20%, while non-personnel expenditure declined by 17%. A substantial increase in the education budget is fiscally infeasible, and in addition it has been shown internationally that that it does not always improve educational outcomes (Van der Berg, 1999: 10-11). In the following section the performance of coloured and black schools will be analysed further.

This section showed that fiscal resources have become more equally distributed among different racial groups in the past three decades. However, government spending might still not be adequate to relieve the problems encountered in a state of chronic community poverty. Especially the inadequate provision of unemployment insurance is a major obstacle to reducing poverty. The backlog in terms of fewer resources allocated to coloured and black schools will also cause problems for some time to come.

### **5.3.3 Education**

One of the central themes in the culture of poverty literature is the role of education. The Theron Commission singled out education as a crucial measure to combat chronic community poverty (see Chapter Three, Section 3.6.7). In Chapter Four various tables on the educational status of coloureds were shown. In all aspects there has been an improvement over the past few decades. In Table 5.4 it was shown that there is a considerable difference in the educational attainment of individuals in the poorest and richest half of households. This draws attention to the role that education played in the rise in income of coloureds over the period of measurement. To establish this relationship, a regression was done using data from the 1995 OHS/IES.



**TABLE 5.5**

**THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF COLOURED ON  
PER CAPITA INCOME OVER 20 AND 30-YEAR PERIODS ENDING IN 1995:  
RESULTS OF REGRESSION AND FURTHER CALCULATIONS**

<b>REGRESSION</b>				
			<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>t-values</b>
<b>R-squared</b>	0.3065	<b>Education year</b>	0.1280378	44.761
<b>Mean Inpay</b>	6.982966	<b>Gender</b>	-0.2653694	-12.79
<b>Mean educyear</b>	8.32	<b>Constant</b>	5.992925	227.715
<b>PREDICTED EARNINGS FOR MALES AND FEMALES</b>				
<b>Years of Education</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>		
0	R 401	R 307		
1	R 455	R 349		
2	R 517	R 397		
3	R 588	R 451		
4	R 669	R 513		
5	R 760	R 583		
6	R 864	R 662		
7	R 982	R 753		
8	R 1 116	R 856		
9	R 1 268	R 973		
10	R 1 441	R 1 105		
11	R 1 638	R 1 256		
12	R 1 862	R 1 428		
13	R 2 116	R 1 623		
14	R 2 405	R 1 845		
15	R 2 734	R 2 097		
<b>THE EFFECT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS ON PREDICTED INCOMES OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE AGE COHORTS IN 1995</b>				
	<b>Mean years of education</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
<b>Birth cohorts 1936-76</b>	7.60	R 1,060	R 813	
<b>Birth cohorts 1916-56</b>	5.79	R 841	R 645	
<b>Progress over 20-year period</b>	1.81	R 219	R 168	
<b>% change in income over 20-year period</b>		26%	26%	
<b>Birth cohorts 1946-76</b>	8.03	R 1,120	R 859	
<b>Birth cohorts 1916-46</b>	5.37	R 797	R 611	
<b>Progress over 30-year period</b>	2.66	R 323	R 248	
<b>% change in income over 30-year period</b>		41%	41%	

**Source:** Calculated from the 1995 OHS/IES and the 1996 Census.

The results of the regression are shown in the top part of Table 5.5. The regression was a simple equation relating the years of education to the natural



log of income for both male and female coloureds. The t-values are statistically significant at the 0.1% level and the coefficient of determination,  $R^2$ , has a value of 0.307. The coefficients for the variables are satisfactory, with the expected positive sign for the educational variable and negative sign for the gender dummy (female).

Given the regression equation, the expected income of a male with 8 years of education is R1 116 and the income for a male with 7 years of education is R982. In the bottom part of Table 5.5 the additional calculations needed to establish the effect that the improvement in educational achievement of coloureds had on their personal income are shown. By using the educational attainment of different age groups (as in Table 4.3) it was calculated that the mean years of education of adults of approximately working age increased by 1.81 years over a 20 year period and by 2.66 years over a 30 year period. From this follows that the increase in mean years of education (if the regression holds, i.e. returns to years of education remained constant at 1995 levels) caused an increase in income levels of 26% over a 20 year period and 41% over a 30 year period. This must now be compared to the real change in coloured income over these periods. Table 4.6 shows that between 1970 and 1993 coloured per capita income rose by 21% and between 1960 and 1993 it rose by 93%. Thus over the 20 year period the real rise in income was somewhat lower than suggested by the regression, but over the 30 year period it was higher.

These differences must ultimately be explained by other variables that played a role, including changes in the returns to education. It is impossible to pinpoint all possible variables, but some important factors can be isolated. It is likely that in the period from 1960 to 1970 the good economic performance played a very important role in the upward mobility of coloureds, creating a higher than expected rise in income levels. Likewise the weak economic performance of the economy in the past two decades hampered the upward mobility of coloureds. Thus it also makes sense that the regression overestimates the rise in income



over a 20 year period but underestimates it over a 30 year period<sup>1</sup>. A second factor, which is of a technical nature, concerns the rate of unemployment. The regression was based on the income of employed workers while the figures shown in Table 4.6 are based on total per capita income. Since employment rose rapidly later on in the period of measurement, the regression probably overestimated the rise in income that occurred. A third factor that influenced per capita income positively over the 30 year period was the lowering in the dependency burden. It was shown in Chapter Four that the dependency ratio dropped from 0.96 in 1975 to 0.58 in 1996. Some of the other factors that were likely to influence the per capita income of coloureds are discussed in other sections of this chapter.

The regression supports the view that education played a positive role in the reduction in poverty. Although other factors also influenced poverty levels, there is no doubt about the positive effect of education. However, as was suggested in the previous section of this chapter as well as in Chapter Four, the educational outcomes of coloured and black schools are still found wanting relatively to Asian and white schools. Apart from poorer pass rates, especially in the higher grades, the quality of Matric that is attained is poorer than in Asian and white schools. Keeping in mind the gains already made through the improvement in the educational attainment, it should be of highest priority to tackle the problems that are still affecting coloured and black schools.

To analyse the problems that are presently affecting education it is useful to start out from a public spending point of view. In the analysis of government spending and taxes it was shown that the public education spending ratio is very high and that there is no room for an increase in the education budget. But why do coloured and black schools fare so poorly? According to Van der Berg (1999:11) the problem lies in x-inefficiency rather than in allocative inefficiency. A

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<sup>1</sup> The average real growth in GDP was 5.5% during the 1960's, 3.3% during the 1970's, 1.4% during the 1980's and close to zero in the first five years of the 1990's (South African Statistics, 1995).



redirection of resources to another level would bring little gain. If any there should be a shift of financial resources from personnel to non-personnel teaching resources. The problem of x-inefficiency or poor utilisation of resources, lies in the poor quality of learning and in particular the low productivity of teachers. According to De Villiers (1996:282) this is the result of a principal-agent problem. It is very difficult to monitor the outputs of the educational system as well as teacher efforts or inputs and this makes it very difficult to prevent low teacher productivity. At the heart of the problem is the absence of a "culture of learning" in South African schools. This has led to the launching of the COLTS (Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service) campaign in 1996. The effect of the culture of learning is very well illustrated when comparing the success of the South African school system with East Asia's academic performance. According to Lee and Barro (1997: 25, cited in Van der Berg, 1999:11) "...a major component of East Asia's academic performance is left unexplained by the family and school inputs that were included in the regressions. /...The significance of the East Asian dummy may reflect the existence of an 'Asian value', which is broadly defined by the cultural and religious features unique to the East Asian countries." Van der Berg (1999:11) concludes that "culture and history play a strong role in education, and South Africa is presently poorly placed to benefit from this." A specific impediment to the establishment of a culture of learning can be traced back to the struggle against apartheid. Coloured and black pupils and teachers were actively involved and this gave rise to the well-known phrase: "liberation before education" used in anti-apartheid demonstrations. Unfortunately this has also hampered the establishment of a culture of learning (De Villiers, 1996: 281).

Some additional factors might delay significant progress in coloured and black schools. Although education resources are more evenly distributed between the different racial groups, coloured and black schools still have to put up with a backlog from the apartheid era, which will take some time to eradicate. Furthermore there are problems with delivering the same standard of facilities in rural areas, thus there is continued unintended discrimination against rural



coloureds and blacks. Lastly it must be remembered that in a very poor family the pressure on a child to leave school is very high. Therefore, as long as poverty exists in the coloured and black communities drop-out rates will continue to be high.

This section showed that an improved educational attainment played an important role in weakening the state of chronic community poverty. In order to gain the maximum benefits from education, it was further suggested that the establishment of a culture of learning in coloured and black schools should be seen as a very high priority.

#### **5.3.4 The role of social work**

Social work or welfare services form part of the larger category of welfare expenditure which also includes social security expenditure (see Section 5.3.2) (Van der Berg, 1996:9). Social work includes elements such as care of the elderly, child and family welfare, rehabilitation of offenders/restorative justice, rehabilitation of drug and alcohol dependants, managing community centres and population development. Social work is seen as a very important instrument in combating social problems associated with poverty. Oscar Lewis, who developed the culture of poverty theory, emphasized the role of social work to break the culture of poverty (1965: [lii]). The Theron Commission made a detailed analysis of the social problems in the coloured community and of the available social services to combat these problems (see Chapter Eleven of the Theron report).

From the literature two areas emerge that are relevant to the debate. In the first place there is a discussion on the amount of resources that the government should allocate to social work relative to other social spending. An equally important discussion revolves around the effectiveness of social work policy and its implementation in South Africa. We will now look at these two areas:



- **Resources**

Apart from the Theron Commission, various authors at that time concluded that the social work services in the coloured community were inadequate. This was due to serious problems with infrastructure and operational funding, as well as a lack of qualified and experienced social workers. Heydorn (1967: 208-209) identified too few welfare organisations and social workers and a general ineffectiveness of those that were active in the coloured community as the biggest problems. Lategan (1974: 82-84) singled out a lack of facilities and qualified social workers in the high density coloured townships on the Cape Flats. Kruger (1978: 216) argued that the introduction of a proper social work system in coloured schools was essential. Cloete (1978: 140-145) pointed out several problems such as very poor community facilities, virtually no attempt to provide recreational facilities, a very skew distribution of social workers catering for the white and coloured communities respectively, too few organisations to deal with specific problems such as alcoholism, very little material support and a large percentage of community organisations that had become inactive. The most important policy recommendation made by the Theron Commission was that the different welfare departments of the government should unite in one body so that it can provide a better coordinated social work service and so that it can address the inequalities in the delivery of services to the different racial groups (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 68).

- **Social work policy and practice**

An important point of criticism against social work policy and practice in South Africa is its preoccupation with traditional social case work which focuses on individuals and is mainly of a curative nature, rather than a focus on community work, which is of a more preventive or developmental nature (Sewpaul, 1997: 1-3). The Theron Commission also used this line of argumentation (Theron and Du Toit, 1977: 67). Coloured social work leaders also proposed a single department of welfare (Lategan, 1977: 278). Unfortunately it seems as if this problem had not been adequately tackled until very recently. Cloete (1978: 143) asked for an



increased focus on community work. Kotze (1983:83-91), Louw (1984:36-37) and Hugo (1984: 207-215, 258) also strongly supported a better utilisation of community resources in the fight against social problems. According to McKendrick (1991:94), with the onset of the 1990's studies had shown that about 90% of all local social work could still be classified as case work. Other more recent writings that follow a similar line of argument include McKay (1991: 285), De Beer (1995: 348-356) and Ferguson Brown & Partab (1999: 138-139).

The developmental or community based approach has only recently gained prominence (Lund and Patel,1995; cited in Sewpaul, 1997:3). However, Lund (1995, cited in Sewpaul, 1997:3) indicated that very little of this new approach had yet been implemented, especially in the public sector.

When analysing changes in resources and policy it can be seen that some changes have occurred in the post-apartheid era. Sewpaul (1997: 5-8) argues that the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) embraces the theory of community and social development, which was to a large extent absent in the apartheid ideology. Therefore there is reason to believe that social work, given proper policy implementation, might become more effective in future. Another important policy milestone was the finalisation of the White Paper on Social Welfare in 1995. Van der Berg (1996:8) analysed the fiscal implications of the White Paper and identified several problems in policy and implementation which needed attention. He argued that the provision of welfare services: "is still highly discriminatory; is inequitably distributed across provinces; is not directed at communities, families or social integration; is mainly rehabilitative rather than preventive; and is often (as in the case of care of the elderly) based on an inappropriate institutionally-based model". He showed that social security is dominant in the overall welfare budget (about 88%, leaving 12% to social welfare services and administration). He also argued that there is an inequitable distribution of resources between racial groups and provinces. Table 5.6 shows that whites and to a lesser extent coloureds had been favoured by welfare



spending. The biggest racial gap occurred in spending on the elderly. Even when allowing for a larger percentage of elderly whites the gap in spending between whites and blacks was still 7 to 1 and between coloureds and blacks it was close to 5 to 1. Van der Berg (1996:15) argued that the institutional model of caring for the elderly was inappropriate for a country with South Africa's limited resources, and given the fact that other welfare needs of large segments of the population are still inadequately met. As the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Gauteng had higher percentages of elderly whites and coloureds – the groups who benefited most from government provision - the White Paper envisaged a downscaling of levels of public funding of care of the elderly in these provinces. It was, however, added that it should be implemented gradually as to not cause a total collapse of functioning institutions and services.

**TABLE 5.6**

**PER CAPITA SPENDING BY GOVERNMENT ON SOME WELFARE SERVICES BY RACE, 1993 (EXCLUDING ALL HOMELANDS)**

	White	Coloured	Asian	Black	Total
<b>Care of elderly: Spending ÷ total population</b>	R 59.63	R 15.03	R 2.17	R 3.02	R 17.72
<b>Care of elderly: Spending ÷ elderly population</b>	R 636.62	R 441.44	R 63.36	R 92.15	R 377.07
<b>Rehabilitation for alcoholics And drug dependants: Spending ÷ total population</b>	R 2.09	R 1.63	R 3.13	R 0.27	R 1.02
<b>Care of the disabled: Spending ÷ total population</b>	R 8.21	R 2.09	R 4.06	R 3.11	R 4.16

**Source:** Van der Berg, 1996: 11

The provision of other social services is also problematic as they are skewed over different provinces and in many cases inadequate. Any expansion of the services in one province will thus lead to a deterioration of the level of service provision in other provinces. Van der Berg therefore suggested that the national financial investment in social welfare services should be increased. Although the



level of service provision in the Western Cape cannot be treated as an absolute measure it can be used a benchmark for the expansion of social services in other provinces. There is also scope for containing growth in social security expenditure which might make funds available for social welfare.

According to Van der Berg (1996: 12-13), social security spending is dominated by three major forms of expenditure, namely pensions for the elderly (including war veterans), disability grants and child/family grants. Real expenditure pensions for the elderly can be expected to decline in future because an increasing number of workers in the younger cohort groups are starting to receive adequate occupational pensions which disqualifies them for the state pension. The major driving force behind the increase in social security spending was the elimination of discriminatory benefit levels. As this process has been completed, further increases in real pensions do not seem likely in the near future.

With regard to child and family grants, the government is currently phasing in a new strategy proposed by the Lund Committee of Inquiry into State Support for Children and Families (Vorster & Rossouw, 1997: 316-326). As the focus of the State Maintenance Grant (SMG), the previous system of child and family support, was on the nuclear family, recipients were mostly single mothers who were unable to support themselves. The new system entails a flat-rate Child Support Benefit paid to the primary care giver of all children qualifying in terms of a simple means test. The Lund Committee proposed this new policy as they felt that the nuclear family did not play a dominant role in the South African society and that it is better to "follow the child" (Lund Committee, cited in Vorster & Rossouw, 1997:317). Vorster & Rossouw (1997: 325) as well as the National Children's Rights Committee have criticised the new strategy on grounds that it will ultimately take away money from the poor and that it will create a shift away from the protection of family life. In the case of coloureds this problem is accentuated by the fact that under the previous system "a significantly higher percentage of



coloured women and children in comparison to the other three population groups benefit(ed) from these (SMG) grants"<sup>2</sup> (Vorster & Rossouw, 1997: 316).

There is still some uncertainty regarding the implementation of social welfare policy as well as the improvement in delivery systems. Van der Berg (1996: 16) argues that as in the case of education spending, the challenge probably lies in real capacity rather than in fiscal constraints or overall policy measures. It also seems that for coloureds by the time of democratisation in 1994 the benefit levels were considerably higher than for blacks. This implies that any increase of benefit levels for coloureds will not be justifiable.

It seems that the provision of social welfare services for coloureds has improved in the era since the Theron Commission, at least when considering it relatively to the South African society as a whole. If there was an external constraint in terms of social welfare provision that was affecting coloureds specifically and which contributed to a state of chronic community poverty, it is not present any more. However, if one ignores fiscal constraints, this does not mean that the current level of social welfare expenditure on coloureds is adequate to break the vicious circle of impoverishment and social problems that could be encountered in a state of chronic community poverty.

### **5.3.5 The impact of economic development in South Africa**

So far there has been an analysis of factors which could have influenced a state of chronic community poverty in the coloured community. But these factors all form an inextricable part of the larger economic environment within which coloureds have to live. The question now comes to mind whether the nature of economic development over the past three decades did not in itself play a much

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<sup>2</sup> Although there has been no national survey on the subject, Strong (1996, cited in Vorster & Rossouw, 1997: 330) estimated that for every 1 000 coloured children, 50 received maintenance grants. This compared to 45 per 1 000 Asian children, 14 per 1 000 white children and 3 per 1 000 black children.



more significant role in changing the socio-economic status of coloureds and also a state of chronic community poverty. This question can be asked in another way: Had there not been a Theron report and other socio-political changes, would the situation of coloureds have been much different than is the case today?<sup>3</sup>

To answer this it may be worthwhile to do a quick revision of some of the findings in Chapter Four. It was shown in Chapter Four that the socio-economic position of coloureds changed markedly from the era of the Theron Commission. By looking at fertility and mortality rates as well as education and per capita income, it can be shown that the upward mobility in the coloured community was already in full swing at the time of the Theron Commission and as the government started to initiate some political reforms.

- Total fertility and infant mortality: Table 4.2 showed that total fertility decreased by 42% in the 15 years from 1960 to 1975 while it only declined by a further 36% in the following 26 years. In the case of infant mortality, it had already started to decrease significantly by 1970, with the biggest thrust between 1975 and 1980.
- Education: It was shown that the improvement in the levels of education of coloureds was an ongoing process which had already started some time before the Theron Commission. This is especially true in the case of primary education.
- Income: Table 4.6 showed that the real per capita personal income of coloureds almost doubled in the period from 1960 to 1975, when it reached a peak of R6 945. Since then coloured income has stagnated and in 1993 it was slightly lower at R6 877. It must, however, be added that also white income and to a lesser extent that of Asians and blacks, had followed the

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<sup>3</sup>The Theron Commission was appointed in 1973 and its report was published in 1976. Thus it can be assumed that any changes before the census date of 1975 could not have been influenced by the report. Similarly the tri-cameral parliament was only formed almost a decade later, in 1984, and could therefore not have made any impact in the 1970's.



same pattern, with a rapid increase in personal income levels until 1975 and a stagnation after that. This was mainly due to the stagnation in economic growth that occurred after the oil-shock in 1974 and was maintained through the 1980's and 1990's and as political violence and disinvestment due to apartheid disrupted the economy. A factor that must be kept in mind is that poverty levels did not decrease significantly and that the largest upward mobility was among the middle income group and not the poorest 40%.

What can now be concluded regarding the socio-economic development of coloureds and the Theron report? It seems that the socio-economic changes in the coloured community since the Theron Commission were more related to the structural changes and performance of the South African and world economies in general than to the direct influence of the Theron report or other socio-political changes. There can be no doubt that the report gave extra momentum to the process of reintegration of the different racial groups in South Africa and eventually to the formation of a democratic society, but its effect was only moderate. It can thus be concluded that had there not been a Theron report or other socio-political changes, the socio-economic situation of coloureds would still have improved over the past three decades, albeit not to the same extent.



### 5.3.6 The cultural identity of coloureds

*maar 'n onsekerheid  
hang soos 'n swaar reis-etiket om my nek,  
waarop duidelik geskrywe staan:  
"Kleurling" ...nasionaaliteit geskend  
bestemming onbekend...*

- Noël-David Adams

(cited in Wyngaard: 1999: 34)

Apartheid has left South Africa with very clear racial divides in terms of economy and society. In generalised terms we have a poor black society and a rich white society in one country. Where do coloureds fit in? To understand the complexities involved a short review of the establishment of the "coloured identity" is necessary.

Coloureds are the offspring of the original inhabitants of the south-western part of South Africa, the Khoi-San, as well as European settlers and slaves, especially from the Asian world. Consequently coloureds form a very heterogeneous group of people (Van der Ross, 1979: 5). The establishment of a separate coloured identity only gained momentum at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as racial divides started to replace class alliance and religious criteria as the most important political and ideological force in society (Goldin, 1987: 163). The first exclusively coloured political organisation, the African Peoples' Organisation (APO), was formed in 1902. This organisation tried to promote coloured interests as racial divides grew stronger. For the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the social and cultural identity of coloureds stayed a contentious issue (See Van der Ross, 1979 and Wyngaard, 1999). Although the idea of a separate coloured identity has been embraced by some, many others have rejected it, claiming that coloureds form part of either the larger black community or the white community.



Coloured identity was a major focus of the Wilcocks Commission as well as the Theron Commission (see Chapter Three). Both commissions argued that coloureds, although a clearly distinctive group of people, had a historical and cultural background that was so intertwined with that of white Afrikaners that it did not really make any sense to try and treat them as a separate nation. (This is also the view of Van der Ross, 1979:8, who was a member of the Theron Commission.) The Theron Commission included a section in which they analysed the idea of a separate coloured nation. The majority of the members of the commission came to the conclusion that coloureds were not a separate nation or in the process of becoming a separate nation. Particularly language and religion were seen as cohesive factors between whites and coloureds.

Policy recommendations by both commissions focused on an integration of the white and coloured communities. The Wilcocks Commission suggested that measures of racial segregation that had not yet been extended to coloureds should not be implemented and that discriminatory measures should be stopped. This was, however, to no avail. As apartheid progressed, discriminatory measures were increasingly applied to coloureds as well. Consequently, their socio-economic and political position was seriously jeopardised. The Theron Commission pleaded that most apartheid measures had to be revoked.

The thaw that started to creep into the apartheid ideology during the 1970's is likely to have influenced the course of development in the coloured community positively. It was shown in Chapter Four that the socio-economic position of coloureds has improved significantly over the past three decades.

The 1994 elections brought a new era in the relationship between coloureds and other South Africans. Both white and black political organisations have lobbied very hard to try and win the confidence of coloured voters. During the 1994 elections coloureds voted mainly for the National Party (NP). According to Reynolds (1994: 193), 60-70% of the coloured vote went to the NP. In the 1999



elections, however, there was evidence in the Western Cape of a swing towards the African National Congress (ANC), as the NP was only able to stay in power after forming a coalition with the Democratic Party (DP).

It seems that throughout the history of modern South Africa, the interests of coloureds have been wedged somewhere between black and white South Africa. Coloureds sometimes describe their situation as follows: "During the days of apartheid we were not white enough, now we are not black enough". An interesting development is the current movement within parts of the coloured community to re-invent and revive their Khoi-San heritage. Bredenkamp, Director of the Institute for Historic Research at the University of the Western Cape, provides two possible reasons for this:

"Enersyds hou dit verband met die ruimte wat die nuwe bedeling aan uiteenlopende groepe bied om in die gees van die Afrika-Renaissance hul kulturele erfenis, sonder die stigma van apartheid, openlik te mag bevorder of selfs te herontdek; andersyds staan dit nie los van van 'n redelik wydverspreide gevoel in die breë gemeenskap oor hul gemarginaliseerdheid ná apartheid nie"

Bredenkamp: 1999: 36

These factors are important in our analysis of the socio-economic changes and chronic community poverty in the coloured community. One of the assumptions of the culture of poverty theory is that it is a subcultural phenomenon within the larger cultural group. It was suggested by the Theron Commission that the impetus for the development of poor coloureds should come from within the richer white community as poor coloureds essentially formed part of the same larger community. Although poor coloureds were still marginalised, the closer association between coloureds and whites was likely to have contributed to the socio-economic progress in the coloured community during apartheid. In the new dispensation the balance of power has shifted towards blacks and there are fears among some coloured leaders that poor coloureds might again be



marginalised. The likelihood of a marginalisation of poor coloureds is however small, as we have moved away from a racially based development paradigm, typifying an apartheid-South Africa. The government has committed itself to all poor South Africans, but it remains to be seen whether the RDP and GEAR will provide enough of a support system to incorporate poor coloureds (and blacks) into the mainstream economy. However, when considering the socio-political changes that have taken place since the Theron era, it can be concluded that the socio-cultural identity of coloureds should not any more be seen as an impediment to the upward mobility of coloureds living in a state of chronic community poverty.

#### **5.4 Are the social problems associated with a culture of poverty still present?**

*“Die (bruin) plattelanders het kom versand in die Kaapse vlakte”*

-Reverend Jan Mettler: United Reformed Church, Mitchells Plain

Chapter Four has shown that the socio-economic position of coloureds has improved visibly over the past decades. From this perspective, it could be argued that a state of chronic community poverty has also been driven back to some extent. It is, however, important to look more closely at the social dimension of chronic community poverty before drawing final conclusions.

The most important social problem identified by the Theron Commission was the disintegration of family life and its associated problems. Other problems were alcohol and drug abuse, a very high incidence of criminality as well as an apparent aversion to work. These problems combined to create a large population of coloureds who lived in a poverty subculture with little hope of breaking out of their miserable conditions (Theron and du Toit, 1977: 60-63).



The measurement of these specific social problems is not easy. Efforts to obtain recent racially based statistics on criminal offences from the Department of Correctional Services did not succeed. The measurement of other social problems is also problematic. According to Muller (2000), very little data is available that can be compared over time. Furthermore the focus of studies changes constantly and some social problems which might have seemed insignificant at the time of the Theron report, have gained more prominence since then. A further complicating matter is that the rate of reporting of offences such as family violence and rape might have increased since the Theron era. For the aim of this study the most satisfying results were obtained by using the socio-economic changes reported in Chapter Four as a starting point and combining them with available data and reports from field workers.

In Chapter Four, some important conclusions regarding social problems in the coloured community were drawn. As many social problems are strongly influenced by poverty, it is unlikely that positive socio-economic change in the coloured community did not also reduce social problems to some extent. The fact that income levels, occupational status, housing, medical facilities and family planning have all improved must have contributed to weakening the vicious circle of impoverishment and ignorance. It was argued in Chapter Four that problems such as alcohol abuse have also decreased over the past decades. This view is echoed by reports from different parties involved in the coloured community. The most visible improvement has come in the rural areas. Without exception all farmers, social workers and other people involved in development work in rural areas who were interviewed were of the opinion that social problems have decreased substantially over the past three decades.

In the urban areas it is less obvious that there has been an improvement in the situation. Several factors play a role. In the first place it must be kept in mind that at the time of the Theron Commission urban coloureds were already in a much better socio-economic position than rural coloureds. It was also shown in



Chapter Four that those coloureds that migrated to the cities were mostly the poor and unemployed, while the wealthier and employed stayed behind. Thus there was a relocation of some poverty from rural to urban areas. Development workers involved in the Cape Flats share this view and add that these rural migrants quickly become part of the poverty cycle in the urban areas.

A social problem that has, however, increased in urban areas over the past three decades is that of gang related violence and other criminal activities. The activities of gangs in the former coloured suburbs in the Cape Peninsula have received wide-spread media attention in the past decade. Especially high density areas on the Cape Flats such as Manenberg, Hanover Park, Mitchells Plain and Elsies River seem to be hotspots of gang activities (Kriel, 1995: IV.1.2). The structure and activities of gangs vary greatly from pre-teen gangs which normally engage in petty criminal activities to professional and ruthless adolescent and adult gangs which readily participate in gang wars, murder, rape, smuggling of illegal substances, housebreaking and theft (Kriel, 1995:III.5 and Pinnock, 1998: 28-54). Prison gangs and reformatory gangs also play a prominent role with activities reaching both inside and outside jail<sup>4</sup>. Van Aswegen (2000) indicates that drug trafficking is currently playing a more important role in the formation of gangs than previously when most were simply street gangs.

According to Van Aswegen (2000), gangsterism on the Cape Flats has a strong socio-economic dimension. Poverty, unemployment and few community and recreational activities are conducive to the formation of gangs. But why is gangsterism so strong specifically in the coloured community on the Cape Flats? Pinnock (1984) adds that a very important factor that has led to the gang problem is the breakdown of family and community life. Most of the suburbs on the Cape Flats are high-density areas erected to house thousands of people relocated in terms of the Group Areas Act. This caused a destruction of existing communities

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<sup>4</sup> The problem of prison and reform gangs is somewhat removed from street gangs and will not be discussed here.



and extended family organisation. The Theron Commission also pointed out that the implementation of the Group Areas Act was the most important reason for the increase in criminality:

Gesinne is meestal teen hulle sin verskuif uit ou gevestigde gemeenskappe waar bure mekaar geken het, familieledede by mekaar gewoon het en sosiale bedrywighede dikwels rondom 'n kerk gesentreer het, na 'n groot, nuwe woongebied wat dikwels aanvanklik rou en onherbergsaam voorgekom het. Mense uit verskillende omgewings en agtergronde, asook met ander lewenshoudings, is verplig om saam te woon. Weens onderlinge onbekendheid was hulle dikwels agterdogtig teenoor mekaar. In plaas dat in die nuwe omgewing die gesinne met hoër waardes die ander gunstig beïnvloed het, het die volwassenes in groter isolement verval, tewel die jeugdige geleer het om die daggarokery en ander 'skollie'-aktiwiteite met die nuwe buurkinders mee te maak"

(Theron report, 1976: 260)

Lategan (1974: 71-74) came to the same conclusion when studying the social problems associated with high-density housing schemes on the Cape Flats. Pinnock described the devastating effect of the Group Areas Act in a Carnegie Conference paper in 1984 as follows:

"If Group Areas removals ... were to disrupt economic relationships, they were to have disastrous effects on social relationships. As the familiar social landmarks in the closely-grained working-class communities of the old city were ripped up, a whole culture began to disintegrate. This culture included maps of meaning which made life intelligible to its members. The 'maps' were not simply carried around in people's heads, they were inscribed in the patterns of social organisation and relationships through which people became social individuals. These patterns tended to involve three elements: The extended kinship network, the ecological setting of the neighbourhood, and the structure of the local



economy (which provided income for a large number of people, although at a low level of income).”

(Pinnock, 1984)

Pinnock (1984) also described the social isolation, fear, lack of social control and the establishment of a youth subculture of gangs and criminal activities that were born out of these forced resettlements. In a recent book on gang rituals he argues (Pinnock, 1998: 55-95) that the best way to solve these problems is not to increase policing and give harsher sentences, but to provide alternatives to the inadequate social structures that currently exist. In particular adolescents should be initiated into adulthood through community-based programmes, rather than leaving them to seek acceptance in the adult world through gang rituals.<sup>5</sup>

There is little hope that the influence of gangs on the Cape Flats will decline significantly in the future. The culture of gangsterism is the dominant social structure and unless living conditions in these areas improve drastically and alternatives to gang membership gain prominence<sup>6</sup>, the gangsterism subculture will keep on disrupting the lives of a large percentage of the coloured population. Where gang related violence was already a concern at the time of the Theron report, it is currently the overwhelming social problem in some parts of the urban coloured community. Although other problems related to poverty in the urban areas might have decreased, the problem of gangs neutralised much of the positive effects of a decrease in other social problems.

In conclusion it can be said that social problems associated with poverty did decrease over the period. The biggest improvement perhaps came in the rural

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<sup>5</sup> In recent times, the Cape Peninsula has seen another form of organised crime which is related to the problems discussed so far. Pagad (People against gangsterism and drugs), is a semi-religious organisation that has a large following in the Muslim sector of the coloured community. It claims to be protecting the community against the criminal activities of gangs and drug lords and to campaign for the Muslim religion. Unfortunately Pagad has been connected with various criminal and terrorist activities.

<sup>6</sup> The author participated in a community project in the Epping Industria area in 1996/97. Boys between the age of 10 and 13 who were interviewed all came to the same conclusion: due to the power of the gangs they had no alternative but to join them, lest they put themselves and their families at risk.



areas. In urban areas, the problem of gang related violence and social disruption have unfortunately tempered the positive changes.

### **5.5 Does the culture of poverty still exist?**

Before we assess the current situation, we can quickly look at the evidence provided on the Theron era. There can be little doubt that the subculture of poverty among the poorest 40% of coloureds as described by the Theron Commission did indeed exist, although some may prefer an alternative analytical description or term for it. The initial finding of Chapter Three was that the commission made a very accurate assessment of poverty problems in the coloured community. The findings of Chapters Four and Five confirmed this by providing evidence on the socio-economic status of poor coloureds as well as the external and internal factors which have led to a state of chronic community poverty and which served to perpetuate it. Chapter Four showed that the socio-economic position of coloureds was much worse than currently and in this chapter it was shown that a number of constraints that served to keep intact the state of chronic community poverty got weaker over the past three decades.

The important question now is whether the culture of poverty still exists? Three aspects need closer scrutiny before deriving a final answer:

- **Socio-economic position:** It was shown that the socio-economic position of coloureds has improved markedly over the period. Two additional factors are also relevant. In the first place there is no evidence that total poverty levels have decreased significantly. This was because the biggest upward mobility occurred among the middle and higher income groups and not the poorest 40%. Secondly, it was shown that there was a definite shift of poverty from rural to urban areas.
- **Other external and internal factors:** Several factors which could have influenced the culture of poverty were analysed, namely political participation,



government spending and taxes, the role of education and social work, the nature of economic development and the cultural identity of coloureds. The socio-economic pressure of these forces, which helped to create a state of chronic community poverty, decreased over the period and thus allowed an upward mobility. This would suggest that a culture of poverty that existed at the time of the Theron Commission is likely to have decreased in intensity.

- **Social problems:** It was shown earlier that social problems identified by the Theron Commission decreased, especially in the case of rural coloureds. Unfortunately escalating gang activities have become a major social problem in some areas of the coloured community. In terms of the culture of poverty conceptual framework, gangsterism can be seen as a form of community organisation. According to the original theory developed by Oscar Lewis, a lack of all forms of community organisation was typical of communities living in a culture of poverty. This was because individuals lacked any sense of a wider community. The author suggested that this rigid proposition was not correct and that it would be better to assume that community organisation would still be possible to some extent. (See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion). The treatment of gangsterism is therefore somewhat problematic. The best approach is to treat it as a very closely related problem, which exerts strong downward socio-economic pressure on coloureds living in a culture of poverty, but not as a dimension of a culture of poverty *per se*.

When bearing in mind all the variable factors that exerted an influence on the state of chronic community poverty, it can be concluded that the problem has decreased significantly since the time of the Theron Commission. Particularly in the case of rural coloureds, whose situation was much worse than urban coloureds at that time, there has been an improvement. The extreme poverty, ignorance and the associated problems such as aversion to work and a fatalistic life perspective are not as prominent in the rural community as three decades ago. This by no means implies that social problems associated with poverty are no longer present or that these are now less than in the case of urban coloureds.



In fact, the rising unemployment among unskilled workers since the 1980's was also a strong force in the agricultural sector, the most important employer in rural areas, and consequently acute poverty and socio-economic problems still exist. However, the original subculture of poverty seems to have declined to such an extent that it can no longer be used as the basic model to describe the socio-economic problems in the rural areas.

In the case of urban coloureds, and thus for the majority of the coloured population, the same basic conclusion regarding chronic community poverty can be drawn, but with some provisions. At the time of the Theron Commission the situation of urban coloureds was better in general and the culture of poverty was not as strong in the urban areas as in the rural areas. As rural poverty declined while urban poverty increased, partly through the effect of rural-urban migration, the culture of poverty is not likely to have declined as much in urban areas. This is complicated by the fact that the closely related problem of gang violence has proliferated since the Theron investigation was completed. As in the case of rural coloureds it must also be remembered that problems associated with poverty have by no means vanished. However, in the case of urban areas also, the original culture of poverty declined to such an extent that it must no longer be used as the basic model to describe socio-economic problems.

This same conclusion can be drawn when using the culture of poverty as a theoretical framework. One of the premises of the culture of poverty theory is that while an increase in income levels will be necessary to eradicate the culture of poverty, it will not be enough. It will have to be combined with an improvement in education levels, social services and other support services. It was shown in both Chapter Four and this chapter that there was a substantial improvement in the educational attainment of poor coloureds as well as in the rendering of social services. Therefore, poor coloureds are currently better positioned to benefit from a rise in income and ensure an improvement in their overall socio-economic



position than three decades ago. From this follows that the culture of poverty approach is no longer the best way to analyse coloured poverty.

According to Muller (2000) poverty has again increased due to the poor economic growth and high unemployment that we have encountered recently (This was also suggested in Chapter Four). Unless economic growth accelerates this may become a permanent phenomenon.

A final remark can be made regarding the relevance of the culture of poverty theory. In the previous paragraphs it was suggested that the culture of poverty approach is not the proper model to analyse present coloured poverty. However, the improvement in the socio-economic position of coloureds that caused the weakening of the culture of poverty has not disproved the theory. It rather confirms the proposition that the culture of poverty can only exist when a range of negative external factors is present and when education levels are poor. Since these negative factors have weakened substantially, the culture of poverty has also weakened.

## **5.6 Summary and conclusions**

The aim of this chapter was to establish whether poverty and associated social problems in the coloured community should still be viewed from a culture of poverty perspective. The first step was to look at some external and internal factors which could have influenced a culture of poverty – apart from the positive changes in the socio-economic status of coloureds shown in Chapter Four. The following factors were analysed:

- **Political changes:** It was shown that coloureds are currently much more politically involved than at the time of the Theron Commission and that this would have contributed to the reduction of a culture of poverty.
- **Public spending and taxes:** It was shown that relatively to other racial groups, public social funding cannot be seen as a constraint in coloured



development any more. However, the inability to fight poverty through social security programmes and the backlog in education spending might still be conducive to a culture of poverty.

- **Education:** Regression analysis showed that improvements in educational attainment of coloureds must also have had a positive effect on their socio-economic status. This improvement in the educational attainment of poor coloureds would inevitably have weakened a culture of poverty. It was also shown that improving the culture of learning in especially coloured and black schools might lead to further progress.
- **The role of social work:** A lack of resources and an improper model of social work practice hampered the rendering of effective social work for coloureds at the time of the Theron Commission. The situation has improved in the sense that coloureds already receive substantial welfare assistance (given constrained government resources) and that there has been official recognition that community based development programmes are more important than curative case work. However, from a national perspective, the provision of specifically welfare services to individuals in South Africa is still inadequate and unless extra resources are freed for this purpose, poverty related social problems would be difficult to contain.
- **The impact of economic development:** It was shown that the most important socio-economic changes since the era of the Theron Commission had already gained momentum before 1975. It seems that economic development in South Africa played a more important role in the socio-economic development of coloureds than the Theron report and other socio-political changes.
- **The cultural identity of coloureds:** The coloured community forms a loose cultural unit closely associated with the white culture but also containing some unique elements. The cultural identity of coloureds was a contentious issue at the time of the Theron investigation as there were fears that poor coloureds might be marginalised due to neglect by their wealthier white cultural relatives. Although there are still some problems regarding coloured



development in a multi-cultural South Africa, it was concluded that the cultural identity of coloureds should not be regarded as an impediment to their upward socio-economic mobility.

The analysis of these social problems is difficult due to the subjective element involved and the little data available. Nevertheless it was attempted to show that social problems related to a culture of poverty have decreased over the past three decades, despite the increase of gang related violence.

After evaluating all the relevant factors, the conclusion was drawn that the culture of poverty as it existed at the time of the Theron report has weakened considerably. Contributory factors were positive changes to the external socio-economic and political environment and consequently an improvement in their socio-economic status as well as a decrease in social problems specifically related to the culture of poverty. This does not imply that problems associated with poverty have vanished. It is rather a case of the nature of the problems having changed to such an extent that they should not be approached from a culture of poverty perspective any more.

The final chapter will identify some lessons learnt from the Theron Commission's culture of poverty analysis as well as from the weakening of the culture of poverty syndrome since then. Policy recommendations to enhance the upward mobility of poor coloureds will also be made.



## **Chapter Six - The culture of poverty and the way forward in coloured socio-economic development**

### **6.1 Introduction**

South Africa faces a very big challenge in terms of the socio-economic development of the poorest part of society. Specific constraints include a small fiscal capacity as well as large differences in the incidence of poverty in different regions of the country. Poor coloureds form only a relatively small part of the total number of poor in South Africa. However, the relative quick upward socio-economic mobility that has occurred among many coloureds provides research possibilities.

The next section of this chapter will provide a summary of the main arguments of the thesis. The last sections will be used to present the most important lessons that can be learnt from this study as well as to provide policy recommendations regarding current and future development projects in the coloured community and among the poor in South Africa at large.

### **6.2 Summary of main arguments**

#### **6.2.1 The culture of poverty hypothesis in context (Chapter Two)**

The aim of Chapter Two was to provide a conceptual framework within which the Theron Commission's analysis of poverty problems in the coloured community and their socio-economic development since then can be interpreted.

In the first part of the chapter a general approach for the treatment of culture was discussed. It was shown that culture and its relationship to other socio-economic phenomena can be treated from different perspectives which can range from a



very generalised view to others such as the expressive approach or the hegemonic approach. Depending on the exact dimensions of the phenomena looked at, the best approach will also vary.

Apart from different general approaches to culture there also exists different development paradigms within which the mutual grounds between culture and socio-economic matters is treated. The conservative paradigm assumes that culture plays an important role in the socio-economic development of a community and has developed different theories to try and explain this relationship. The culture of poverty theory also forms part of this paradigm. Some other conservative theories have lost their appeal due to an overemphasis on cultural or even racial differences. The liberal paradigm represents the other end of the spectrum where culture is considered to have no or little effect on the socio-economic status of a community. It instead focusses on the rational economic agent and tries to explain differences in socio-economic status in terms of other economic phenomena. The third paradigm, namely dependencia, rejects the first two and states that economic underdevelopment should be viewed in terms of exploitative relationships between more developed and less developed communities.

The second part of Chapter Two was used to show the evolution and popularisation of the culture of poverty theory and to provide a critical analysis of its scientific value. The basic premise of the theory is that the culture of poverty is firstly caused by adaptations to external downward socio-economic forces and secondly through an internal process of self-perpetuation. Unfortunately the theory was popularised by means of a number of misinterpretations. The theory was strongly criticised for a range of conceptual and methodological weaknesses. This caused the culture of poverty to lose some of its validity. Subsequent discussions revolved around the underclass debate and although it has shifted the focus away from previous analytical and ideological problems, it shows a lot of resemblance to its predecessor.



It was concluded that the culture of poverty approach could still be used as a methodological framework if certain conceptual problems and contradictions between theory and data are avoided. The following two aspects are of particular importance:

- There should be a stronger focus on the culture of poverty as an adaptive response rather than focusing on the self-perpetuating nature of poverty;
- One should guard against a rigid assumption that people living in a culture of poverty do not participate in any community organisation.

It was noted that the conceptual framework was mainly based on experiences in North and South American ghettos and had to be adapted to conditions in the Western Cape, where most coloureds live.

### **6.2.2 The Theron Commission (Chapter Three)**

Chapter Three provided an analysis of the role of the Theron report and some of its predecessors in understanding and combating poverty in South Africa. The first major investigation into poverty in South Africa was the Carnegie investigation into the poor white problem. It was shown that various factors led to their eventual backward position, but also that it could not really be described in terms of a culture of poverty approach. The second investigation into poverty concerned the coloured community. Although the Willcocks Commission did not do a thorough review of poverty problems, it seems that they left the door open for a culture of poverty explanation, by emphasising the role of unfavourable environmental factors which caused poverty. The third important commission, which analysed black development, was the Tomlinson Commission. It was argued that the Tomlinson Commission realised the immensity of the economic challenges to develop the black community. Unfortunately, the commission proposed a separate path of development for blacks, which strengthened the apartheid ideology.



The Theron investigation which started in 1973, created much public debate and can be seen as a landmark in poverty research in South Africa. The commission had to investigate the progress made by the coloured community since 1960 and had to identify problem areas. The eventual report consisted of five different sections on the position of coloureds in the South African society, namely economic issues, socio-cultural matters, statutory matters and some perspectives on socio-cultural and statutory matters. Many problems within the community were identified. Almost all facilities and services like education, housing and health were inadequate. Poverty in the coloured community also put them at a huge disadvantage in participating in cultural and recreational activities. The commission identified a whole range of apartheid laws and practices which served to perpetuate their backward position. Of these, the Population Registration Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Separate Amenities Act were very important. Equally important were the separate parliamentary voters' rolls which prevented coloureds from having political power on an equal basis with whites. The commission suggested that these laws should be adapted (or in the case of the Mixed Marriages Act, abolished) in order to give coloureds more equal rights and opportunities.

The analysis of the economic position of coloureds was marked by a differentiation between three different socio-economic groups. The 20% richest coloureds had living standards comparable to that of middle class white South Africans. Apartheid laws that kept them from participating normally in economic and societal activities were their biggest frustration. The middle group spanned the wide gap between the poorest 40% and the richest 20%. They could again be divided into a richer and poorer quintile, which depending on their socio-economic status were more affected by problems of either the richest quintile or the poorest 40%. The biggest problems affecting them related to jobs and housing. Unequal salary scales as well as job reservation for whites, disadvantaged this group. They also made widespread use of transport services, which were very expensive and unreliable.



The poorest 40% lived in a situation of chronic community poverty. The commission made use in their analysis of this group of the same basic approach as found in the culture of poverty theory. Firstly chronic community poverty was caused by several unfavourable environmental factors. There were a range of historical factors such as slavery and political marginalisation which played a role. Their lack of political power and the unwillingness of the white government to spend enough to improve their standard of living were further drawbacks. White prejudices also played a role in keeping coloureds in a subjective position. Lastly, there were various negative economic factors. Discrimination on the labour market was a very important factor. The mentality evident of chronic community poverty resulted in employers often preferring not to make use of coloured labour. Coloureds were also very vulnerable consumers and often got caught in a debt-spiral. There was a lack of commitment from both the public and private sectors to change the situation.

Apart from the negative environmental factors, chronic community poverty also had a self-perpetuating element. This had much to do with the way children grew up in the midst of poverty and the wide range of social problems that were prevailing.

The commission compared the poor white problem and coloured poverty, but came to the conclusion that there were too many differences between the two kinds of poverty to use the poor white problem as an example for policy proposals.

The commission concluded that there had to be a fundamental adaptation of the political and economic environment in order to reintegrate this group of coloureds into the mainstream of the economy. There also had to be a very strong focus on education in order to break the cycle of chronic community poverty. This whole effort would only have been possible if with a greater commitment from the white population to this end.



A minority of six members of the commission wholly rejected the notion of chronic community poverty on the grounds that the external factors did not play such an important role in creating coloured poverty. The government also rejected many of the policy proposals of the commission in an interim memorandum, distributed with the report.

An evaluation of the concept of chronic community poverty showed that many of the pitfalls of the culture of poverty were avoided. The research methodology was sounder than in the case of Lewis' model. Although Terreblanche also used the much-criticised concept of the self-perpetuation of chronic community poverty, he left no room for misinterpreting its role. The eradication of poverty itself was not negotiable. Terreblanche did not lean so heavily on trait analysis as was the case with Lewis' model. He clearly distinguished between a culture and a subculture and pointed out that chronic community poverty was a subcultural phenomenon. In the last instance, it was concluded that Lewis' usage of middle class values as benchmark could not have led to a singular focus on eradicating the "deviant" behaviour of people living in chronic community poverty.

The following final conclusions were drawn: The Theron Commission did not misinterpret coloured poverty by using the concept of chronic community poverty. The concept was better constructed and showed a closer relation to real life than the original culture of poverty theory. The policy measures that followed the analysis were also sound given the fact that the commission had to focus on coloured poverty only.



### **6.2.3 Changes in the socio-economic position of coloureds since the era of the Theron commission (Chapter Four)**

It was shown in Chapter Four that the socio-economic position of coloureds has improved considerably since the era of the Theron commission.

- Demographic change

The demographic changes that have taken place among coloureds are truly remarkable. The age structure of coloureds has changed significantly with coloureds currently being an older population than at the time of the Theron report. Both total fertility rates and infant mortality rates have fallen considerably. The net effect was a decline in the natural rate of increase from 3.1% per year in 1960 to 1.6% per year in 1990. The life expectancy of coloureds also increased substantially during this period.

- Education

The educational attainment of coloureds has also improved considerably. For the youngest cohorts, illiteracy rates are very low, while it is much higher for the older cohorts. The most substantial improvement, however, has come in higher grade levels. The matriculation rate has increased at least threefold over the past 3 decades. Other trends are also visible: Firstly, there is still a very large disparity in the educational achievement of rural and urban coloureds. Secondly, there is a strong positive correlation between education and income status. Thirdly, it can be seen that coloured girls have improved their school performance and are currently attaining a higher educational status than boys. When comparing the educational achievement of coloureds with that of other racial groups, it is clear that there has been a dual system. Coloureds and blacks perform similarly and much worse than Asians and whites. Although the educational achievement of coloureds has improved much since the Theron



commission, it is still not at a desirable level at all and much still needs to be done to rectify the situation.

- Changes in income patterns and occupational status

The per capita income of coloureds has almost doubled in the 3 decades since 1960. It has also increased relative to that of whites from roughly 16% to 21% of white income during that period. The rise in per capita income of coloureds was due to a combination of factors. Average wages and salaries of coloureds in the non-agricultural sectors have increased from 29% of white levels in 1970 to 45% in 1993. This could be attributed to both an increase in wage levels for the same job grade and gender (i.e. racial discrimination in terms of wages decreased) as well as mobility of workers from lower paid to higher paid occupations. An additional factor that influenced the per capita income positively was a decrease in the dependency ratio from 0.96 in 1975 to 0.58 in 1995. The only negative factor was the rate of unemployment, which almost doubled in the period from 1970 to 1991.

- Changes in the distribution of income and poverty levels

It was shown that the distribution of income in terms of the Gini-coefficient stayed very stable in the period from 1975 to 1991. The expectation was thus that poverty rates would have decreased over the period. Some estimates showed that except for the poorest decile that became even poorer, the rest of the coloured community experienced a steady rise in their income. Poverty measures based on the MLL and SLL, however, appear to show that poverty rates did not decrease in the period. Other dimensions of poverty such as the incidence of tuberculosis confirmed this. As the evidence is somewhat contradictory it is difficult to come to a final conclusion regarding poverty levels. It is, however, likely that this situation is the result of problems with the data. Regardless of this fact, it is certain that the overall socio-economic position of coloureds improved markedly since the 1970's. Since it could not be established without doubt that poverty rates decreased it must be suggested that the biggest



upward mobility took place from the middle income group to the higher income group. It is also important to keep in mind that poverty in coloured ranks is much less severe than among blacks.

- The socio-economic status of coloureds in rural areas and the agricultural sector

The socio-economic position of coloureds in the agricultural and rural areas is of particular interest as one fifth of all coloureds live in rural areas, where the main employer is agriculture, and because the Theron commission concluded that their socio-economic status was much poorer than that of urban coloureds. It was shown that coloureds in the rural areas are still considerably poorer than their urban counterparts. However, the gap between the two groups did shrink in terms of per capita income, as well as in terms of other measures such as education. Although it is difficult to find reliable data on the income levels of agricultural workers, it was concluded that their socio-economic position increased, if not in terms of wages, at least in terms of other dimensions such as educational attainment, etc.

An additional trend that was visible was that the pace at which the socio-economic position of coloureds improved decelerated from the 1970's to the 1990's. Therefore, by the time of the Theron investigation their socio-economic position had already improved considerably from 10-15 years earlier.

It was suggested that the poor economic growth of the past few years has had a large effect on coloured workers, especially in the lower paid occupations. Poverty rates are currently higher than normal and will only decrease if economic growth accelerates in future.



#### 6.2.4 The culture of poverty 25 years after the Theron report (Chapter Five)

The aim of Chapter Five was to establish whether poverty and associated social problems in the coloured community should still be viewed from a culture of poverty perspective. The first step was to look at some external and internal factors which could have influenced a culture of poverty – apart from the positive change in the socio-economic status of coloureds shown in Chapter Four. The following factors were analysed:

- **Political changes:** It was shown that coloureds are currently much more politically involved than at the time of the Theron Commission and that this would have contributed to the reduction of a culture of poverty.
- **Public spending and taxes:** It was shown that relatively to other racial groups, public social funding cannot be seen as a constraint in coloured development any more. However, the inability to fight poverty through social security programmes and the backlog in education spending might still be conducive to a culture of poverty.
- **Education:** Regression analysis showed that improvements in educational attainment of coloureds must also have had a positive effect on their socio-economic status. This improvement in the educational attainment of poor coloureds would inevitably have weakened a culture of poverty. It was also shown that improving the culture of learning in especially coloured and black schools could bring further progress.
- **The role of social work:** The scarcity of resources and an improper model of social work practice hampered the rendering of an effective social work system for coloureds at the time of the Theron commission. The situation has improved in the sense that coloureds already receive substantial welfare assistance given constrained government resources and that there has been official recognition that community based development programmes are more important than curative case work. However, from a national perspective, the provision of welfare services to individuals in South Africa is still inadequate



and unless extra resources are freed for this purpose, poverty related social problems would be difficult to contain.

- **The impact of economic development:** It was shown that the most important socio-economic changes since the era of the Theron Commission had already gained momentum before 1975. It seems that economic development in South Africa played a more important role in the socio-economic development of coloureds than the Theron report and other factors.
- **The cultural identity of coloureds:** The coloured community forms a loose cultural unit closely associated with the white culture but also containing some unique elements. The cultural identity of coloureds was a contentious issue at the time of the Theron investigation as there were fears that poor coloureds might be marginalised due to a neglect by their wealthier white cultural relatives. Although there are still some problems regarding coloured development in a multi-cultural South Africa, it was concluded that the cultural identity of coloureds should not be regarded as an impediment to their upward socio-economic mobility.

After evaluating all the relevant factors, the conclusion was drawn that the culture of poverty as it existed at the time of the Theron report has weakened considerably. Contributing factors were positive changes to the external socio-economic and political environment and consequently an improvement in their socio-economic status as well as a decrease in social problems specifically related to the culture of poverty. Especially in the case of rural coloureds there has been a great improvement. This does not imply that poverty associated problems have vanished. It is rather a case of the nature of the problems having changed to such an extent that it should not be seen from a culture of poverty perspective any more.



### **6.3 Lessons learnt from the Theron Commission's analysis of coloured poverty**

This thesis has provided an important perspective on the Theron Commission's contribution to coloured poverty. Three important conclusions were drawn in the various chapters of this thesis which call for some further discussion. Firstly it was concluded that the Theron Commission's usage of the culture of poverty framework was accurate and useful in describing the socio-economic problems in the poorest section of the coloured community. Secondly it was concluded that the culture of poverty was indeed present at the time of the Theron report, but that it has since weakened to such an extent that it should not be used as the basic theoretical approach to coloured poverty any more. Lastly it was shown that in spite of the soundness of the Theron report, it did not have a major influence on coloured development and that the positive socio-economic changes that subsequently took place in the coloured community could largely be attributed to the nature of economic development in South Africa.

Nevertheless some important lessons can be learnt from the Theron report.

- It was shown in this thesis that a range of factors had an influence on poverty levels in the coloured community. Although the nature of economic growth in itself is one of the key determinants of poverty, it is still important for the government to get a clear view on all the different external factors that could enhance a state of poverty.
- The fact that the culture of poverty weakened relatively quickly suggests that the self-perpetuating nature of a culture of poverty is not as strong as suggested by the original culture of poverty theory. This confirms the viewpoint held in this thesis as well as by the Theron Commission.
- The most important policy recommendations by the Theron report to eliminate the state of chronic community poverty were to provide job security and a steady income and to focus very strongly on improving their educational attainment. While the former prerequisite was not fully obtained due to the



rise in unemployment that has occurred in the last two decades, the improvement in the educational achievement of coloureds was of great importance. It is likely that the improvement in education played a significant role in eradicating the culture of poverty.

#### **6.4 Current initiatives and policy recommendations**

- **Unemployment:** The large-scale structural unemployment in South Africa is the most important reason for the high incidence of poverty. In the case of coloureds this is also true. In this thesis it was not attempted to analyse unemployment problems and to propose policy measures to improve the situation. It is, however, important to realise that job creation is of utmost importance to increase the welfare of the poorest half of the population. Unfortunately factors such as the poor skill levels of a large percentage of the labour force, put South Africa in a disadvantageous position to many other developing countries. The government as well as the private sector have committed themselves to job creation, but unfortunately little progress has so far been made.
- **Gangsterism:** The gangsterism problem in the Western Cape must be brought under control. This is an extremely difficult task as the underlying problem is still one of poor socio-economic conditions. According to Van Aswegen (2000) normal policing activities and special gang units are not effective due to problems with understaffing and too few resources. Peace initiatives between rival gangs are normally only temporary and more permanent structures are needed. The establishment of community policing forums was an initiative to curb the spate of criminal activities and gang related violence, but it seems these forums are also not able to make a major impact on gangs. Thus, at this stage there is not any contingency plan which seems likely to control gang violence. In the long run gangsterism will only be driven back if an improvement in the socio-



economic situation of residents on the Cape Flats is achieved. From a social work perspective, community based programmes which can provide an alternative to gangs look like the obvious avenue along which further efforts must be directed.

- **Education:** The value of education cannot be underestimated. It was shown that the improvement in the educational attainment of coloureds has already contributed to the improvement in their socio-economic status. It is of crucial importance to improve the level of effectiveness in schools, especially in public schools catering for the poorer segment of the community. Innovative ways of monitoring teacher productivity will have to be tested. Drop-out rates, especially in the higher grades, are still too high. Strengthening the COLTS programme might also bring some progress.
  
- **Rural Development:** The improvement that has occurred in the socio-economic status of rural coloureds over the past three decades is promising. The presence of organisations such as the Rural Foundation possibly gave momentum to this process. However, it seems that some of the momentum that has been gained in rural development in the Western Cape since the 1980's has again been lost in the past few years. To gain a better understanding of this a number of people involved in rural development were interviewed<sup>1</sup>. All the respondents agreed that rural development in the Western Cape is currently experiencing some difficulties. The following contributing factors were identified:
  - the poor performance of the agricultural sector in the past few years,
  - the lack of a proper framework for rural development on a national basis,

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<sup>1</sup> The following people were interviewed: Professor Nick Vink, head of the department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Stellenbosch; Mr Mohammed Karaan, lecturer at the same department and formerly involved with the RF; Mr Gerrit van Rensburg, Minister of Agriculture for the Western Cape, Mr Herman Bailey, mayor of Wellington and former head of the RF, Mr Okkie Bosman, former head of the RF, Mr Marthinus Saanderson, general manager of the Wine Industry Trust, Mr Francois Nel, human resources manager at Lanok development company and Mr Karl Opperman, chief executive officer of Agriculture Western Cape.



- a lack of co-ordination between different developing institutions,
- a lack of funding for different projects, and lastly
- the demise of the Rural Foundation (RF).

From the interviews it was clear that there is an urgency to try and address the different problems identified and it is hoped that the momentum in rural and farm level development will be regained within a fairly short period.<sup>2</sup> It was emphasised by respondents that existing institutions should be utilised better, instead of trying to set up new structures. Unfortunately the current stagnation in agriculture in the Western Cape cannot really be influenced by policy measures as it is largely affected by the global food market.

- **The role of social work:** The biggest challenge for social workers dealing with coloured poverty will be to implement more community based programmes. It was already mentioned that this would be very important when trying to fight gangsterism. It would, however, also be important to try and combat other social problems associated with poverty. It has been shown that the involvement of the community can often be the key factor in the success of development programmes and not physical resources as such.

### **6.5 Research suggestion**

This thesis showed that various factors should be taken into account when trying to improve the socio-economic position of poor people. A singular focus on

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<sup>2</sup>A few further remarks can be made about current initiatives. According to Vink (2000) and Karaan (2000) the government is currently in the process of drawing up an improved strategy for rural development on a national basis. Herman Bailey is currently chairing a Research and Development Trust which will try to replace the vacuum that has been left with the demise of the RF. It is hoped that the trust will eventually lead to the implementation of an Integrated Urban-Rural Development Programme. The project is funded by the Irish Government and is based on their very successful Urban Renewal Programme. The Farmworkers Association of the Western Cape is also trying to secure funding which could improve their capacity for development work in future. The Wine Industry Trust, which has been set up by the KWV, may also contribute to community development on farms.



raising income levels might fail to achieve a significant rise in socio-economic status. The study was, however, limited to the coloured community and there is scope for further research on the broader South African society. An improvement in our knowledge of the various community-specific factors that impede socio-economic mobility among the people of South Africa can contribute to the reduction of poverty.



## **Appendix 1: The traits of an individual living in a culture of poverty<sup>1</sup>**

### **Universal Characteristics**

- Relatively higher death rate
- Lower life expectancy
- A higher proportion of individuals in the younger age groups
- Child labour and working women – therefore a higher proportion of gainfully employed
- Provincially and locally oriented culture
- Only partially integrated into national institutions
- Marginal people even in the heart of a great city
- Low level of education and literacy
- Do not belong to labour unions
- Not members of political parties
- Do not participate in medical care, maternity or old-age benefits
- Make little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums, galleries, airports

### **Economic traits**

- Constant struggle for survival
- Unemployment and underemployment
- Low wages
- Miscellany of unskilled occupations
- Child labour
- Absence of savings

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<sup>1</sup> In order to standardise the different versions of Lewis' model of traits, Leeds (1971: 239-241), constructed a model, which will be presented here. It focuses mainly on Lewis' material on Mexico, but also include later works.



- Chronic shortage of cash
- Absence of food reserves in the home
- Pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as need arises
- Pawning
- Borrowing from local moneylenders at usurious rates of interest
- Spontaneous informal credit devices organised by neighbours
- Use of second-hand clothing and furniture

### **Social and Psychological Characteristics**

- Living in crowded quarters
- Lack of privacy
- Gregariousness
- High incidence of alcoholism
- Frequent resort to violence in settling quarrels
- Frequent use of physical violence in training children
- Wife beating
- Early initiation into sex
- Free unions, consensual marriages
- Relatively high incidence of abandonment of mothers and children
- Trend towards mother-centred families
- Greater knowledge of maternal relatives
- Predominance of nuclear family
- Strong predisposition to authoritarianism
- Great emphasis on family solidarity – ideal rarely achieved

### **Other traits**

- Strong present-time orientation
- Little ability to defer gratification and plan for the future
- Sense of resignation and fatalism based upon realities of difficult life situation



- Belief in male superiority; crystallised in *machismo*, the cult of masculinity
- Martyr complex among women
- High tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts

#### **Local solutions for problems not met by institutions and agencies**

- No bank credit, therefore informal credit devices
- No doctors; suspicion of hospitals, therefore reliance on herbs, home remedies, curers and midwives
- Critical of priests, rarely go to confession or Mass, relying on prayer to images at home, and pilgrimages to popular shrines

#### **Counter quality and potential for use by political movements contra existing order**

- Critical attitude toward some values and institutions of dominant class
- Hatred of police
- Mistrust of government and those in high positions
- Cynicism which extends even to the Church

#### **Residual Quality**

- Attempt to utilise and integrate into a workable way of life the remnants of beliefs and customs of divers origins

#### **Additions**

- Strong feeling of marginality, helplessness, dependency, not belonging, alienation
- Feeling that existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs
- Feeling of powerlessness, inferiority, personal unworthiness
- Very little sense of history
- Know only their own local conditions, neighbourhood, own way of life



- Do not have knowledge, vision or ideology to see familiarities with their counterparts elsewhere in the world
- Not class conscious
- Sensitive to status distinctions



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