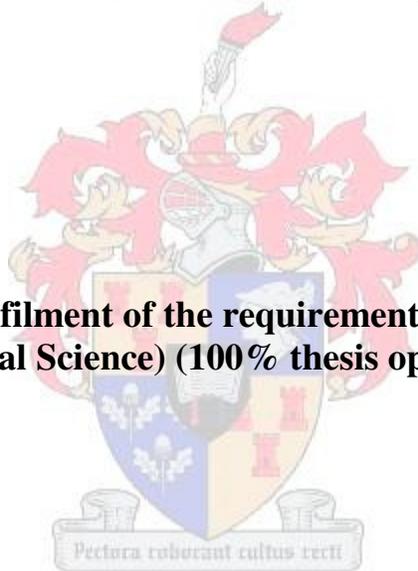


# **Problematizing unemployment: The competing representations of unemployment and the implications thereof**

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**Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Political Science) (100% thesis option) at the University of Stellenbosch.**



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## **Declaration**

By submitting this electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 29 October 2012

## **Abstract**

Unemployment has been recognized as one of the most important social problems worldwide as most countries suffer from some unemployment. South Africa's high unemployment rate has led to an abundance of research on the topic. A vast majority of the research available on unemployment in South Africa is positivist in nature. This study instead uses an interpretivist approach to analyse the problem of unemployment in South Africa. The study uses Carol Bacchi's approach to provide a different way of analysing the problem of unemployment in South Africa.

Bacchi's approach allows the analyst to focus on problem representations and how these representations shape what is discussed and what is not discussed about the topic. This study demonstrates the application of Bacchi's approach and focuses on the problem representations of the significant actors involved with unemployment, namely the South African government, business, COSATU and the SACP. The study focuses on the effects of the problem representations of unemployment, in particular the discursive and political effects. This study argues that Bacchi's approach is a useful tool for the analysis of unemployment. It is also argued in this study that the approach provides insights into the problem of unemployment by highlighting what is not discussed in the problem representations of the significant actors. By sensitizing individuals to what is excluded in the problem representations, it is argued that solutions which negate the negative effects of such representations can be found.

Bacchi's approach highlighted a number of problem representations of unemployment. The study found that some problem representations were shared by one or more actors and that divergence exist between the representations of other actors. The shared and divergent representations focused on the tripartite alliance due to the significance of the alliance in South African politics. The shared and divergence representations were demonstrated to either help to towards improving the relationships between actors or, in the case of divergence, increase the tensions in the actor's relationship with one another. The study also found that the non-government actors' problem representations of

unemployment direct attention to government's responsibility for dealing with unemployment while minimising their role and contribution to unemployment. The study also demonstrated that the interests of different actors can be identified in the dominant problem representations.

## Opsomming

Werkloosheid is 'n belangrike probleem wat meeste lande raak. Baie navorsing is al in Suid-Afrika gedoen weens sy besondere hoë werkloosheidsyfer. Die meerderheid hiervan is positivisties in benadering. Hierdie navorsing gebruik egter 'n interpretiewe benadering. Carrol Bacchi se benadering word gebruik as 'n alternatiewe raamwerk om Suid-Afrika se werkloosheidsprobleem te analiseer.

Bacchi se benadering laat die navorser toe om te fokus op hoe die probleem beskou word en hoe hierdie beskouing die keuse van wat ingesluit is en wat nie is nie, beïnvloed. Hierdie navorsing fokus op die sleutelfigure in die werkloosheidsprobleem, naamlik die Suid-Afrikaanse regering, die SACP en COSATU. Die studie benadruk die diskursiewe en politiese effek van die probleembeskouing van werkloosheid. Die studie argumenteer dat Bacchi se benadering waardevolle insigte kan lewer, spesifiek deur onbespreekte kwessies rakende die sleutelfigure uit te lig. Dit word aangevoer dat deur waardering te kweek vir hierdie kwessies, oplossings vir hierdie probleembeskouings gevind kan word.

Bacchi se benadering het 'n paar probleembeskouings uitgelig. Die studie het gevind dat daar ooreenstemming is by sommige figure, terwyl ander s'n uiteenlopend is. Hierdie sienings het gelei tot samegorigheid in die eersgenoemde geval, maar tot verhoogde vlakke van wantroue en spanning in die laasgenoemde geval. Die fokus van hierdie sienings is die drieparty-alliansie, weens sy belangrikheid in SA-politiek. Die studie vind ook dat nieregeringsorganisasies se probleembeskouings die rol van die regering benadruk en hul eie verantwoordelikheid onderspeel.

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## **List of abbreviations**

ANC = African National Congress

ASGISA = Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa

BUSA = Business Unity South Africa

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

CDE = Centre for Development and Enterprise

COSATU = Congress of South African Trade Unions

DA = Democratic Alliance

EPWP = Expanded Public Works Program

FET = Further Education and Training

GDP = Gross Domestic Profit

GEAR = Growth, Employment and Redistribution

GNU = Government of National Unity

NGP = New Growth Path

PPP = Public Private Partnerships

RDP = Reconstruction and Development Program

SACP = South African Communist Party

SETA = Sector Education and Training Authority

WPR = What's the Problem Represented to be?

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## **Chapter 1: Unemployment in South Africa: Background and policy developments**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Unemployment has been recognised as a social problem since the 1900s, while measures aiming to combat unemployment were introduced in the British parliament as early as 1909 (Leiserson, 1909:423). Unemployment first became a problem after the Industrial Revolution with countries starting to experience the upswings and downswings associated with modern economies (Lambert, 2012). Nowadays it remains a problem in the majority of countries around the world, whether they have a high unemployment rate (Zimbabwe with an estimated 95 per cent) or a low one (Belarus with a rate of 1 per cent) (CIA World Factbook, 2012).

Unemployment in South Africa is an important topic for research. This is mostly due to the continuing high rate of unemployment the country has experienced since the country's transition to democracy (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren & Woolard, 2008:716). While South Africa suffered from high unemployment even before democratisation, the persistence of the problem has led to much debate and research around this issue (Bell & Padayachee, 1984; Kingdon & Knight, 2001; Simkins, 1978; Schlemmer & Levitz, 1998). The pervasiveness and large scale of the unemployment problem in South Africa has made research into this area very important for the practical applications it can have (Kingdon & Knight, 2005:9).

This chapter provides an introduction to the problem of unemployment in South Africa and the background to the current unemployment situation. It presents a brief overview of the developments concerning unemployment within South African public policy as traced through from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa (ASGISA) and the New Growth Plan (NGP). The focus shifts to the rationale for this study, a discussion of the research design, the limitations and delimitations of the study and an outline of the chapters to follow.

## 1.2 Research Aim

The main aim of this study is to demonstrate the value of applying different approach to analysing the problem of unemployment in South Africa. The literature review will demonstrate that a large amount of the research on unemployment in South Africa available uses positivist methods to analyse unemployment. In this study, unemployment is approached from an interpretivist perspective.

Carol Bacchi's what's the problem represented to be (WPR) approach is applied to analyse the problem of unemployment. Bacchi's approach is used because it provides insight into the implications related to how the problem of unemployment in South Africa is understood.

The research aimed to illustrate what the various representations of the problem of unemployment leave unexplored. The study also aimed to demonstrate the implications of the accepted problem representations and the implications of what the representations ignore. Accepted problem representations refer to those problem representations which form the basis of public policy. Through the analysis, the various problem representations of unemployment held by significant actors are identified. This allows for shared and divergent problem representations to be identified and allows the dominant problem representations of unemployment in South Africa to be uncovered. By analysing South African unemployment using Bacchi's approach, the study was able to go beyond the effects that Bacchi highlights. The research delved into the potential political effects of the problem representations. By analysing unemployment in this way, the tensions between different actors and the interests served by the dominant problem representations were explored.

The actors that were considered in this study are: business, government, COSATU and the SACP. Business is represented by Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) and the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), labour as represented by COSATU and the SACP. The reason for the inclusion of business and COSATU as non-governmental

actors is that they are significant actors in unemployment policy. Government, business and COSATU come together at the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to discuss and attempt to reach consensus on social and economic policy. Business and COSATU are significant non-governmental actors in unemployment policy as agreements that can substantially impact on South African unemployment policy are made within NEDLAC. Business is also included as there is much research on the relationship between business and government and because of the concern that big business does influence public policy to some extent (Yackee & Yackee, 2006:129).

The SACP is a significant actor in South African politics because they form part of the tripartite alliance. The tripartite alliance is the strategic alliance that was forged between the ruling ANC party, COSATU and the SACP. Therefore, COSATU and the SACP can field election candidates through the ANC and hold senior positions in the party (Hale & Hale, 2011:303). This opens way for the SACP or COSATU to potentially influence party policy and dialogue (Hale & Halle, 2011:303). The study has focused on effects, both discursive and potential political effects, which makes the SACP and COSATU important as they are members of the tripartite alliance and thus are often thought to have an influence over government policy (Naki, 2009). The potential political effects of divergence and correspondence regarding problem representations as far as alliance members were concerned was expected to be of interest, as a large amount of divergence could herald potential change in the political landscape. The expectation was that the analysis of the SACP and COSATU's representations would provide insights into the relationship between the alliance partners.

The researcher wished to examine whether there was convergence or divergence in the representations of unemployment of the tripartite alliance members as well as between the South African government's representations and the other representations demonstrated by business and labour, through COSATU and the SACP. The researcher therefore examined press statements and documents related to COSATU and the SACP so as to explore to what extent there has been congruence in COSATU, SACP and ANC representations of unemployment. Documents and press releases by the CDE and BUSA

were analysed to explore whether there was correspondence in the problem representations by business and government. The purpose was to explore differences between the representations, if any existed, and explore the implications of such differences and the tensions they could cause. The main focus of the effects was on the differences between representations by government, COSATU and the SACP as they were likely to be the most significant differences and could lead to possible political tensions.

The research aimed to show the value of applying Bacchi's approach to the problem of unemployment by highlighting the discursive and potential political effects of the constructions of the problem of unemployment. The study demonstrated that every problem representation implicitly serves the interests of an actor and has effects beyond limiting what can and cannot be discussed. Finally, the study aimed to explore the potential political effects of shared and divergent representations with a particular focus on the tripartite alliance members.

### **1.3 Background**

The South African economy experienced strong growth between 1994 and 2008, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth close to four per cent (similar to other middle income states) (Economic Development Department, 2010:3). Despite this, unemployment remained high with only a little less than half of the South African working age population enjoying some form of employment (Economic Development Department, 2010:3). This is significantly lower than the international norm of two thirds (Economic Development Department, 2010:3). Between 1996 and 1999 the unemployment rate rose from 16 per cent to 25 percent, although the accuracy of these statistics has been questioned (Simkins, 2011:111). The rise in unemployment continued until 2002 when South Africa experienced an expansionary period causing unemployment to slow down slightly, and it ended by 2008 due to the global financial crisis (Simkins, 2011:111) and from 2008 South African unemployment rose steadily until it reached the levels of today (Simkins, 2011:111).

According to the CIA World Factbook, South Africa, with one of the highest unemployment rates worldwide, currently ranks at number 173 out of 199 countries in terms of the worldwide unemployment rate (2012). Two definitions of unemployment exist. According to the narrow or strict definition of unemployment, people within the working population (ages 15 to 65) are only considered to be unemployed if they have not worked in the seven days leading up to the interview (with the census official), would like to work and are available to begin working within two weeks after the interview and have actively sought work or self-employment in the month before the interview (Mohr, 2008:86). This definition therefore excludes those considered discouraged workers, people who are not actively searching for work. However, the broad or expanded definition of unemployment includes those discouraged workers and thus is thought to reflect a more accurate picture of the situation in South Africa (Mohr, 2008:86).

In the final quarter of 2011, using the expanded definition of unemployment, approximately 4 244 000 people in South Africa were unemployed (23.9 percent), and the number rose to 7 396 000 people (35.4 percent) (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Between 2000 and 2008 the official (narrowly defined) unemployment rate averaged 26.38 percent, while the expanded definition unemployment rate ranged between 30 and 40 percent (Trading Economics, 2012). However, there is an assertion by the private sector that the official statistics are higher than the actual figures. The validity of the official unemployment rate has been examined and it was found that the level of the unemployment was not as high as the official unemployment rate, but it remains South Africa's "most serious socio-economic problem" (Schlemmer & Levitz, 1998:77). The ADCORP Employment Index (AEI) is released by South Africa's largest diversified employment services company and its computed unemployment rate is often below that released by government (ADCORP, 2012). The AEI reflects an unemployment rate which is closer to eight percent than to the 23.9 percent at which the official unemployment figure currently stands (ADCORP, 2012). The reason for this discrepancy is the differing definitions of unemployment. The AEI includes informal employment in its calculation of the unemployment rate whereas the official unemployment rate does not include or under-reports informal employment (ADCORP, 2012).

Despite the contestation of the numbers of South Africans that are unemployed, it is generally agreed by both the private and the public sector that unemployment is too high and needs to be addressed urgently. The persistent nature of unemployment in South Africa and other social ills commonly associated with unemployment have made understanding unemployment essential. The pressure put on government officials by citizens have made it vital for government to be seen to be addressing the problem of unemployment and this has stimulated much research into this area.

#### **1.4 Developments in South African unemployment policy between 1994 and 2010**

Unemployment policy in South Africa is not made up of one document but of different policies which overlap and address different aspects of unemployment and thus, form unemployment policy. This section provides an overview of the macro-economic policies of South Africa to present the background to unemployment policy. In order to present a coherent picture of the development of unemployment policy in South Africa, the research proposed to examine the RDP, GEAR, ASGISA and NGP documents to track the changes in unemployment policy. These macro-economic strategy documents were chosen as they explicitly focus on way designed to alleviate unemployment.

##### *1.4.1 The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)*

The RDP was the first economic growth plan of the African National Congress (ANC)-led government after South Africa's transition to democracy. The RDP was put forward as a policy framework for integrated and coherent socio-economic development (Republic of South Africa, 1994). A central priority of the RDP was employment creation (Republic of South Africa, 1994). The Government of National Unity (GNU) aimed to use labour intensive methods in the public sector through the National Public Works Programme to create employment (Republic of South Africa, 1994). The RDP's economic policy crafted trade and industry policies in such a way as to foster high levels of employment and increase the levels of labour participation (Republic of South Africa,

1994). Under the guidance of the RDP South Africa's industrial policy focused on job creation through the manufacturing sector.

The RDP's industrial policy focused on creating a more dynamic manufacturing sector which would become a source of increasing and productive employment (Republic of South Africa, 1994). It also sought to support agro-manufacturing sectors, which use less capital and, thus, could indirectly and directly create jobs (Republic of South Africa, 1994). It sought to increase employment by government assistance to small to medium-sized enterprises and this was to be achieved through extending access to finances for research and development; extending access to credit; venture capital; and so on (Republic of South Africa, 1994). The human resource and labour market development outlined in the RDP, focused on adult education and skills acquisition in the attempt to address unemployment, underemployment and increasing the quality of employment (Republic of South Africa, 1994). The RDP also set out the affirmative action policy to create fair and equitable conditions of employment and spread employment more equally (Republic of South Africa, 1994). Thus, employment creation formed part of every consideration within RDP.

#### *1.4.2 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR)*

GEAR was instituted after the RDP in 1996 and came to replace it. The economic development achieved under the RDP, while heading in the right direction, was found to be too slow in achieving a reduction in unemployment, increasing social service delivery and equitable distribution of income and wealth (Department of Finance, 1996). As with the RDP, GEAR makes employment creation a central priority with structured flexibility within the collective bargaining system to support a more labour intensive growth path and a social agreement to assist in accelerating employment (Department of Finance, 1996). In GEAR, employment creation is increased by the following measures: replacing the general export incentive scheme with supply-side industrial measures to increase industrial competitiveness; wage moderation added to the demand for labour while reducing inflationary pressures and greater flexibility in labour market regulations GEAR

aimed for; and aided more employment creation while still extending basic rights to more of the workforce (Department of Finance, 1996).

The outlined policy package, included employment and training programmes, which increase the potential growth of industry; expand the employment opportunities; and contribute to redistribution of income over time (Department of Finance, 1996). As in the RDP framework, GEAR's trade and industry policy centres on the pursuit of increased employment. In the outline of GEAR's trade and industry policy, higher employment is encouraged through lowering tariffs to encourage the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (Department of Finance, 1996). In this integrated macroeconomic strategy, there are two thrusts in terms of labour market policy. One is aimed at extending the protection and stability afforded to more workers through regulation, and the second is the encouragement of improvements in productivity through the development of skills in both formal and informal sectors.

#### *1.4.3 Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa (ASGISA)*

After GEAR came ASGISA, which was launched in 2006. Just as in the preceding two growth plans, ASGISA makes sustainable employment creation a central concern (SA Government Online, 2007). ASGISA identifies business process outsourcing and tourism as two sectors for development with the potential to create many jobs (SA Government Online, 2007). Through ASGISA, government aimed to increase employment in the business process outsourcing via a joint government and business project. ASGISA focuses on skills development, marketing, safety and air access to increase employment, making use of a strong public/private partnership (SA Government Online, 2007). Agriculture and agro-processing fields are other high priority industries for creating employment. ASGISA focuses a great deal on education, education interventions, skills development and training as means of increasing employability and employment (SA Government Online, 2007). ASGISA furthermore focuses strongly on the educational, through skills development and training with the Umsobomvu Youth Trust and the Joint

Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition driving a number of initiatives to create employment opportunities (SA Government Online, 2007).

#### *1.4.4 The New Growth Path*

The NGP strategy was launched in November 2010. This strategy was adopted among growing consensus that job growth, decent work growth, decreasing inequality and battling poverty can only be achieved through a new growth path based on the restructuring of the South African economy (Economic Development Department, 2010:1). The NGP endeavours to increase growth, job creation and equity (Economic Development Department, 2010:1). This strategy aims to improve the performance of the South African economy in terms of labour absorption, structure of the economy and the growth rate (Economic Development Department, 2010:1). The NGP prioritises employment creation and has the aim of creating five million jobs by the year 2020 (Nattrass, 2011:1). This strategy seeks to speed up job creation by the state mainly through direct employment schemes, a more expansionary macroeconomic package<sup>1</sup> as well as targeted subsidies in the short run<sup>2</sup> (Economic Development Department, 2010:7).

Between the short and long run<sup>3</sup> the strategy seeks to ensure that government supports labour-absorbing activities, particularly in the agricultural value chain, services and light manufacturing, to create a large amount of employment (Economic Development Department, 2010:7). In this strategy, the state provides incentives for private investment in sectors which are primarily involved in labour-absorbing activities for “the provision of appropriate and cost-effective infrastructure, regulatory interventions that effectively address market and state failures, measures to improve skills systems, and in some cases subsidies to production and innovation” (Economic Development Department, 2010:7). With this strategy, over the long run as full employment becomes a reality, the

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<sup>1</sup> An expansionary macroeconomic package includes measures which aim to encourage economic growth or curb inflation through expanding the money supply (Economic Glossary, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> In macroeconomics, the short run does not refer to a particular time frame, but to a time period in which some prices, specifically wages, are inflexible or in the process of adjusting (Economic Glossary, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Long run in macroeconomics refers to a period of time in which all prices are flexible and have achieved their equilibrium levels (Economic Glossary, 2008).

government has to support the knowledge and capital-intensive sectors for the economy to remain competitive (Economic Development Department, 2010:7).

The NGP, unlike the macroeconomic frameworks before it, more explicitly deals with the issue of unemployment and the challenge of reducing it. The strategy focuses on five areas which hold the potential for large-scale employment, as well as potential for secure and sustainable economic growth, which have been termed “job drivers” (Economic Development Department, 2010:8). The areas that have been identified as job drivers are: large investment by government in infrastructure to generate jobs directly, through construction, operation and maintenance, as well as indirectly by increasing efficiency economy-wide; directing more labour-absorbing activities across key economic sectors such as the agricultural and mining value chains, services and manufacturing; making the most of new prospects created by the knowledge and green economies; “leveraging social capital in the social economy and public services”; and encouraging rural development and regional integration (Economic Development Department, 2010:9).

The NGP also comprises a developmental package which includes macroeconomic strategies, microeconomic measures and stakeholder commitments. The macroeconomic strategies entail more active monetary policy interventions to increase growth and job creation, through a more competitive exchange rate and lower cost of capital, with a tighter fiscal stance and the reprioritisation of the public expenditure to safeguard sustainability (Economic Development Department, 2010:15). The microeconomic measures include directed measures to curb inflationary pressures and aid competitiveness, as well as improved equity (Economic Development Department, 2010:15). These measures comprise reforms within policies on competition, skills, small business, industry, the labour market, African integration, rural development and trade policy (Economic Development Department, 2010:15). A national consensus on wages, savings and prices is needed as part of the stakeholder commitments so that a significant increase in job creation can be assured, the concerns of vulnerable workers can be dealt with and income inequality can be reduced (Economic Development Department, 2010:15). The stakeholder commitments should include partnership, shared solidarity and

sacrifice to achieve the objective of five million new jobs by 2020 (Economic Development Department, 2010:15). This developmental package focuses on using government policy to create a new, more labour-absorbing growth path (Nattrass, 2011:1).

In terms of how they construct employment policy, the growth paths of the RDP, GEAR, ASGISA and the NGP, in terms of how they understand employment policy, are very similar. All of these growth programmes treat employment creation as central to the development of South Africa. The GEAR approach to employment creation is a refinement and expansion on the RDP approach to employment creation, with the focus on sectoral policies, as well as trade and industry. ASGISA also focuses on employment creation, but places a greater emphasis on the role that education, skills development and training plays in employment creation. The NGP recognises the chief issues facing the South African economy, as:

high unemployment, low levels of domestic saving and investment, persistent balance of payments deficits, an overvalued exchange rate, skilled labour shortages, energy and infrastructural bottlenecks, economic concentration (and related anti-competitive behaviour), government inefficiency, rent-seeking and regulatory burdens on business. (Nattrass, 2011:3).

The NGP, in particular, places a heavy emphasis on reducing unemployment, focusing on job drivers, macroeconomic strategies, microeconomic measures and stakeholder commitments, all of which attempt to address the unemployment problem. These are just some of the policy documents which make up unemployment policy and show some of the changes in emphasis that have occurred in South African unemployment policy over time.

## **1.5 Rationale of the study**

The South African unemployment rate has risen over the years following the transition to democracy and this has sparked much research into why unemployment has risen and the causes and determinants of unemployment (Banerjee *et al*, 2006; Kingdon & Knight, 2005; 2004). The majority of the research available relies on positivist methods to

understand and examine unemployment. As the literature review in Chapter 2 will demonstrate, little research of a post-positivist nature exists on unemployment in South Africa. The positivist orientation in research on unemployment in South Africa can be evidenced by studies such as Kingdon and Knight, (2001); Mlatsheni and Rospabé, (2002); Rankin and Roberts, 2011; Banerjee *et al*, (2006); and Moleke, (2006). The search of the literature on unemployment in South Africa, did not reveal any research focusing on the problem definitions similar to Bacchi's problem representations.

Despite the amount of research available on unemployment, there has been little progress in reducing the numbers of the unemployed. For this reason, the study seeks to provide a different way of analysing unemployment. This is done in the hope that the insights gained from a post-positivist perspective will prove useful in tackling the problem of unemployment. This study uses Bacchi's approach 'what's the problem' to demonstrate how post-positivist approaches can be applied in the study of unemployment by exploring the problem from the basis of different assumptions. The underlying reason for providing a different way of analysing unemployment is the hope that better ways of reducing unemployment will be brought to the fore. By highlighting what is left out from the various significant actors' representations of the problem of unemployment, there is the hope that practical, more meaningful solutions to the unemployment problem will be uncovered.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

The study applied a qualitative approach. Scholars argue that there is no single definition of qualitative research as there is not one accepted way of doing qualitative research (Snape & Spencer, 2003:1). Shank (2002:5) provides the following definition of qualitative research: "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning", by which he means a planned and ordered inquiry which is grounded in the world of experience. Denzin & Lincoln (2000:3) argue that qualitative research makes use of a naturalistic and interpretive approach, which means qualitative researchers examine things in their natural surroundings and try to understand phenomena in terms of the way people give meaning

to the phenomena. Qualitative research is also often defined as either “small-*n* research” or as an assortment of methods that are used to understand “human meanings (concepts, metaphors, symbols, descriptions, etc.) in their historical contexts” (Morçöl & Ivanova, 2010:256).

Qualitative research is able to provide intricate textual explanations of how people experience certain issues (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005:1). Qualitative methods are also useful in recognising intangible factors such as gender roles, religion and social norms, that play role which is unclear in the research problem (Mack *et al*, 2005:1). Qualitative research can also be used alongside quantitative methods to better understand the multifaceted reality of a particular situation as well as the effects of the quantitative data (Mack *et al*, 2005:1).

Qualitative work is sensitive to context, placing emphasis on historical circumstances and so forth (Mathekga, 2009:7). This context sensitivity is one of the advantages of using qualitative research methods. Context sensitivity is important as it allows for a nuanced understanding of a situation or interaction which is relevant for this study (Travers, 2001:107).

The qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as this research took an interpretivist approach and the approach allows for the focus on language which the study uses to identify problem representations. The qualitative research approach was best suited to be used in this study because the aim was to understand the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa and identify and explain the implications of the problem representations. Problem representations are how an actor sees the problem thus implying what is the cause of the problem. This approach is best suited as it aligned with Bacchi’s approach which is the analytical tool to be used.

The qualitative research method was suitable as it allowed the researcher to go beyond identifying and listing the particular representations of unemployment. It allowed the researcher to provide a more nuanced, deeper understanding of the various

representations and the implications of these representations. The qualitative research method's emphasis on interpretations by individuals is ideal, as problem representations present interpretations and the meanings within these representations can be best accessed using a qualitative research method. The context sensitive and naturalistic, interpretive nature of a qualitative approach could facilitate deeper understanding and demonstrate a different way of analysing unemployment.

The study used documents as the source of data. This is because policy documents involve the input of various individuals within policy-making circles and thus provide a better depiction of government's problem representation of unemployment than the problem representation held by single members of government, which interviews are likely to ascertain. Bacchi states that raw material for analysis using her approach consists of "policy statements, media representations of issues, public addresses, parliamentary debates, and theoretical analyses" (1999:11). Bacchi's approach is also tailored to the analysis of policy documents and/or policy proposals, thus the selection of documents was best suited to this approach. The researcher also selected texts as the data to be analysed due to the constraints of time and money.

### *1.6.1 Research design*

The research undertaken for this investigation did not readily fit into any pre-set empirical research design. In qualitative research, the term research design is used less often than in quantitative research; however, while qualitative work pays little attention to research design, qualitative research designs do exist (Flick, 2007:36). The most common forms of qualitative research design include case studies, ethnographic research, phenomenological research, action research, historical research and grounded theory research (Lavrakas, 2008:729). Each of these research designs is suited to fit certain research goals. For instance, ethnographic research is a design that is used for studying culture, social groups and human interaction in natural social and cultural settings, with the primary goal of offering an in-depth, detailed, all-inclusive narrative description of the group and cultural setting under investigation (Lavrakas, 2008:729).

Against this background, the case study research design was deemed most suitable for this study. Case studies are in-depth investigations and detailed descriptions of individuals, groups or organisations founded on gathered data from a variety of sources (Lavrakas, 2008:730). These studies are used to provide deep understanding of certain examples of phenomena (Mabry, 2008:216). Case studies allow a picture to emerge of the phenomenon in context. As this research investigated the problem of unemployment in the South African context, the context is an integral part of the phenomenon. The best way to capture the picture of the problem in context is through the use of a case study research design. Case study research contributes to the understanding of the complexity of a problem, thus, providing the deeper understanding of the problem of unemployment in South Africa which this research wished to provide (Mabry, 2008:217). It is in keeping with the aim of this research to provide a different way of analysing and understanding the problem of unemployment in South Africa.

There is little congruence among researchers about what case study research includes (Mabry, 2008:217). Some argue that case study research focuses one case whereas others argue that it can include a number of cases (Mabry, 2008:218). Many things can constitute a case, from micro-lending to an immigrant child's struggle to learn (Mabry, 2008:217). This study uses the policy solutions, both adopted and suggested, for unemployment in South Africa as the case to be studied. The cases in this research are considered to be unravelled through the analysis of the problem representations and thus are specific to this case study. Therefore, the case study research design is most appropriate for this thesis.

### *1.6.2 Data collection*

Qualitative research methods include interviews, observational fieldwork, documents and focus groups, among others (Lavrakas, 2008:725). In this study, documents were analysed to access the problem representations. This study uses a relevance-based means of collecting the policy proposal documents as well as policy documents and press releases which formed the data for this research. In other words, the documents were

selected based on whether they contain suggested or accepted policy solutions to unemployment. All the texts were chosen for analysis based on their relevance. Relevance was established using the following question: do the texts contain proposed or accepted policy solutions to the problem of unemployment. The texts were gathered mainly in the form of press statements, documents and articles in the case of business.

The analyst examined documents from the period between 2009 and 2012. This time frame was chosen as the researcher wanted to examine the current accepted representations of unemployment as expressed by the incumbent South African government which was elected during the 2009 South African elections. The incumbent government's term of office is five years. Recent media statements as well as the 2012 state of the nation address were also analysed. This was because problem representations can vary over different time periods and to establish the problem representation of unemployment of the incumbent government, it was necessary to analyse recent texts on the topic.

This thesis examines existing data in the form of texts such as government policy documents and media statements. These government documents are the NGP, the State of the Nation address of 2012 and the Introduction to the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which contain proposed policy solutions. The proposed youth wage subsidy was also included among the texts. These documents were analysed to identify the South African government's representations of unemployment.

South African business was represented by BUSA and the CDE. The CDE documents containing proposed policy solutions were analysed to uncover the problem representations. The relevant texts comprised BUSA comments on the latest unemployment statistics (9 May 2012); Implement youth wage subsidy soon – BUSA (22 May 2012); COSATU and BUSA Bilateral on the Economy, Jobs, Education and Anti-corruption (14 September 2011); Five Million Jobs CDE Working Paper no.3; Fresh proposals for solving SA's job crisis (27 May 2009); A job for every South African.

Labour was represented by COSATU. The researcher analysed documents and press statements concerning unemployment in order to ascertain their representations of the problem. These documents included documentation on the youth wage subsidy in South Africa; COSATU's response to employment statistics (8 May 2012); COSATU Central executive committee media statement (28-30 May 2012).

The SACP's documents and press releases relating to unemployment and their proposed solutions were analysed. The texts included an SACP Eastern Cape PEC Press statement (10 May 2012); papers from the Y-REDS National Congress Edition (December 2010); the SACP KZN statement on the Red October Campaign – 2011 (8 November 2011); and papers from Umsebenzi (February/March 2010).

### *1.6.3 Data analysis*

The textual data concerning unemployment in South Africa that were gathered during the study was analysed using Carol Bacchi's policy analysis tool. Bacchi's approach was applied to uncover the problem representations of unemployment from both proposed and adopted policy solutions. Bacchi states that her approach is most effective when it is used at the policy proposal stage because at this stage the discourses used demonstrate more clearly the policy makers' positions and understandings of the problem as well as the solutions (1999:13). Bacchi's approach will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

Bacchi states that the policy solutions should first be identified (2010:133). The data were analysed by first identifying the policy solutions to the problem of unemployment discussed or suggested in each document. Once the policy solutions had been identified, these solutions were examined in order to pinpoint the underlying problem representations. Bacchi states that an examination of the problem representations can uncover the cause and concern of the problem (2007:2). The cause and concern could be implicit or explicit. Each problem representation contains within it a cause and concern which is informed by certain assumptions and presuppositions (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). Using Carol Bacchi's approach these assumptions and presuppositions can be

uncovered. The effects of the assumptions and presuppositions can be examined. The analysis continues with the exploration of what is not discussed due to the problem representations. The effects of these problem representations were identified, together with where the accepted and alternative problem representations led.

The analysis of the data proceeded by applying the six questions that Bacchi suggests to facilitate the application of the approach (Bacchi, 2009:2). These questions concern the following:

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy? For example what's the problem of child abuse represented to be in the youth wage subsidy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'? For example there is the assumption that the youth unemployment issue is due to the cost of hiring young first time employees.
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently? For instance, could the youth be unprepared to enter the workplace?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

This is not a simple formula to follow to ensure a successful application of Bacchi's approach, but it is suggested as a means to build in a level of reflexivity into the approach (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:116). The list of questions to be applied to policy proposals is suggested so that the researcher is reminded to think critically (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:116). The list of questions is also suggested to remind the researcher that any proposed or accepted policy solution may be based on unexamined presuppositions and thus may need "rethinking and modification" (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:116). Therefore, the application of the list of questions assists in ensuring that the research produced through the application of this approach is reflected upon.

The WPR approach allows the analyst to inquire into the effects that follow from problem representations that are identified (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). The approach sensitises one to three kinds of often overlapping implications or consequences of problem representations. These effects are: discursive effects (what is discussed and what is left out); subjectification effects (how the people to be benefited by the policy are thought of and how they think about themselves); lived effects (the material impact the policy has on people's lives) (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). These effects aid in assessing the usefulness and limitations of the policy or policy proposal (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). This present study focused particularly on the discursive and political effects of problem representations of unemployment.

This section explained the research methodology used in this study. The first section focused on the qualitative research approach which this study uses and the reasons it is best suited to this research. The context sensitivity and the qualitative research approach's alignment with Bacchi's approach are some of the reasons for its suitability. The research design was discussed. The case study research design was chosen as it allows a picture of the phenomenon in context to be developed. The cases in this study are defined as the suggested or accepted policy solutions to unemployment. The collection of textual data was discussed. How the sources of data were selected and the sources of the data were explained. Finally, the data analysis section discussed how Bacchi's tool for analysis would be applied, without providing too much detail on Bacchi's approach as this is to be discussed in detail in chapter two.

## **1.7 Outline of thesis chapters**

The first chapter has presented an outline of the issue of unemployment in South Africa. It provided a brief discussion of the background to the problem of unemployment in South Africa, a discussion on the major developments in unemployment policy as well as the rationale for the study. Chapter 1 has also been focused on the research aim for the study and providing a discussion of how the research was conducted. The section dealing with the research methodology outlined the case study research design that was used. The

section discussed how the data was collected and which documents were selected as sources of data. Bacchi's WPR approach, the tool to be used for data analysis, was also discussed in this section and focused on how the approach was applied to the data.

The second chapter contains a discussion of the literature on unemployment and focuses on the research dealing with the South African problem of unemployment. Positivism and post-positivism are discussed to demonstrate that the majority of research falls under the positivist paradigm and to illustrate the differences between the paradigms. The post-positivist section is focused on interpretivism, as Bacchi's approach is interpretivist in nature. The WPR approach is explained and the potential criticisms of the approach are also discussed.

The third chapter begins with the identification of problem representations and a brief explanation of how the problem representations are extracted from policy solutions. The policy solutions of each actor are discussed before the problem representations contained within those solutions are outlined. Those problem representations which are shared by the government and other non-governmental actors as well as the divergent problem representations, are discussed.

Chapter 4 is focused on the effects of the problem representations of unemployment. The discursive effects of the problem representations which were identified and the potential political effects of these constructions of the unemployment problem are discussed. These implications of the shared representations are explored with a particular focus on the tripartite alliance members. The interests being served by the accepted representations and the potential tensions caused by divergent representations are presented. The focus in the final chapter is on how the aims of the research were achieved and on recommending avenues for further research into the problem of unemployment in South Africa.

## **Chapter 2: Reviewing unemployment research, research paradigms and the WPR approach**

### **2.1 Introduction**

“Unemployment is like a headache or a high temperature – unpleasant and exhausting but not carrying in itself any explanation of its cause.” (William Henry Beveridge, 1976)

Unemployment is a serious issue faced by most countries around the globe (CIA World Factbook, 2012). This has led to an abundance of research into the issue of unemployment in general and also to country specific research on unemployment. The focus of the majority of this research tends to be on the factors causing or affecting unemployment. Research focusing on these factors is mostly quantitative and statistical in nature. As demonstrated in this chapter, a large portion of the research into unemployment is based in the positivist methodological tradition.

The variety of research on unemployment is briefly discussed in this chapter and an overview of unemployment research in the global context, as well as the scope of unemployment research, is provided. The literature on unemployment in South Africa is furthermore reviewed and it is determined that a focus exists on the determinants of unemployment within South African research. The debates in the literature on South African unemployment are looked at; these centre around the character of unemployment and the effect of trade liberalisation and wage subsidies on unemployment. The literature review also examines the current trend within unemployment research to focus on youth unemployment.

In the next section, an overview of positivism and post-positivism, the main research paradigms, is provided; what each paradigm is and what interpretivism is discussed in detail as it forms the basis for the approach used in this study. The types of products that both research paradigms yield are therefore discussed so that the reader can identify the differences between these research products and recognise the value of each tradition.

This is done so that the differences between the traditions can be made clear and so that the different approach to unemployment research that this thesis takes can be better understood.

Lastly, Carol Bacchi's WPR approach, the approach to be used in this research thesis, is explained. Bacchi's approach is discussed as well as the usefulness and insights of the WPR approach. The suitability of Bacchi's approach as the method of analysis for this research thesis are briefly discussed. Finally, the section is concluded with a look at the criticism that has been levelled at the approach and the mitigation of some of the criticism that can be found in Bacchi's approach itself, is discussed.

## **2.2 The breadth and the scope of unemployment research**

Unemployment is a major problem in industrialised countries and in developing countries. Numerous studies into unemployment have been conducted around the world and the extent of the problem is illustrated through the higher unemployment rates that have been recorded worldwide (Economic and Social Affairs Department, 2010; Green, 1997; Hildreth, Millard, Mortensen & Taylor, 1998; Hodge, 2009). The Costs of Unemployment briefing instituted by the Economic and Social Affairs Department of the Trades Union Congress examines unemployment across a variety of countries, demonstrating the breadth of unemployment research (2010). The briefing includes work on unemployment and physical health from across Canada, Australia, Denmark, England, Finland, as well as Wales, Germany, France, Sweden, the USA and Scotland (2010). The same brief also included work on happiness and unemployment and the research made use of surveys conducted throughout Europe and the US (2010).

Another example of the breadth of unemployment research is Green's study on exclusion, unemployment and non-employment across the European Union (1997). An example of unemployment research in developing countries is the research done by Bosch and Maloney into the cyclical movements in unemployment in Brazil and Mexico, two developing countries with large informal sectors (2008:1). The findings of this research

on cyclical movements and the effect on informal sectors challenge the conventional wisdom that has been used in modelling and calibrating a labour market with informal jobs (Bosch & Maloney, 2008:24).

The breadth of unemployment research can be demonstrated by the numerous studies on the subject conducted on the issue of South African unemployment. These studies include research on the causes of unemployment (Bell & Padayachee, 1984; Rodrick, 2006); determinants of unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004); the psychological costs of unemployment (Powdthavee, 2007); the patterns of unemployment (Lewis, 2001); and the relationships between unemployment and various factors such as growth (Hodge, 2009) and suicide (Breetzke, 1988). This demonstrates that unemployment not only is an issue for developing nations, but also for industrialised countries. These various studies illustrate the breadth and scope of unemployment research worldwide.

Research into the subject of unemployment crosses many disciplines, for instance psychology, sociology, political science and economics. Psychological research on unemployment has made a large contribution in terms of measuring, analysing and validating the negative effects of unemployment. Some psychological research attempts to quantitatively measure and analyse the adverse effects of unemployment on mental health, behaviour and well-being (Hagan, 1993; Feather, 1992). The literature on unemployment in the field of sociology has focused on the link between unemployment and crime, as well as on the relationship between suicide and unemployment (Nordenmark, 2007; Platt, 1984; Blakely, Collings & Atkinson, 2003). Emile Durkheim's classic study on the suicide-unemployment relationship is considered one of the first studies on unemployment (Agerbo, 2003:560).

However, economics remains the most dominant discipline in research on unemployment. Research into unemployment by economists came to the fore in the late 1920s to early 1930s during the Great Depression when governments were faced with staggering unemployment rates and little knowledge of how to accurately respond to the situation (Amadeo, 2010). Throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s, unemployment

became the biggest economic problem facing Europe and this led to economists racing to the forefront of unemployment research (Blanchard, 2007:410).

Economists have spent much time pondering the question of unemployment and they are the ones who have provided definitions for categorising the unemployed, who have identified causes and determinants and measured the impact of unemployment on the economy (Bhorat, 2007; Lippmann & McCall, 1976; Hildreth *et al*, 1998; Nikolaou & Theodossiou, 2003). Economists have also been very interested in the relationship between unemployment and growth, with contradicting results being uncovered by different researchers (Blanchard, 1997; Romer, 1990; Hussain, Siddiqi & Iqbal, 2010). Unemployment research by economists has extended so far as to examine the relationship between health and employment status, as well as crossing over into psychology with the economics of happiness (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Sullivan & von Wachter, 2009).

Unemployment research has been greatly influenced by the statistical and mathematical methods used in economics. This is because unemployment is of great interest to economists due to the implications of unemployment for macro-economic policy (Hodge, 2009:488). The dominance of economics in unemployment research has been due to the long history of economists attempting to understand and provide solutions to the problem of unemployment. It is also due to the quantifiable nature of unemployment, in terms of how many people are unemployed, and economists' reliance on numbers and quantification. This can be seen from the tendency of economic research to reduce the unemployed to numbers and statistics (Macamo, 2003).

### **2.3 The foci of unemployment research in South Africa**

This section provides an overview of the research that has been conducted on the South African unemployment problem. A large amount of research on South African unemployment focuses on the determinants of unemployment, for example Bhorat and Leibbrandt, (2002); Kingdon and Knight, (2004); Schoeman, Blaauw and Pretorius,

(2008); Von Fintel, (2007). The most commonly investigated determinants of unemployment are: race, education, gender and age (Bhorat, 2006). This section provides an overview of some of the literature focusing on determinants of South African unemployment and on the relationship between some of these determinants and unemployment. Youth unemployment and the research into the reasons for South Africa's youth unemployment are discussed. Debates within unemployment research are explored, such as debates surrounding the character of unemployment in South Africa, as well as the effects of trade liberalisation and targeted wage subsidies on unemployment.

### *2.3.1 Determinants of unemployment*

Research conducted into South African unemployment has focused on revealing determinants of unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Research shows that race, education, gender, home ownership, age and location are some of the most important determinants of unemployment in South Africa (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Kingdon and Knight (2004) used a probit model. A probit model is a type of regression used in econometrics to model dichotomous outcome variables (Stata Data Analysis Examples Probit). Human capital characteristics have also been seen to affect the chances of unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). It has also been postulated that unionisation, the real effective exchange rate, the price of crude oil and the banker's acceptance rate would determine unemployment in South Africa (Schoeman, Blaauw & Pretorius, 2008). Schoeman *et al* (2008) did a time-series analysis of unemployment over the periods of 1970-1982 and 1983-2002 (Schoeman *et al*, 2008). They used an economic equation to express unemployment as function of the total fixed capital stock, unionisation as a percentage of formal employment, real effective exchange rate, banker's acceptance rate and crude oil price (Schoeman *et al*, 2008). This research revealed that increased fixed capital reduces unemployment and that increased unionisation, a higher price of crude oil, an increase in real exchange rate and tight monetary policy all contribute to an increased unemployment rate in South Africa (Schoeman *et al*, 2008).

A number of studies have attempted to explain the cause of South African unemployment. Early research concluded that the rise in unemployment was due to the decrease in the demand for labour (Bell & Padayachee, 1984). Bell and Padayachee used statistical data to determine that the reduction in demand for labour in South Africa was mainly due to the fall in the rate of economic growth due to a global downswing at the time (1984). The downswing was due to the rise in raw materials prices, the decelerated process of technology diffusion from industrialised countries to developing countries and the downward pressure on the relative price of manufacturing because of the swiftly increasing productivity and international competitiveness of newly industrialising countries, which only served to exacerbate the South African unemployment issue (Bell & Padayachee, 1984).

A more recent explanation for South Africa's high unemployment rate is that it is the result of the large reduction in the non-mineral tradable sector since the beginning of the 1990s (Rodrick, 2006). The weak export-oriented manufacturing in South Africa undermined growth opportunities and led to high unemployment as non-mineral tradables are essential for economic growth and employment in South Africa, due to the large amount of low skilled labour required (Ashipala & Eita, 2010:96). An econometric analysis of the patterns of structural change was applied using regressions and equations to uncover this explanation for South African unemployment (Rodrick, 2006).

Further recent research indicates the main reason for the high rate of unemployment in South Africa is due to the substantial increase in the labour force and not because of the historically low growth or poor employment performance of the South African economy (Hodge, 2009:488). Annual time-series data from as far back as 1946 were used in this investigation to construct and measure the employment coefficient, a number that is multiplied with a variable or an unknown quantity in a mathematical equation, in order to determine the reason for South Africa's high unemployment rate (Hodge, 2009:488).

Research into the unemployment problem in South Africa has examined the aggregate trends in employment, unemployment and growth, as well as the relationships between

unemployment and growth (Hodge, 2009:501). This research used mathematical equations and coefficients as explained above, while older research on unemployment trends focused on movements in the Black unemployment rate and the patterns of Black unemployment (Bell & Padayachee, 1984).

More recent research has shown that employment growth and economic growth have followed a similar pattern with an extended downturn between the early 1970s and early 1990s, after which both recovered strongly (Hodge, 2009:494). The aggregate relationship between growth and employment in South Africa was found to be positive and stable over the long term (Hodge, 2009:499) and research using the employment coefficient and time-series data, also found a declining trend in South African unemployment, although it has been reducing very little and slowly (Hodge, 2009:503).

Research conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations on the scope of the unemployment problem, the patterns and the trends in employment concluded that it seems that South Africa is heading towards what is referred to as an “enclave society” (Schlemmer & Levitz, 1998:77). By “enclave society”, the authors mean that a type of socio-economic apartheid will prevail, in which the employed section of society advances while the unemployed or marginally employed will increase in relation to the ability of the government to supply survival benefits (Schlemmer & Levitz, 1998:77). This research came to the final conclusion that the issue of increasing unemployment can only be addressed via a joint private-public sector partnership in informal sector development (Schlemmer & Levitz, 1998).

A significant amount of research on unemployment in South Africa has focused on the relationship between education and unemployment (Bhorat, 2004; Kingdon & Knight, 2005; Moleke, 2006). Some of the research made use of descriptive statistics and probit equations of unemployment, others used statistical analyses of household surveys and labour force surveys, and some used surveys and quantified answers to understand this relationship (Bhorat, 2004; Kingdon & Knight, 2005; Moleke, 2006). A number of studies have focused on unemployment, education and skills constraints in South Africa.

Research shows that high levels of educational attainment play an important role in becoming employed (Lam, Leibbrandt & Mlatsheni, 2008:6). Thus, employment prospects increase with the level of educational attainment (Burns, Edwards & Pauw, 2010:15).

Skills constraints on employment growth were examined by exploring the relationship between formal education and unemployment (Dias & Posel, 2007). The results of the interrogation of this relationship showed that the likelihood of unemployment reduces as education increases, but the effect was only significant if matric (or grade 12) education was completed (Dias & Posel, 2007). In relation to individuals with only primary school education, those who have completed tertiary education were more likely to be employed (Dias & Posel, 2007). It was found that the aggregate trends hide considerable variation among race groups, within race groups and among women and men (Dias & Posel, 2007). These researchers found that the benefits of higher education increased substantially and significantly among Indian and Coloured men and women in particular (Dias & Posel, 2007), while the aggregate trends among Africans and Whites were less distinct due to the fact that the relative benefits of tertiary education among both White and African women declined over the same period (Dias & Posel, 2007).

Current debate around South African unemployment centres on the effects of trade liberalisation and formal sector wage subsidies on unemployment (Davies & Thurlow, 2009:3). Some believe that trade liberalisation is basically synonymous with downsizing, retrenchment, outsourcing and cost-cutting in developed and developing states (Valodia, 2007:24). Others believe that trade liberalisation leads to the expansion of exporters and thus can serve to reduce unemployment (Edwards, 2001:55).

South Africa's rapid trade liberalisation has caused some debate in unemployment research (Davies & Thurlow, 2009:16). This is due to the fact that a variety of sector studies have found that liberalisation increases industrial unemployment, although it only slightly increases unemployment (Bhorat, 1999; Edwards, 2001). Some research argues that trade liberalisation has only served to increase unemployment (Stiglitz, 2002:59).

Other research maintains that the South African government's continuation with trade liberalisation without labour market reform has contributed to unemployment (Nattrass & Seekings, 2001:484).

Other economy-wide studies produced different findings for industry and services, but also pointed towards an increase in the national unemployment figures (Thurlow, 2007; Herault & Thurlow, 2010). A study by Davies and Thurlow (2009) demonstrated that trade liberalisation has different effects on the formal and informal sectors in South Africa. This research by Davies and Thurlow used "labour force surveys to develop a typology of informal activities" and used this to "construct an empirically-calibrated economy wide model to capture formal-informal sectors linkages" in order to study trade liberalisation and wage subsidies (2009:2). Trade liberalisation considerably increases informal unemployment by increasing import competition; on the other hand, formal producers are able to take advantage of the new foreign market opportunities and thus increase employment (Davies & Thurlow, 2009: 21). However, the large increase in unemployment due to trade liberalisation outweighs the increase of employment in the formal sector (Davies & Thurlow, 2009: 21).

There is evidence which suggests that trade liberalisation along with increased international trade have brought about a change in production towards capital-intensive production (Lewis, 2001:46). This is in opposition to the strengths of the South African economy with its high unemployment rate and abundance of unskilled workers (Lewis, 2001:46). This is thought to be part of the legacy of the South African apartheid regime (Lewis, 2001:46).

### *2.3.2 Prominent debates in South African unemployment research*

For many years there has been debate concerning the character of unemployment in South Africa. Early work related to this debate used the increasing real wages of Africans employed in the formal sector, specifically mining, as evidence of "minimal supply-side pressure to restrain wage growth" (Lewis, 2001:78). If increasing real wages occurred

alongside open unemployment, then, following this line of reasoning, the conclusion is that unemployment must be voluntary (Gerson, 1981). This was countered by research that argued that the concurrent increase in African wages with high unemployment is due to “institutional wage setting and limits on African mobility” (Knight, 1978:119). Knight concludes by saying “... in so far as voluntary unemployment reflects a preference for family life [in African Homelands], this behaviour should be seen as optimization within an inhuman set of political and institutional constraints” (1978:119).

Later work sought to examine the character of unemployment in contemporary South Africa. Research found that the unemployed were worse off than the informally employed (Kingdon & Knight, 2000). It was found that remaining unemployed seemed to be more a reflection of the barriers to entering informal employment than a choice not to (Kingdon & Knight, 2000). The research therefore concluded that the majority of African unemployment is involuntary.

As can be seen from research on the character of unemployment in South Africa discussed above, early work on South Africa’s unemployment focused mainly on Black or African unemployment. Such research on unemployment appears to have been the trend in unemployment research from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, a trend that was made apparent by the majority of work on South African unemployment dealing almost exclusively with Black unemployment (Loots, 1977, 1980, 1982; Simkins, 1978, Van der Merwe, 1976). All of the above-mentioned research on unemployment in South Africa before the democratic transition, dealt with the level and trends in the Black unemployment rate (Bell & Padayachee, 1984).

The measuring and appropriate definition of unemployment has been a source of debate for many years. Early research that exists on the defining and measuring of unemployment in South Africa (Van der Merwe, 1976; Knight, 1977; Sadie, 1977; Simkins, 1978, 1982; Loots, 1977, 1980, 1982) focused on including estimates of the Black unemployment rate into South Africa’s overall employment rate (Simkins, 1978). There has been debate over which definition of unemployment is more accurate and,

thus, which should be used. Researchers have argued whether the broadly measured or narrowly measured unemployment rate more aptly reflects the real unemployment rate (Kingdon & Knight, 2000). The findings from some research demonstrate that it is misleading to apply the job-search criterion in measuring unemployment in South Africa and thus, that the broad definition is more suitable for analysing the South African labour market (Kingdon & Knight, 2000:16). The evidence shows that the non-searching unemployed are discouraged workers, whose search is constrained by the costs of job-searching, poverty or high local unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2000:17).

There currently is an on-going debate in South Africa over whether wage subsidies would be effective in decreasing unemployment. This policy option has been suggested by many authors and academics as a means of reducing mainly youth unemployment (Burns *et al*, 2010; Levinsohn, 2008; Kremer, 1993). International experience of wage subsidies have not been positive, but it has been associated with decreases in poverty and does temporarily bring people into employment (Burns *et al*, 2010:20).

Studies conducted on the success of wage subsidies in Australia have shown that the net increase in employment was between 15 to 20 percent, but there was evidence that employers were substituting subsidised labour for unsubsidised labour (Byrne & Buchanan, 1994). Two studies conducted in South Africa used computable general equilibrium models of the South African economy to examine wage subsidies (Pauw and Edwards, 2006; Go, Kearney, Korman, Robinson & Thierfelder, 2009). These studies found that a wage subsidy which targeted lower skilled workers decreased the general unemployment rate, but creates the need for tax increases and causes possible inflexibilities in the labour market (Pauw & Edwards, 2006; Go *et al*, 2009).

Other research examined targeted wage subsidies and found that it increases employment and real incomes, but benefits those in the middle of the national income distribution (Davies & Thurlow, 2009). These findings were consistent with previous studies in South Africa, but pointed to the fact that the debate needs to take into account the links between

the formal and informal economy, as well as account for the effects employment policies can have on labour and produce markets (Davies & Thurlow, 2009:23).

### 2.3.3 *Youth Unemployment as a popular research focus*

Youth unemployment has become a popular topic in unemployment research (Commander, 2010; Rankin & Roberts, 2011; Verick, 2010; Banerjee *et al*, 2006; Bell & Blanchflower, 2009). Youth (people between the ages of 15 and 24) unemployment has been recognised as a problem in industrialised countries since the 1970s (Furnham, 1985:109). Recently, though, youth unemployment has re-emerged as a popular research focus in unemployment research in general and in South African unemployment research in particular (Commander, 2010; Rankin & Roberts, 2011; Banerjee *et al*, 2006; Bell & Blanchflower, 2009; Schirmer, Johnston, Dagut & Bernstein, 2009). This is most likely due to the substantial increase in youth unemployment in recent years and in particularly in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Demidova & Signorelli, 2010). According to an International Labour Office study conducted in 2004, young people constitute approximately 47 percent of the world's unemployed population, although the youth only makes up 25 percent of the globe's working age population (Lam, Leibbrandt & Mlatsheni. 2008:1).

Between 1999 and 2007, the global youth unemployment rate rose from 10.9 percent to 11.9 percent, peaking at 12.6 percent in 2004 (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010:3). The ILO found that the global youth unemployment rate was close to three times the adult unemployment rate in developing countries and 2.4 times that of the adult unemployment rate in the industrialised world (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010:3) while according to the ILO (2008) there had been a decreasing trend in youth unemployment rates around the globe before the financial crisis (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010:3). In the wake of the financial crisis, the youth unemployment rate has risen substantially to 12.7 per cent (ILO, 2012). This has ignited fears of a lost generation comprised of young people and has globally stimulated research into this area in the hopes of finding a viable solution to the growing problem (Elder, Kapsos & Sparreboom, 2010:1).

Research conducted before and up until the mid-1990s focused mainly on detailing the dire situation of the youth and analysing the different determinants of youth unemployment (Lam *et al*, 2008:2). Examples of the studies detailing the situation are Everatt and Sisulu (1992) and Truscott (1993). Mhone (2000) and Mlatsheni and Rospabé (2002) are examples of researchers who have examined the determinants of youth unemployment. Some studies have explored various dimensions of youth unemployment. One of these studies investigates why youth unemployment is so high and unequally distributed in South Africa (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002). This study used the 1999 October Household Survey to uncover the causes and determinants of youth unemployment and also examined the extent to which racial, educational, background and gender differences affect the burden of youth unemployment (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002).

The results of the study show that the large differences in employment of youth and older people are ascribed to discrepancies in observable characteristics, for example education and experience, as well as family characteristics in the case of self-employment (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002:25). The paper also revealed that a significant difference in African and White youth wage employment was not explained by observable characteristics and probably reflected hiring discrimination on the part of the employers (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002:25). Finally the research also found that differences in self-employment could be ascribed to differences in observable characteristics of both races and that gender differences pointed to discrimination against women in wage employment and self-employment (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002).

Other researchers examined the reasons for South Africa's high youth unemployment rate. One study explored whether one of the reasons that South African youth unemployment is higher than in other countries that are similar to South Africa in terms of development, economy and other key aspects, may be that young people want or need a wage which is higher than they could reasonably expect, given their characteristics (Rankin & Roberts, 2011). The paper discusses youth unemployment and reservation wages, as well as the impact of firm size on possible earnings and the relationship

between earnings in different sized firms and reservation wages (Rankin & Roberts, 2011). The researchers used statistical techniques, namely two estimation techniques, ordinary least squares and a Heckman two-stage procedure, as well as three means of predicting wages, by means of equation coefficients (Rankin & Roberts, 2011:133). The findings show that a significant difference exists between predicted wages in large and small firms for the same observable characteristics (Rankin & Roberts, 2011). The results indicated that reservation wages reduce with age until 30 and that people with previous experience in small firms have more realistic reservation wages (Rankin & Roberts, 2011). The study concludes that firm size is an important determinant of youth wages and that a large percentage of young people report reservation wages higher than they could reasonably hope to achieve (Rankin & Roberts, 2011).

Recent research in South Africa on the problem of youth unemployment has examined the role of education in youth unemployment and has sought to understand why a large number of young people leave school without finishing their secondary education, as this is known to be a factor which affects the likelihood of employment (Lam *et al*, 2008). Such recent research on youth unemployment has focused on increasing the employability of young people, developing programmes aimed to bring young people into the labour market and providing the youth with skills that are in demand in the economy (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2011:7).

Much research on youth unemployment concerns how to most effectively reduce the number of those unemployed. As it was recently shown that youth unemployment affects the “lifetime trajectory of the individual” (Rankin & Roberts, 2011:128) because individuals who experience unemployment in their youth are more likely to remain unemployed, experience unemployment again or experience longer durations of unemployment (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Gregg, 2001; Gregg & Tominey, 2005). Research into this area has been stimulated and has become particularly important. As Levinsohn (2008) has demonstrated, once employment is found in the formal sector, retaining formal employment becomes considerably more likely.

All of the research mentioned above falls within the tradition of positivism. These studies made use of empirical means to examine the issue of unemployment in South Africa. Each study made use of mathematical, econometric or other models in an attempt to examine a relationship or a determinant of unemployment. While these studies have added valuable insights into the determinants of unemployment as well as the causes and trends in unemployment, the present study, aims to understand the problem of unemployment in a way that is different from positivist studies. The research was aimed at attempting to understand the problem representations of unemployment and to examine what the implications of problem representations of unemployment include and exclude.

#### **2.4 Positivist and Post-positivist approaches to unemployment research**

Positivism currently is the paradigm which dominates within the field of public policy and unemployment research (Fischer, 2003:vii; Boland, 1991:90). Post-positivism is a counter paradigm which has emerged and which includes interpretivism within its approaches (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001:15). The dominance of positivism within public policy research has also extended to research on unemployment. A large amount of the research into unemployment in general and research on unemployment in South Africa in particular, use positivist approaches to study unemployment. This is illustrated by means of the literature on unemployment reviewed above, which mostly employed statistical and empirical means to examine unemployment in South Africa. The abundance of literature on unemployment which is based on positivist methods, indicates the need for studies on the topic which originate within the post-positivist paradigm.

This section of the current chapter provides an overview of the paradigms of positivism and post-positivism to illustrate the differences between the paradigms as well as highlight the importance of the different insights of each. Positivism and its dominance within the social sciences, as well as the products of positivist research, are discussed to illustrate how the current research aimed to be different. Post-positivism is explained briefly before the section focuses on interpretivism and its history. The reason for this is because interpretivism is one approach under the umbrella paradigm of post-positivism

and it needs to be explained as this study uses an interpretivist approach. The products of post-positivist and interpretivist research are discussed to highlight the differences between positivist and post-positivist research.

#### 2.4.1 *What is positivism?*

Positivist approaches are those which focus on combining deductive logic with empirical data in the attempt to find general laws (Neuman, 2006:82). Positivism welcomes scientific rationality and value free research (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009:21). Positivists believe that research can objectively study the phenomena in question and they can thus uncover objective knowledge (Howlett *et al*, 2009:21). Those who approach research from a positivist perspective mainly use economic principles and quantitative methodology to understand public problems, for example unemployment (Howlett *et al*, 2009:21). Thus, statistics, figures and percentages most often are used to understand the problem of unemployment.

Positivists often use mathematical and statistical models to falsify or verify a set of hypotheses, which is most useful when the aim is to predict or control some natural phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106). Research within the positivist tradition most often appears in the form of cost-benefit analysis, survey research, mathematical stimulation models, quasi-experimental design, operations research, input-output analysis, systems analysis and multiple regression analysis (Fischer, 1995). Positivism produces knowledge through the statistical analysis of observations of reality which are statistically generalised to a population (Perry & Sobh, 2006:1195). Research conducted using positivist methods results in quantifiable or empirical data which speak for themselves, representing objective reality. Thus, positivists analyse statistics and can be seen as reducing people and situations to numbers and hypotheses in order to explain, attempt to control or predict the phenomenon in question.

#### 2.4.2 *Positivism in unemployment research and its dominance*

Studies conducted on unemployment in South Africa have mainly been situated within the positivist tradition, with a focus on the determinants, nature of, causes of, impact on wages, why unemployment has risen in South Africa after transition and the pattern of unemployment (Bhorat & Leibbrandt, 2002; Banerjee *et al*, 2008; Bell & Padayachee, 1984). These studies made use of econometric and mathematical models to examine these aspects of unemployment in South Africa as can be evidenced from studies undertaken by Bhorat (2004), Kingdon and Knight (2004) and Moleke (2006). The majority of studies found during the search of the literature pointed to the dominance of the positivist paradigm in unemployment research in general and in South Africa.

Positivism's dominance is due to its ability to test theories and to make reliable generalisations to the population (Njihia, 2011:79). Positivism therefore has become the dominant tradition in the social sciences due to the ideal of value-free scientific inquiry within the social sciences, and also as a result of its dominance within research methods teaching (Regional Policy, 2009). Positivism emphasises experience, observation and testing, specifically, which made the tradition more popular as it allowed for better understanding of phenomena (Clarke, 2009:29). Positivism's attractiveness and popularity are based on the fact that it uses systematic and transparent methodologies, as well as its claims to reduce bias, encourage objectivity and is said to be "self-consciously error seeking and self-correcting" (Sabatier, quoted in Jones & McBeth, 2010:332). Positivist-oriented research helps one to better understand cause and effect relationships and allows research to be replicated in different environments (Clarke, 2009:29). Thus, positivist research has been valuable in creating insights into many research areas.

Despite positivism's popularity within public policy and political science in general, it has been recognised that positivism is not as sensitive to politics as those concerned with political science would like it to be (Fischer, 2003:vii). This strict positivist orientation has not incorporated value issues and social meanings, an inherent part of public policy, into its approaches (Fischer, 2003:vii). Without the incorporation of the value issues and

social meanings which drive politics and policy making, comprehending these processes becomes increasingly difficult (Fischer, 2003:vii) and this neglect only serves to hinder the promotion of more democratic and socially just forms of policy making and policy analysis (Fischer, 2003:vii). Thus, there recently has been a renewed effort within the social sciences to emphasise values and social meanings through a deeper understanding of discourse and language (Fisher, 2003:vii).

#### 2.4.3 *What is post-positivism?*

Post-positivism is the research paradigm which surfaced in opposition to the positivist research paradigm (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001:15). Post-positivism is an overarching term which is used to signify philosophies in research that are not positivist (Carson *et al*, 2001:15). Post-positivism argues that there is an external reality but the way different people understand that reality is constructed and thus can be contested (Carson *et al*, 2001:15). Post-positivist approaches are all based on the “argumentative turn” and seek to move away from positivism and towards a better understanding of problems (Howlett *et al*, 2009:26).

One of the largest contributions of post-positivism within policy analysis has been in terms of problem definition with post-positivist approaches illustrating the “subjective, value-laden, and conflictual quality of problem definition” (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:176). Post-positivism recognises that varying problem definitions produce different policy prescriptions (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:176). The focus and importance of problem definition is therefore tied up with citizen participation and the participation of citizens in the formulation of problem definitions (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:177). According to some authors, the emphasis on citizen participation or democracy is one of the other large contributions that post-positivism has made to policy analysis (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:177).

#### 2.4.4 What is interpretivism?

Interpretivism is situated under the umbrella paradigm of post-positivism (Carson *et al*, 2001:15). Post-positivist researchers make use of a variety of interpretivist approaches. Interpretivism forms the basis of the current study's approach to unemployment. The current version of interpretivism has its foundations in the "German intellectual tradition of hermeneutics and the *verstehen* tradition in sociology.... and critiques of scientism and positivism in the social sciences [including] the writings of ordinary language philosophers critical of logical empiricism" (Schwandt, quoted in Willis, 2007:101). Interpretivism has its roots in the work of philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey and the work of sociologist Max Weber, with his concept of *Verstehen*, which directly translated means understanding (Andersen & Taylor, 2006:16). The concept of *Verstehen* refers to understanding social actions from the standpoint of those involved in it (Andersen & Taylor, 2006:17). Wilhelm Dilthey (1883) argued that two different forms of science existed: *Naturwissenschaft* based on abstract reasoning and *Geisteswissenschaft* which is embedded in an "empathetic understanding or *Verstehen*" (Neuman, 2006:87).

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called 'linguistic' turn in philosophy was catalysed by Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblances in language (Willis, 2007:102). Wittgenstein posited that, just as members of a family resemble one another in a number of ways, so to do words and phrases (Willis, 2007:103). Thus, words and phrases have related but slightly different meanings when used in various contexts and meaning therefore comes from the use of the word; when individuals use words and phrases, they play the language game, thus constructing the different meanings of the words and phrases (Willis, 2007:103). Much of interpretivist theory is built on Wittgenstein's idea of a relativist definition of meaning and numerous studies have been conducted in the social sciences to understand how meaning develops within varying language communities (Willis, 2007:103). Many other authors have since added and helped shape interpretivism within the field of political science and public policy (Bevir, 1999; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Fischer, 1995).

In the last decade, the 'interpretivist turn' has increased in significance within the fields of public policy and public administration with Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes leading the way (Hay, 2011:167) and Fischer has done work on the 'interpretive turn' that political science has taken in recent years (2003:222). Fischer highlights the fact that this turn in political science has placed more emphasis on interaction, language and context (Fischer, 2003:222). Fischer argues that the 'interpretive', or 'argumentative' turn as he refers to it, is an improved account of what social scientists already do (1998:131). He furthermore argues that behind scientific conclusions lie interpretive judgements and these conclusions are actually arguments which aim to persuade others to view a particular phenomenon in a specific way (Fischer, 1998:138). Thus, Fischer argues that research within public policy consists of policy arguments which are a mix of fact, interpretation, evaluation and opinions linked to data (1998:138). Fischer thereby argued for more meaning-oriented approaches within the social sciences, such as interpretivism.

Interpretivism positions interpretation at the centre of social and political life, as well as its analysis (Hay, 2011:168). Interpretivism maintains that research can never be value free as the researcher cannot be separated from reality; one's experiences influences one's values, thus the research will, at least in part, reflect the researchers values (Weber, 2004:iv). Weber explains that interpretivists seek to understand the object of the research in light of meaning structure; thus interpretivists believe there is no universal truth of a research object, only subjective truths and that much can be gained by understanding those subjective truths (2004:iv). Interpretivist approaches within political science therefore focus on meaning, understanding and explaining actions, practices and, to a lesser degree, institutions (Hay, 2011:168).

Interest in interpretivism has become popular across many fields, for instance management and organisational sciences and public policy, with a particular emphasis on law making (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Alvesson & Sköldbörg, 1999; Prasad & Prasad, 2002; Zald, 1996; Barclay & Birkland, 1998). This is due to the dissatisfaction many researchers have felt with the methods and procedures for producing knowledge within the positivist tradition (Sandberg, 2005:41). Some of this dissatisfaction stems from the

fact that positivism omits the “discovery dimensions in inquiry” as well as “the under-determination of theory” (Perry & Sobh, 2006:1197). For instance, it has been noted that the assumptions underlying the positivist paradigm may not be appropriate to use in the attempt to understand a multifaceted social phenomenon (Perry & Sobh, 2006:1197).

Dissatisfaction also has arisen due to the likelihood that no deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question will be produced by using the quantitative results that positivist methods yield (Perry & Sobh, 2006:1197). Others have noted that the most significant problem with positivism is that it uses numbers to misleadingly represent its findings as a ‘truth’ (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:176). It manages to do this as the products of positivist research uses numbers to provide what appears to be a definitive answer to the question under investigation (Clemons & McBeth, 2001:176). Another reason cited for the dissatisfaction with positivism is that the quantitative approaches used often remove variables that exist within the context from consideration and that these variables, if they were included, could affect the results of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106).

Willis (2007:97) points out that interpretivism has even made inroads into traditionally positivist and quantitative areas such as “accounting (Chua, 1986), health care (Horton, 1998; Koch, 1995; Young, 2003), computer engineering (Fischer, Nakakoji, Ostwald, Stahl, & Sumner, 1993), computer software design (Thanasankit & Corbitt, 1999), management information systems (Kosaka, 2002), requirements engineering (Atkinson, 2000), the history of chemistry (McEvoy, 2000), and management (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991)”. All these studies used interpretivist approaches to understand and explain the phenomenon under study. Interpretivist work has recently also become very popular within the information systems field, along with a shift toward qualitative research methods (Myers, 1997). As this suggests, interpretivist research is very diverse and extends across numerous disciplines and areas of application (Willis, 2007:138).

Interpretivism seeks to understand a particular context. Those who approach research from an interpretivist perspective believe it is important to understand the context in which the research is conducted as it is crucial to the interpretation of the data collected

(Willis, 2007:99). Thus, interpretivists are more interested in understanding the particular situation than in discovering universal rules or laws (Willis, 2007:99). The increased use of interpretivism has led to debate around whether it is possible to generalise from interpretivist research or not (Sandberg, 2005:42). In the discipline of sociology the problem of generalisation in interpretive research lies at the root of an old debate about whether sociology, is scientific or humanistic in character (May, 2002:125).

Due to interpretive research seeking to understand a particular instance within a certain context, some authors have argued that no generalising from the results of interpretive research is possible (Williams, 2003:56). Those who claim that generalisation is not possible from interpretivist research tend to understand it as drawing inferences from single observations through scientific methods to create more general formulations (Mayring, 2007). These authors argue that too much variability of meaning and action exists within the setting in which the research takes place (Denzin, 1983; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Taylor, 1994). Denzin (1983) explicitly denies that generalisation is possible from interpretive research and his argument can be summarised in the quotation as “individual consciousnesses are free to attach different meanings to the same actions or circumstances” (May, 2002:130). He and others thus contend that there is too much variability of the micro level interactions due to the uniqueness of each situation and claim traditional generalisation to be impossible (Williams, 2003:56; Williams, 2000:210).

Both Williams (2000; 2003) and May (2002) argue that generalisation is an inevitable and desirable part of interpretive research. They argue that generalisation is not a monolithic concept and if one considers generalisation in a non-scientific sense, as “a general notion or proposition obtained by inference from particular cases” (Concise Oxford Dictionary quoted in Williams, 2000:212), one finds that interpretative research is filled with generalisations. Williams offers the examples of Clifford Geertz’s (1979) study of the Balinese cockfight<sup>4</sup> and Sue Fischer’s (1993) study of children and fruit

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<sup>4</sup> Geertz’s study made use of a strategy called ‘thick description and focused on the ritual of cockfighting in Balinese society (Williams, 2000:211). In this strategy he moves from a general description of the setting to

machine gambling.<sup>5</sup> Williams argues that, in both of these studies, the research endeavoured to interpret what was happening according to the frame of reference of the observed to capture the nuances and the individual characteristics of the social environment, while at the same time trying to say something about the larger picture (2000:212). Geertz attempted to uncover the symbolic meaning of the cockfight ritual, while Fischer tried to create typologies of fruit machine gamblers to provide a better understanding of what it means to gamble (Williams, 2000:212). Thus, both authors were inferring from particular cases to the features of a larger social environment (Williams, 2000:212). Interpretivist research, while focusing on the micro-level detail of a small portion of society, can be used to paint a picture of that wider society (Williams, 2000:211).

Both May and Williams advocate ‘moderatum generalisations’ as a form of methodological pluralism to overcome the limits on generalisation within interpretative research (May, 2002:139). In moderatum generalisations features of the situation under consideration are seen to be examples of a larger set of recognisable characteristics (Williams, 2000:215). Williams argues that this is the type of generalisation that is made from interpretative research, both wittingly and unwittingly (2000:215). However, academics continue the debate surrounding generalisations in interpretative research.

Although interpretivism has extended throughout social science research, there is much debate about the reliability and validity of interpretivist research due to the subjective nature of understanding within such research. Reliability and validity are criteria most

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interpretations of what was happening in the particular context of the cockfight (Williams, 2000:211). He first provides a detailed description of the rules of the cockfight and the certain relationships of features of the competition to Balinese life before moving on to the thick description in which Geertz tries to discover the symbolic meaning of the ritual for Balinese men (Williams, 2000:211). He did this by choosing certain aspects and interpreting what they may symbolise (Williams, 2000:211).

<sup>5</sup> Fischer’s study focused on the social problem of gambling through unobtrusive observation of children combined with in-depth interviews with ten of the fruit machine gamblers and four group interviews with secondary school children (Williams, 2000:211). Her observations led her to create a typology consisting of five categories of fruit machine player (Williams, 2000:212). These are Arcade Kings, Machine Beaters, Rent-a-Spacers, Action Seekers and Escape Artists (Fischer, 1993:458). The typologies depict playing strategies, the meanings players assign to their activity or way the individuals used the social space of the arcade (Williams, 2000:212). Fischer came to the conclusion that, although existing accounts of gambling are heuristically useful, her study illustrates the diversity of orientation in gambling which needs to be taken in to account when attempting to discourage gambling (Williams, 2000:212).

often applied to positivist research in order to justify the knowledge produced through the research. In positivist research, validity is used to measure the degree to which the theories and instruments relate to objective reality (Sandberg, 2005:43). Reliability in positivist research means that results are reliable in that the same procedures under the same conditions produce the same results (Weber, 2004:iv). There is debate about whether the concepts of reliability and validity are applicable to interpretive research and whether other forms of standards of quality or scientific rigour need to be established for interpretative and other qualitative research.

The epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying interpretative research are very different from the assumptions underlying positivist research (Sandberg, 2005:43). Thus, it has been argued that the terms validity and reliability cannot be applied to interpretivist research as these terms originate in the positivist tradition and therefore conform to those epistemological and ontological underpinnings, which interpretivist research does not (Sandberg, 2005:43). A number of supporters of interpretive approaches reject the use of validity and reliability as they are positivist criteria and do not apply as there is no objective reality, according to interpretivists (Giorgi, 1992; Searle, 1995). These scholars argue that reliability, validity and other standards of quality used to assess research are inconsistent with the logic of interpretive approaches (Dodge, Ospina & Foldy, 2005:287).

Other interpretivists believe reliability and validity to be applicable, but only if the terms are restated so that they are in line with interpretative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interpretative scholars have developed their own standards of quality which are in line with interpretivism's assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge creation to assess their work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Some scholars argue that interpretive research does conform to the concepts of reliability as stability of findings and validity as truthfulness of findings (Popay, Rogers & Williams, 1998; Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Thus, development of validity and reliability criteria in interpretive research continues to be an area of interest.

Criticism of interpretivism has come from both within and outside of the approach (Blaikie, 2012:510). Some scholars have argued that it is deceptive to imply that social actors engage in a continuous monitoring of their behaviour and, as a result, are conscious of their intentions and the motives for their activities (Giddens (1984) in Blaikie, 2012:510). Giddens (1984) argues that for the majority of the time, action continues without reflective monitoring, as actors most often only reflect on their behaviour when others query their behaviour (in Blaikie, 2012:510).

While some interpretivists argue that social scientists must simply report the actors' explanation of their behaviour and not interpret or theorise these accounts, others have argued that social scientists should give varying and competing explanations of actors' behaviour from the explanations provided by the actors (Blaikie, 2012:510). Bhaskar (1979) terms this the 'linguistic fallacy', which is the failure to identify that there is "more to reality than is expressed in the language of social actors" (Blaikie, 2012:510). It has also been argued that interpretivism is guilty of the epistemic fallacy of presuming that we can only access the social world through our understanding of interpretive processes (Blaikie, 2012:510). Other critics have argued that interpretivism does not pay attention to the role of institutional structures and, in particular, to the division of interest and relations of power (Blaikie, 2012:510).

#### 2.4.5 *What does interpretivist research produce?*

Interpretivism focuses on meaning, context and interpretations, thus, research within this tradition produces narratives. Interpretivist research produces knowledge which seeks to provide an understanding of the phenomenon in question. Dodge *et al.* (2005:286) state that interpretivism aims to interpret social experiences as well as understand the meanings and intentions of social actors through research. Williams (2003:57) explains that interpretive research seeks to understand what differentiates us or what makes us the same. Interpretivist research produces narratives or stories (knowledge) which is context specific, as the narrative may have different meanings or interpretations within a different context (Myers, 1997). Therefore interpretive research focuses on providing an account

using the full complexity of human sense making as applied to the phenomenon (Myers, 1997). Interpretive research aims through its narratives and analysis to blend details about motivations, preferences and actions into systems of belief whose expressions are particular to the context (Lin, 1998:163). Lin also points out that interpretivists use their work to demonstrate what the general pattern of the phenomenon looks like (1998:163). Thus, as Bevir and Rhodes argue, interpretivism allows one to uncover the stories of others and to tell narratives about these stories, so as to criticise and compare rival accounts of “agreed facts” (2003:39-40).

## **2.5 Understanding Carol Bacchi’s What’s the Problem? approach**

There is little research in which post positivist approaches have been applied in the study of unemployment in South Africa, as the literature review has demonstrated. This study was aimed at addressing this by using Carol Bacchi’s approach to analyse the issue of unemployment in South Africa. This will contribute to the unemployment literature by demonstrating how an interpretivist approach can add to the understanding of unemployment.

This section of the chapter sets out Bacchi’s approach. An outline of the approach is provided. The usefulness of the WPR approach for the research and the insights that the approach can provide into the problem of unemployment is then discussed. Finally, this section addresses the criticism that can and has been levelled at this approach.

### *2.5.1 Explaining Bacchi’s approach*

Carol Bacchi’s approach is an interpretive approach which focuses on how a problem is represented through either the proposed policy solutions to that problem or the definition given of the problem. In the simplest terms, the insight from the approach appears to be common sense – how one sees or thinks about a certain thing will influence what one thinks should be done about it (Bacchi, 1999:1). Therefore, the way individuals perceive

things determine how the individual will set about changing those things (Bannister & Fransella, quoted in Bacchi, 1999:1).

The guiding principle of Bacchi's approach is that each proposed policy solution, either explicitly or implicitly, includes within it a verdict on what the problem is (Bacchi, 1999:1). Bacchi refers to this diagnosis of the problem as its problem representation (1999:1). Thus, any explanation of a problem is an interpretation and all interpretations contain within them "judgement and choices" (Bacchi, 1999:1). Interpretations offer particular policy recommendations in line with that interpretation, or more specifically, policy recommendations include interpretations and thus, representations of the issues (Bacchi, 1999:2).

The nature of problem representations or interpretation requires a focus on discourse (Bacchi, 1999:2). In Bacchi's approach, discourse is defined "as the language, concepts and categories" which are used to frame a problem (1999:2). The WPR approach constructs policy as a discourse whereby problems and solutions are created (1999:2). Thus, the objects of study are problematisations – "all those discursive practices that introduce something into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object for moral reflection, scientific knowledge or political analysis" (Foucault (1984) quoted in Bacchi, 1999:2). This approach also focuses on effects, which means that discourse is more than simply ideas or manners of speaking; it comprises practices with material penalties (Bacchi, 1999:2).

Problem representation is intended to illustrate a prime interest in the way problems are explained, as well as an interest in the implied causes and the consequences which follow from the interpretation of the problem (Bacchi, 1999:36). Therefore, as Deborah Stone explains, "problem definition is never simply a matter of defining goals and measuring our distance from them. It is rather the strategic representation of situations" (cited in Bacchi, 1999:36). Stone states the goal of problem representation as a means of gaining power, stating that "representations of a problem are therefore constructed to win the most people to one's side and the most leverage over one's opponents" (Stone, cited in

Bacchi, 1999:36). Bacchi argues that her approach is useful for unpacking politics (Bacchi, 1999:5). The WPR approach allows one to examine the effects of policy solutions as well as the impact of problem representations on the subjects of the policies and the political impact of the representations (Bacchi, 1999:10). Bacchi's approach seeks to unpack the consequences of problem representations.

Problem representations have a represented 'cause' of the problem and a represented 'concern' (Bacchi, 2007). From how the problem is represented and the policy recommendations made to address the problem, one can see what the cause of the problem is considered to be (Bacchi, 2007). The concern underlying a particular representation can be in line with the stated reason for addressing a certain issue or can be deduced by examining the problem representation. Bacchi contends that it is important to repeat the question: What's the problem? at every level of analysis, as what can be construed as the concern can also be construed as the cause of the problem (1999:5). Due to the interpretative nature of describing an issue or a problem, Bacchi's approach includes identification and evaluation of problem representations as an essential part of policy analysis (Bacchi, 1999:1).

This approach examines competing constructions of issues, as labelling something as a problem brings with it a host of implications which need to be considered (Bacchi, 1999:5). Bacchi insists that an in-depth examination of the way in which issues are represented should be done, as the problematisation of some issues may be to the advantage of some and an obstacle to others (1999:6). There are implications which flow from what is left unproblematised and from how the problem is labelled. For example, when something is labelled a 'social problem', there is the implication that a public responsibility exists to address this issue (Bacchi, 1999:6). Thus, it is necessary to reflect upon how issues and policies are shaped and what is left unproblematised (Bacchi, 1999:11).

Bacchi argues that it is not enough to merely identify the various representations of the problem; one has to go beyond that and evaluate these representations (1999:10).

Evaluation depends on the assumptions, political motivations and values of the person doing the evaluation (Bacchi, 1999:10). Bacchi argues that by listing the competing representations, one is already involved in evaluation and the action is in itself political as one is giving equal status to these representations (1999:10). Thus, the representations of unemployment in South Africa must be assessed so as to direct attention to issues which have been left unproblematised and need to be addressed.

### *2.5.2 Usefulness and insights of Bacchi's approach*

Bacchi's approach allowed the analyst to go beyond the representations of problems and to examine the potential implications of these representations. It allowed a more nuanced picture of the problem of unemployment in South Africa to emerge. The approach, by focusing on perceived views of a problem and allowing the researcher to highlight what is left out of the problem representation, facilitates the reflection on what has been excluded from the accepted problem representations. This is useful as it allows the researcher to see what is likely to change and what is resistant to change due to the formulations of the problem (Brooking, 2005:24). This was important for the current study as it allowed the researcher to draw attention to the potential effects of problem representations. Highlighting what is excluded from the representations of unemployment allowed the researcher to show that potential avenues for reducing unemployment have been closed off and who has closed these avenues.

Bacchi's approach is useful as it brings the silences in problematisations to the surface and allows what has been marginalised to be included in discussion as part of the process of challenging the accepted problem representation (Brooking, 2005:24). In other words, through the examination of problem representations, 'silences' within the accepted policy representations can be identified. These policy silences are important to note as they limit the discussion on the issue under consideration, but have to be taken into account when change is considered as "discursive constructions of problems make change difficult" (Brooking, 2005:24). The inclusion of policy silences allows researchers to reflect on

how the accepted understanding of an issue shapes and limits the possibilities for change (Brooking, 2005:24).

The WPR approach to policy analysis is useful as it directs attention to the ways in which interests and power relations are sustained or challenged through problem representations (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). The approach follows the idea that a “problematization of problems themselves can be a means to unveiling dominant social and power relationships” (Edmunds, 2010:22). Bacchi’s approach acknowledges that the way in which a problem is represented can be to the benefit of some and to the detriment to others (Bacchi, 1999:6), thus it is useful as it allows the researcher to comment on the interests served by the problem representations of the groups under examination. This was appropriate for this research as the researcher could unpack whose interests are represented within the dominant problem representations of unemployment.

The power relations that the WPR approach highlights are important as the accepted representation of a problem has implications for shaping and limiting the possibilities for change. The approach delves deeply into the shaping of the problem and importance attached to a particular problem, as a main insight of the WPR approach is the “need to uncover problem representations and to see where they, and by implication where they do not, lead” (Bacchi, 1999:5; Brooking, 2005:20). This is because the ways in which problems are represented have a variety of effects which limit the change that can be achieved (Brooking, 2005:18). Because this approach highlights what is excluded from problem representations, it allows the exclusions to be discussed and considered, instead of simply taking the formulation of the problem as given (Brooking, 2005:24). It thereby creates the possibility of taking account of the implications of representations and the effects they have on people’s lives (Joensen, 2010:7). The approach encourages the analyst to reflect on the “overall shape of policy initiatives, what they encompass and what they leave out” (Bacchi, 1999:63).

The utility of the WPR approach is that, by sensitising individuals to the problem representations which underlie policies and policy proposals, policies which avoid some

pitfalls can be promoted (Bacchi, 1999:71). Thus, the approach allows the researcher to unpack problem representations and examine why change has come about in some ways and not in others (Bacchi, 1999:71). Through the unpacking of problem representations of the groups of significant actors under investigation, Bacchi's allowed the politics and tensions caused by the different representations of unemployment and potential political effects to be examined. By examining the problem representations of unemployment and to whom the problem representation directed attention, the interests of the actors could be explored. The potential political effects of the shared and divergent problem representations of unemployment were easier to identify through the use of problem representations.

Bacchi's approach offers a unique manner of thinking beyond single issues and interrogates the division implied by listing distinct policy areas, as well as encouraging analysts and others to think about how policy areas overlap (1999:2). While this relates more to policy, the same concept of overlap can be applied to the problem representations of different actors. Bacchi's approach allowed the analyst to uncover the problem representations of the different significant actors in unemployment policy in South Africa. The approach enables easy identification of congruence and divergence between the various problem representations of unemployment. The easily identifiable overlap in problem representations is useful because of aiding in providing a better picture of unemployment in South Africa as problematised by significant actors in the country.

Carol Bacchi's approach provided an appropriate method for achieving the aims of this research. It provided a different way of analysing the issue of unemployment in South Africa along with various insights into the effects of representing unemployment in various ways. Bacchi's approach was congruent with the ontological and epistemological claims in which this research is rooted. In other words, both the WPR approach and this research maintain that the researcher cannot be separated from reality and that knowledge of the world is generated through a person's lived experience, thus there is no objective truth that exists independently of individuals (Weber, 2004:iv). Thus, as implied by the section on post-positivism, is the belief was that Bacchi's approach would bring

something different to the study of unemployment in South Africa through the use of problem representations.

To summarise: Carol Bacchi's approach to examining problem representations was deemed the most appropriate for the current research because it allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the unemployment problem and facilitates unpacking the political implications of competing representations. This research, in seeking to explore the representations of unemployment, was expected to provide valuable insights in terms of how the problem of unemployment is perceived. Lifting out how the problem of unemployment is perceived could illustrate what important aspects are left out of the accepted representations of unemployment and provide an insight into the politics surrounding the construction of policy solutions and policy problems. The exploration of the problem representations could demonstrate whether the cause of the problem has been constructed so as to make it a manageable problem, or in a way so as to shift the blame to a different government department

Carol Bacchi's approach focuses on understandings held by individuals, in particular individuals that inform public policy, and by government. Her work contributes to unemployment research as it not only concentrates on how the problem is represented, but also highlights what is excluded from these representations. Thus, the WPR approach allows one to move beyond simply listing the meanings of representations and has practical relevance derived from exploring the discursive and potential political implications of the representations. The exploration of these implications allows more accurately tailored solutions to be proposed to the problems being investigated.

### *2.5.3 Potential criticisms of using this approach*

Every approach comes with certain limitations and none are immune to criticism derived from rival approaches. Carol Bacchi's approach is rather recent and has been subjected to little direct criticism (Edmunds, 2010:25). The main criticism that has been against it is that it lacks objectivity and focuses on problem representations (Joensen, 2010:6). This is

because most of those who level this criticism do not agree with the post-structuralist method and therefore, find these representations to be irrelevant in the process of policy analysis (Joensen, 2010:7). It has been suggested that the same general criticism that can be applied to critical discourse analysis (CDA) is applicable to Bacchi's approach as well (Edmunds, 2010:25). Edmunds argues that Bacchi's approach, like CDA, presents only limited interpretations as it is biased, taking a critical stance and selecting texts to analyse which suit its interpretation (Edmunds, 2010:25). Thus, Bacchi's approach may simply reflect the perspective of the researcher, because it is very dependent on the interpretation of problem representations within policy (Edmunds, 2010:25). Another possible criticism is that this approach is at risk of implying that the interpretations offered by this approach are the only valid interpretations (Edmunds, 2010:25).

Carol Bacchi's approach does provide answers to the above critique (Edmunds, 2010:25). Bacchi argues that problem definition is inherently subjective and thus, is value-laden (Joensen, 2010:7). Bacchi argues that all political actors, including theorists and analysts are involved in the "structuring discourses of our era and our cultures" (Bacchi, 1999:48). The concern over partiality is addressed by the approach, as Bacchi argues that social science is not, and cannot be made free from judgements, and clearly states a normative agenda through the assumption that problem representations benefit some while hurting others (2009:44; Edmunds, 2010:25).

Bacchi's approach stresses reflexivity throughout the analytical process (Edmunds, 2010:25). It is acknowledged that researchers are immersed in the social world, the conceptual logics and discourses which it encompasses (Edmunds, 2010:25). Thus, reflexivity allows the researcher to maintain some distance through this awareness, which thus prevents the researcher from simply buying into specific problem representations and their discursive critiques (Edmunds, 2010:25). Contrary to the critique mentioned above, Bacchi's approach does not imply that its particular interpretations are the only valid ones; it acknowledges that others may perform similar analyses and yield dissimilar results which may be equally valid (Edmunds, 2010:26). Thus, the approach contains within it the negation of the criticism that has been levelled at it.

## 2.6 Conclusion

There is a vast amount of literature on the topic of unemployment, both locally and globally. This is because unemployment has been an issue in many countries around the world since the 1900s. This literature review has shown the breadth of research on unemployment as it has crossed over into disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology and political science. Most of the literature appears to emanate from the field of economics and almost all the literature found through the current investigation, both research in general and research on South Africa, was founded in positivist tradition.

The literature that focuses on the South African unemployment problem originates from economics and uses positivist methods to analyse the problem. A large amount of this research reviewed used econometric models or other quantitative analyses to study unemployment. The focus largely is on determinants of unemployment, with a recent focus on youth unemployment. Race, gender, level of education and age were found to be the most important determinants of unemployment. The debate on the character of unemployment in South Africa has concerned whether it is voluntary or involuntary, with research supporting both sides of the divide. Debate around the policies of trade liberalisation and wage subsidies has dealt with their effects on unemployment in South Africa and evidence to support the claim that the effects of trade liberalisation and wage subsidies serve to reduce unemployment has been presented, while other evidence shows that it serves to increase unemployment. Further evidence demonstrates negligible effects from these policies.

A brief overview of the origins and assumptions of positivism was provided along with a description of the products of this research. Positivism assumes an objective reality which can be observed and tested to find generalised laws. Thus, positivist research produces statistics and numbers in order to generalise findings to the wider population. An overview of post-positivism with the focus on interpretivism was provided in the next section and a brief explanation of interpretivism's origins and assumptions was presented. Interpretivism maintains that research can never be value free as the researcher cannot be

removed from the situation; therefore the research will in part reflect some of the researcher's values. The overview of interpretivism was included to situate Carol Bacchi's approach within the interpretivist tradition. Criticism directed at interpretivism was discussed, and the products of post positivist research were outlined. Post-positivist research most often produces narratives which seek to provide understanding of the phenomenon in question.

This research attempted to move away from the positivist orientation toward a post positivist approach as outlined above. In order to gain better understanding of problem definitions and the implications that follow from such definitions, the researcher used Carol Bacchi's WPR approach. Bacchi's approach analyses problem representations, to lift out what is left unproblematised and the implications of the policy silences and problem representations. This chapter provided an outline of the WPR approach. The usefulness and insights of Bacchi's approach were highlighted to demonstrate the value of applying the approach to the issue of unemployment. The chapter also discussed the potential criticisms that could be levelled at the approach.

The research was expected to add to the literature on unemployment by being the first to use Bacchi's approach in research on unemployment and by lifting out what has been left unproblematised in the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa. The expectation was that the use of the WPR approach would provide different insights into how the problem of unemployment is understood in South Africa and into the political implications of the representation of the problem, as well as insight into correspondence with the representations of state and non-governmental actors and the possible intra-alliance tensions that competing representations may spark. The following chapter identifies the problem representations of the various significant actors, while the next examines the policy solutions and policy proposals to uncover the problem representations. Shared and divergent representations are also identified.

## Chapter 3: Problem representations of unemployment

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa. Every solution contains within it an understanding of what the problem is and the representation has important effects (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:112). Thus, “[p]roblem representations....are political interventions that constitute policy ‘problems’ in the real” (Bacchi, 2009:35) as they have significant effects on what is seen as problematic, what is not problematised and how individuals think about these issues and themselves. The identification of problem representations is an essential part of the What’s the problem represented to be? (WPR) approach to policy analysis, as policies and policy proposals “create or produce policy ‘problems’ as particular kinds of problems, with important ‘shaping’ effects for social subjects and social relations” (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:114).

The chapter begins with the identification of the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa. A brief overview of how problem representations are established and how the approach moves from policy solutions to problem representations is also outlined. In order to identify the representations held by the various actors (the South African government, business, COSATU and the SACP), the policy solutions advocated by the different actors are outlined. The various problem representations of unemployment as derived from an analysis of the policy solutions that have been suggested by each actor are detailed. Those representations shared among the South African government and non-governmental actors are highlighted and briefly discussed. A discussion of the shared problem representations allows the dominant representations to be identified. The problem representations where government and business, COSATU and the SACP differ will be pointed out in this section on the constructions of unemployment. Shared and divergent representations allow the analyst to comment on the interests being served by dominant representations and also allow a better exploration of the political effects to be discussed in Chapter 4.

## 3.2 Identifying problem representations

Problem representations are at the heart of Bacchi's approach. The approach begins from the premise that policy problems do not exist independently from their representations and that an investigation of the policy solutions will uncover what the problem is represented to be (Bacchi, 2009:131). The approach proposes that particular policy solutions impose certain interpretations on the issue in question (Bacchi, 2010:2). The extraction of representations is an important step in the application of the approach.

### 3.2.1 *How to establish problem representations*

Bacchi argues that the ways in which actors, specifically the government, talk about a certain issue and the proposals they develop to address the issue provides a certain shape to that problem (1999). To find the problem representations, an examination of the proposed or accepted policy solutions is necessary (Bacchi, 2004:131). The problem representation embedded within the policy solution can be uncovered through focusing on the language, concepts and categories which are used to frame the problem (Bacchi, 1999:2). Thus, the way in which a policy solution is discussed in a document provides a framework for viewing the problem (Bacchi, 1999:40).

In order to determine the problem representations of unemployment, it is necessary to examine the policy solutions and apply the first question in the list of Bacchi's six questions to facilitate the application of the approach. The question is: What is the problem represented to be? This question lifts out the problem representation that is in the solution. The question also allows the analyst to uncover the cause and concern contained within the policy solution. The identification of the cause and concern provides a base for the analyst to probe more deeply into the assumptions and presuppositions underlying the problem representations (Bacchi, 2007:2). Analysis of the concern of representations can be used to widen the analysis so as to include larger policy debates (Bacchi, 2007:2). To uncover the problem representations of unemployment, the various solutions suggested

for unemployment are discussed and the first question is applied. From this representation, the cause and concern of the problem is established.

### **3.3 Policy solutions**

A commonly recurring solution set out by the South African government, as well as business and the SACP (Economic Development Department, 2010; Bernstein, 2010; Roberts, 2004:1), has been put into practice through the EPWP. This solution is to create temporary but meaningful employment by expanding, improving and maintaining infrastructure. Related to this solution are training, better education and skill development as a means of reducing unemployment (Economic Development Department, 2010:19). The EPWP also contains the government solution of providing work experience through these temporary employment opportunities. The government proposes better support for small businesses and cultivation of better relationships between government and business as a way to increase employment (Economic Development Department, 2010). This solution includes increasing and improving stakeholder commitment to ensure that economic activities focus on growing employment-creating opportunities. The government has also accepted the youth wage subsidy as a solution to the problem of South African unemployment (National Treasury, 2011).

South African business has proposed back-to-basics education and skills development as a solution to the problem of unemployment (BUSA, 2012a). Business has suggested that a “combination of tax breaks and year-long exemptions from laws on hiring and firing [be given] to employers hiring first-time employees between the age of 18 and 24” (Bernstein, 2010) in order to reduce unemployment. Business has also proposed that Special Economic Zones be created that exempt businesses located within them from “costs like company taxes, tariffs, and all but the most basic labour, health and safety laws” (Bernstein, 2010). It is suggested that different patterns of incentives and exemptions be attempted to uncover the best combination. Another suggestion is that a vocational education programme linked to apprenticeships be instituted in a number of South Africa’s fast growing medium-sized towns (Bernstein, 2010; CDE, 2009:3).

Business has also backed the implementation of youth wage subsidies (BUSA, 2012b). Business has suggested that large and simple employment schemes be created which guarantee dignified and useful employment (such as building roads, providing basic social services) for those that apply (Bernstein, 2010; CDE, 2009:3).

COSATU has suggested that training and skills development programmes which focus on both basic and high-level cognitive skills be used to combat unemployment (COSATU, 2012a). Most of COSATU's solutions to unemployment focus on education, such as the proposed solution that the Further Education and Training (FET) sector be expanded to accommodate one million learners so that the youth labour force is reduced by extending individuals' stay in the education and training system (COSATU, 2012). COSATU has furthermore proposed that state-owned enterprises absorb young people and provide practical training and work experience to the unemployed (COSATU, 2012; Craven, 2012). ). Another suggestion by COSATU is that government should create incentives for employers to create new jobs, as well as provide relief to employers that are struggling to avoid retrenching workers (COSATU, 2012a). That the expansion of infrastructure and labour-intensive production be used as a way of reducing unemployment was also proposed (Craven, 2012).

The majority of the SACP's proposals focus on education, training and skills development as the solution to South Africa's unemployment problem (SACP, 2012; SACP, 2011). In this regard, the SACP has proposed that skills development programmes as well as in-service training and learnerships be provided to reduce unemployment (In praise of communism, 2010:29). The SACP have suggested that all those that achieve the necessary entrance requirements for tertiary education institutions be accommodated so as to reduce the youth labour force (SACP, 2011). A further proposal by the SACP is that labour-intensive infrastructure projects be used to create employment (Hoveka, 2010:12). The SACP also proposed that the EPWP be used to create sustainable employment as a means of reducing unemployment (SACP, 2012).

### **3.4 The problem representations of significant actors**

The South African government, business, COSATU and the SACP all have more than one representation of the problem of unemployment. The myriad of proposed policy solutions indicate that unemployment is understood as a multifaceted problem. These various ways of representing the problem of unemployment in South Africa as seen by the significant actors in unemployment policy are discussed below.

#### *3.4.1 Government's representations of unemployment*

Training and skills development as a solution to the problem of unemployment came about as a shortage of required skills has shaped South Africa's economic and social landscape (Department of Labour, 2003:1). This lack of appropriate skills, training and basic education was caused by the policies and structural shifts of the Apartheid government (Department of Labour, 2003:1). The industrial training system that was in effect during the Apartheid era was racially exclusionary and provided low skills training (Kraak, 2004:46). This history of low skills and the large skills shortage which exists has resulted in the solution of training and skills development being adopted by government. This solution therefore presumes that the problem of unemployment is due to a lack of training and skills. The concern of this representation is that individuals do not possess the skills required to make them employable.

Work experience has been suggested as a solution, as research in South Africa has shown that past work experience is positively linked to future employment prospects (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). This solution has mostly been considered in the area of youth unemployment as it is argued that older workers are preferred due to their experience (Lewis, 2001:33). Work experience has been suggested by government and some academics (Levinsohn & Pugatch, 2011:12) to give the youth a better opportunity to gain employment. The government instituted the EPWP with the intention of providing work experience to the unemployed as well as providing training so as to increase the employability of those enrolled in the programme (Department of Public Works,

2005:11). The youth wage subsidy, which has become policy but is yet to be implemented, also aims to provide young unemployed individuals with work experience. This solution contains within it the representation of the problem of unemployment as a lack of work experience. The concern of this representation is with the large numbers of individuals who have never been employed.

Education has been seen as the key to fighting unemployment in recognition of the deficiency of schooling for the majority of South Africans under the apartheid regime. The Bantu Education Act of 1952 ensured that the education that Black people received limited their potential for tertiary education, ensuring that they would remain in the working class (Ocampo, 2004). The quality of education received by most South Africans was below par under Apartheid as the teachers in Black schools were mostly uncertified and the teacher-pupil ratio was high in schools that were not classified as White schools (Ocampo, 2004). This inherited low-quality schooling system has resulted in the drive for better education and has also affected how unemployment is seen, as a large number of those unemployed experienced the Apartheid education system. The South African government sees the solution to unemployment as education. Education, as mentioned in this chapter, refers to the mainstream schooling system and excludes the work being done through the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETAs)<sup>6</sup>. The government views the unemployment problem as due to a lack of education and the low quality of education. The concern is that unemployed individuals are not employable as they do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills that a functioning education system was meant to provide to them.

Expansion, and maintenance of and public investment in infrastructure have been proposed as a solution to unemployment by the government. Infrastructure projects have been used to create employment and alleviate poverty worldwide (World Bank, 2012), but this solution presents the problem as a lack of employment opportunities. The formulation diagnoses the problem as not enough jobs to provide work for a large part of

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<sup>6</sup> SETAs are used to provide sector specific learning activities, to promote learnerships as well as the development and accreditation of learning programs. SETAs also perform quality assurance and certification functions (SETA's in South Africa, 2011)

the working age population. The concern of this problem representation is that there is a large surplus of labour and not enough work for those of working age.

The government recently adopted a youth wage subsidy which is to be paid to employers who hire workers between the ages of 18 and 29. The solution presents the problem of unemployment as a problem of youth unemployment. The unemployed youth makes up a large percentage of the total unemployed population, as 73 per cent of the unemployed are under the age of 35 (Price, 2012). This presentation of the problem highlights the costs of labour as the cause of the problem as the youth wage subsidy plans to reduce the cost of hiring new, young employees. The concern of the representation is that employers show a preference for older individuals.

The government is the only actor that proposed Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and improved stakeholder commitment as solutions to the unemployment problem. PPPs are defined by law as contracts between a government institution and a private party where the private party performs an institutional function and/or uses state property in terms of specific output specifications (National Treasury, 2012). This presents the cause of the problem as a lack of cooperation and concerted action between government and private actors. The concern underlying this representation is that there is a lack of commitment to job creation by the private sector and not enough is being done by government. The concern could also be construed as a lack of engagement by the private sector only. However, the New Growth Path points to the work that is needed by the government and business (Economic Development Department, 2010:29), which makes it more likely that the concern is the strength of commitment from both actors.

#### *3.4.2 South African business' representations of unemployment*

South African business has suggested training and skills development programmes as means to reduce unemployment. Business has also proposed vocational education as way to increase employment (Bernstein, 2010). Business thereby presents the problem not necessarily as a lack of education, but as a mismatch between the skills that the current

education system is producing and the skills which the market requires (Bernstein, 2010). The concern of this representation is that individuals are unwittingly making themselves unemployable by not aligning their studies with the skills required in the market. This is not only the case in tertiary education where individuals have more freedom to choose subjects. In schools individuals are allowed to pick subjects from grade 10 which determines the fields in which they can enrol for further education. The choice of subjects is often not based on what will provide the best job opportunities.

Business also believes that back-to-basics education is essential to reducing unemployment (BUSA, 2012a). South African business therefore presents the problem as stemming from the low quality of education. The concern is the employability of individuals, as the quality of education being provided to future employees is below the standard required to equip individuals with basic skills to function in the workplace. Studies conducted by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) showed that South African Grade 6 pupils performed worse in reading and numeracy than much poorer countries in the SADC region (Chisholm, 2011:50). Few matriculants possess the necessary skills or even basic reading and writing skills to function in higher education or in a workplace (Hoffman, 2008). Thus, the poor quality of education in many primary and secondary schools brings into question the employability of school leavers (Hoffman, 2008).

Business has also suggested that the government create large and simple employment schemes which guarantee useful employment, such as infrastructure projects and the provision of basic social services, and provide a subsistence wage (CDE, 2009:3). The solution presents the problem as a lack of employment opportunities in South Africa. The concern in this representation is that there are too many individuals and too few job opportunities are being created. It also views unemployment as due to a lack of skills as evidenced by the 'simple' employments schemes. The concern is that individuals do not possess the skills required by the labour market. In further discussions, this representation

will be included in the section that deals with the problem representation as a lack of training and skills.

Business has suggested a variety of incentive-based schemes which focus on reducing the costs of conducting business in South Africa, as well as reducing the costs of hiring and firing employees (CDE, 2009:3). The incentive-based solutions present the problem as the high cost of business and labour within South Africa. This is evidenced by the focus of the incentive schemes on lowering the input costs of the businesses. The concern within this representation is the restrictive labour laws and high minimum wages.

Business did not propose the solution of youth wage subsidies to reduce unemployment, but has backed this policy (BUSA, 2012b). This solution presents the problem as one of youth unemployment and represents the cause of this unemployment as the high cost of hiring and training new young labour. Young workers often require training and supervision as they lack the knowledge and experience that older workers have (Mayer *et al*, 2011:52). The concern within this representation of the problem is that employers prefer older workers with more experience.

### *3.4.3 COSATU's representations of unemployment*

COSATU has suggested training and skills development as a solution to unemployment (Craven, 2012). This solution presents the problem as a lack of training and skills development available to the unemployed. The concern that underlines this representation is that unemployed individuals' lack of skills and training reduces their employability.

COSATU has furthermore suggested that state enterprises absorb unemployed individuals and provide them with work experience (COSATU, 2012a:3). This solution could be seen to present the problem as one of a lack of work experience. The concern illustrated in this representation is that individuals without work experience are less employable than those with experience. While this solution would seem to be based on the premise that the chances of remaining in formal employment are greatly increased,

once formal employment is gained (Levinsohn, 2008:3), a secondary cause of the problem can be seen as government's lack of job creation through state-owned enterprises. This cause is evidenced by the same solution due to the focus on the government providing individuals with work experience. The concern of this problem representation is that the South African government is not creating enough employment opportunities through state-owned enterprises.

COSATU has also suggested that tertiary education be used to reduce unemployment (COSATU, 2012a:3 ), by suggesting the expansion of the numbers of individuals enrolled in tertiary education so as to remove more young individuals from the labour force. This solution therefore presents the problem as one of youth unemployment. The solution also represents the problem as too many young individuals in the labour force, which reveals the concern as too many individuals are entering the labour force as soon as they have finished their secondary education. There is the additional concern that too few individuals are engaging in any post-secondary or tertiary education.

Another proposal by COSATU concerns the reduction of unemployment by expanding infrastructure and more labour-intensive production methods (Craven, 2012). The first solution presents the problem as a problem of not enough work opportunities and the second as a reliance on capital-intensive production. Both solutions represent the concern as the large surplus of labour, with a reduced demand for labour.

COSATU has suggested that incentives for hiring new labour and relief for those employers struggling to avoid retrenching workers be provided by government (Craven, 2012b). There is no concrete formulation of the incentives or relief suggested by COSATU, but the problem appears to be represented as the high cost of business standing in the way of creating more employment. The concern of the representation is that cheaper and less labour-intensive methods are being chosen that only serves to exacerbate the unemployment problem.

#### *3.4.4 The SACP's problem representations of unemployment*

The SACP has suggested that training, skills development and learnerships be provided to deal with the problem of unemployment (SACP Central Committee, 2010:10). The suggestion of learnerships and in-service training for the youth represents the problem as one of youth unemployment. This representation sees the cause of the problem as a lack of training and skills. The concern of this representation is the employability of the South African youth.

The SACP has also suggested that tertiary education be expanded to allow for greater numbers of individuals to be enrolled, thereby removing them from the labour force (SACP, 2011). This solution represents the problem as the large number of people in the labour force. The concern represented in this solution is the large size of the labour force and that too many young individuals are not pursuing tertiary education.

A further SACP proposal is that labour-intensive infrastructure projects such as the EPWP be used to create sustainable employment. This proposal represents the problem as a lack of job opportunities, as well as an under-utilisation of the labour force. The concern of these representations is the large working age population and the temporary nature of the jobs created through infrastructure projects.

### **3.5 Shared and divergent problem representations**

The South African government, business, COSATU and the SACP view the solutions for the South African unemployment problem in different ways. However, from examination of the documents listed in the chapter in which the research methodology is presented, identifies a pattern of commonly proposed and accepted solutions. Government, business, COSATU and the SACP converge on some of the same solutions to the problem of unemployment. The identification of those problem representations shared between the South African government and the various actors are explored to aid in identifying the dominant unemployment problem representations. Dominant problem representations

are those representations which inform South African public policy and are shared by government and at least one non-governmental actor. The problem representations that are shared by government and business, COSATU or the SACP also provide way for the analyst to identify and comment on the interests that are being served by the dominant representations.

Divergence between the various actors' representations of unemployment can also be identified. Divergence can be seen as South African business proposes solutions based more on economic aspects, while COSATU and the SACP propose more education and state-led solutions and the government proposes more cooperative (state and business) solutions. The divergence of problem representations identified among the tripartite alliance members is of particular interest in this study. This is because examining the divergence between the government and the SACP and COSATU allows the analyst to explore and comment on the political implications of such divergence. Examination of the divergence of problem representations of unemployment can also highlight possible aspects that are not being discussed due to the construction of the problem of unemployment.

### *3.5.1 Shared representations of government and non-governmental actors*

All but one of the South African government's representations of unemployment are shared with one or more non-governmental actors. All of the actors under consideration share the representation of the problem as a lack of employment opportunities, as was demonstrated by the infrastructure solutions put forward by all actors. Business, COSATU, the SACP and the government share the representation of the unemployment problem as due to a lack of skills and training. This was demonstrated through the training and skills development solutions suggested by all.

COSATU shares government's representation of the problem as a lack of work experience. Business and government share the representation of the problem as a youth unemployment problem and the costs of labour, particularly the costs of hiring young

people. This has been demonstrated through the support for the implementation of the youth wage subsidy by business. South African business also shares government's representation of unemployment as due to a lack of quality education. This is demonstrated through business and government advocating back-to-basics education.

The discussion highlights the dominant representations of the problem of unemployment. In this study, the dominant representations are those problem representations which are found in public policy and are shared by government and at least one non-government actor. These dominant problem representations of unemployment are: lack of employment opportunities; lack of skills and training; lack of quality education; high costs of labour; and a lack of work experience. These dominant representations of unemployment will aid in the discussion on the political effects of problem representations that follows in Chapter 4. Dominant representations aid in identifying the interests being served by these representations that can have a political effect, which contributes to the discussion in Chapter 4.

### *3.5.2 Divergent representations by government and non-governmental actors*

The one unemployment problem representation by government that was not shared by any of the other actors is the representation of the problem as due to a lack of stakeholder commitment and concerted action by government and business. The most noticeable divergence in problem representations is uncovered when the solution of the youth wage subsidy is examined. COSATU and the SACP are against the youth wage subsidy, instead constructing the youth unemployment problem as too many young people in the labour force. Government and business, however, are seen through the youth wage subsidy to be formulating the problem as the high costs of hiring new young labour. Another divergence in problem representations of unemployment is the incentive-based solutions suggested by business and COSATU. These representations are not shared by the other actors. The various incentives each suggest show that business' representation also differs from COSATU's representation. Business presents the problem as high costs of hiring new labour and high costs of conducting business, as can be seen by the

incentives schemes focusing on reducing the costs of business. COSATU's representation of the problem does not problematise the costs of labour but instead presents the issue as the high cost of business.

This discussion has pointed out divergent problem representations of unemployment will aid in the exploration of the potential political effects of problem representations. By highlighting the contestation over some of the problem representations, the identification of possible strains on the alliance due to problem representations is aided. This is particularly noticeable in the contestation over the problem of youth unemployment.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The chapter commenced with outlining how problem representations can be identified. As the problem representations are embedded in policy solutions, the chapter progressed to a brief discussion of each actor's solutions to unemployment. These solutions fall into the categories of training, skills development and work experience solutions, education-based solutions, infrastructure solutions, incentive-based solutions, youth wage subsidies and stakeholder and Public Private Partnerships solutions. The problem representations of each actor were discussed with the cause and concern of the representation being highlighted. The problem representations that non-governmental actors share with government were discussed. Shared representations were discussed so as to highlight the dominant problem representations. This was done to aid in the identification the interests served by these representations, as well as to provide a basis from which to explore the political effects of the dominant problem representations of unemployment, all of which will be discussed in the following chapter. Divergent problem representations were also discussed in order to assist in the examination of political effects and possible strains on the tripartite alliance.

This chapter showed that there are many commonly proposed solutions to unemployment suggested by the South African government and non-governmental actors. All the actors propose training and skills development solutions, solutions based on education and

infrastructure-based solutions, although they often are of different formats. There is no congruence between all the actors regarding all the problem representations. Divergent representations of the problem of unemployment in South Africa exist. The divergent problem representations are: the government's representation of the problem as due to a lack of stakeholder commitment and concerted action by government and business; COSATU and the SACP's representation of the problem as too many young people in the labour force and government and business' representation of the problem as the high cost of hiring new young labour; business' representation of the problem as high labour costs and high costs of business and COSATU's representation of the problem as the high costs of business in South Africa. Some solutions have also been resisted by different actors for example the youth wage subsidy which government has adopted and which business supports, but which is strongly rejected by COSATU and the SACP. Chapter 4 focuses on this theme of resistance to the youth wage subsidy in the section on political effects.

Chapter 4 also discusses the effects of the identified problem representations of unemployment with the use of Bacchi's discursive effects and using the approach to unpack the politics surrounding unemployment representations, the utility of applying the WPR approach to unemployment is demonstrated. Chapter 4 focuses of the effects of the problem representations of unemployment and looks at both the discursive and potential political effects of these constructions of unemployment.

## **Chapter 4: The effects of problem representations of unemployment**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Bacchi argues that how a problem is represented is very important as it has meaningful and real implications which have considerable effects on individuals which “need to be commented on and assessed” (1999:54). To this end, Bacchi requires the analyst to examine what the representations of the issue exclude from consideration and how the issue can be thought about differently (1999:10). The effects that follow from the identified representations also need to be considered (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115). This chapter does both by noting the silences that the problem representations generate and by providing some alternatives that could help formulate the problem in a more constructive manner. For example, the representation of the problem too many people looking for work and not enough existing job opportunities.

Bacchi’s approach draws attention to three types of implications or effects. The first involves discursive effects, which include what is discussed and what is not discussed or problematised (Bacchi, 2010:4). The second concerns subjectification effects, which has to do with the impact of problem representations on how people are thought about and how they think about themselves (Bacchi, 2010:4). The final one involves lived effects, which is the material impact on the lives of individuals (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:115).

This study focuses on the discursive effects of the problem representations. The reason for a focus on discursive effects is that they form an integral part of the approach taken. A major insight of the approach is to sensitise the analyst to what has been left unproblematised by the representations of the problem. Consideration of the discursive effects is useful as these effects illustrate some of the insights which a different way of analysing unemployment can bring to bear on the topic. For example, it demonstrates what the problem representations of unemployment draw attention to, as well as what those representations draw attention away from. A discussion of the discursive effects of the representations also aids in providing a more detailed analysis of unemployment,

which in turn demonstrates the use of the application of Bacchi's approach to the problem of unemployment.

The subjectification effects and lived effects which Bacchi highlights are not discussed. The reason for this is that the subjectification effects and lived effects are very difficult to identify from the problem representations of unemployment. Due also to the constraints of the study, the discursive effects and political effects of the problem representations of unemployment were considered to add more value than a focus on subjectification and lived effects. The discursive effects and unpacking the politics surrounding the problem representations of unemployment were chosen as they best illustrate the utility of applying Bacchi's approach to the study of unemployment in South Africa. This is because lifting out what is excluded from the representations, and the potential political effects of those representations, it provides some insight into how the focus on certain representations of the problem can prevent substantial decreases in South African unemployment. These effects also highlight what other areas need to be focused on in order to create the larger number of jobs needed to reduce unemployment. Therefore, in order to best demonstrate the usefulness of an alternative way to analyse unemployment, the discursive effects and potential political effects of unemployment representations were chosen as the focus.

A discussion of the effects of the problem representations forms the basis of this chapter. The chapter begins with the rationale behind the choice to focus on the discursive effects as well as the political effects of the problem representations of unemployment. A discussion of the discursive effects of the problem representations follows the rationale for the focus on discursive and potential political effects. The next section discusses the potential political effects of the problem representations of unemployment. The discussion on potential political effects in this chapter is facilitated in a large part by the identification of the shared and divergent problem representations of unemployment that are discussed in the previous chapter.

## 4.2 Discursive effects of the problem representations

Problem representations have discursive effects which limit what can and cannot be discussed. Certain formulations of the problem remove from consideration those issues which are not included in the problem representations. This section explores the discursive effects of problem representations of unemployment. This is achieved by highlighting what and what is not discussed in the problem representations of unemployment.

### 4.2.1 *What is discussed and where attention is directed to?*

The construction of the problem of unemployment as a lack of training and skills is subscribed to by government, the SACP and COSATU. This representation of the problem of unemployment directs attention to the qualifications and skills of individuals. This formulation problematises the skills and training that individuals receive. The assumption underlying this is that individuals somehow are partially responsible for being unemployed, as employment is constructed as attainable if one has the right training and has acquired skills. This interpretation keeps the focus on the skills shortage which South Africa has been experiencing.

This construction of unemployment emphasises the responsibility that government has in providing training and skills to the unemployed. This responsibility for action by government appears to stem from the government's aim to correct inequalities by aiding those who are classified as previously disadvantaged<sup>7</sup>. A large number of people that are unemployed are categorised as previously disadvantaged and the ANC-led government has made promises to increase the number of previously disadvantaged groupings in employment (African Charter on Human and People's Rights). COSATU and the SACP

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<sup>7</sup> A previously disadvantaged individual or historically disadvantaged individual (HDI) is defined as: "a South African citizen who, due to the apartheid policy that had been in place, had no franchise in national elections prior to the introduction of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1983 (Act 110 of 1983) or the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act 200 of 1993); and/or who is a female; and/or who has a disability, provided that a person who obtained South African citizenship on or after the coming into effect of the interim Constitution, is deemed not to be an HDI" (Bolton, 2006:210).

direct attention to the government and government's responsibility for providing training and skills development programmes for those who are unemployed. This emphasis excludes the role of all non-government actors in reducing unemployment. By focusing attention on the lack of skills and training, COSATU and the SACP's fight for better minimum wages and other workers' rights, all of which increase the cost of hiring workers, is left unexamined. The government's own formulation of the problem places a large emphasis on the role that the state has to play in providing these training and skills development programmes.

Business constructs the problem as a mismatch of the skills being produced and the skills that employers require. This construction implies that individuals are partly responsible for being unemployed as they have acquired the wrong skills to be employed. The formulation also implies that the responsibility for action lies with the Departments of Labour and Education, because they have provided little vocational education and have failed to link these vocational education streams with apprenticeships or companies in need of such skilled workers (Bernstein, 2010). In this problem representation, attention is directed to the South African tertiary institutions for not producing enough graduates in business-related fields, as there is high demand for these skills (Mbanjwa, 2012). Business' representation of unemployment places the responsibility for action with government and individuals.

The problem of unemployment has been constructed as a lack of work experience by COSATU and the South African government. This interpretation places the responsibility for action on individuals and the government, which can be seen through the solutions of state-owned enterprises and the EPWP that the government has implemented. The assumption underlying this representation is that, once employment is gained, it is easier to remain employed or find employment again. There is evidence which supports this assumption. Levinsohn (2008) and Kingdon and Knight (2004) provide the evidence that demonstrates how previous work experience in the formal sector significantly decreases the likelihood of an individual experiencing unemployment again.

The problem of unemployment is also formulated as a lack of quality education by both South African business and government, as evidenced by the focus by both on education. The assumption underlying this construction of the unemployment problem is that a good education will inevitably lead to employment. This assumption problematises the employability of individuals as it places an emphasis on the qualifications of the unemployed. It also focuses on the quality of those qualifications as a grade 12 senior certificate without mathematics, sciences and with a bare minimum pass is not seen as the equivalent to a senior certificate with mathematics, science and an 80 percent aggregate (Bartlett & Gustafsson, 2008:9). This interpretation of the unemployment problem places the responsibility for action on the government, in particular the Department of Education. The responsibility is placed with the Department as it is responsible for ensuring that the public schooling system produces quality education that equips pupils for the workplace.

The problem representation of unemployment as too many young people in the labour force is how COSATU and the SACP have constructed the problem. Both have suggested the expansion of the higher education system to allow for the enrolment of more people in tertiary education as a means to remove more young people from the labour force. The assumption underlying this representation is that the youth labour force is too large for the amount of work available. The implication of this construction of the problem of unemployment is that there is a need for a reduction in the number of people entering the labour force. The responsibility for action is placed on the Departments of Education and partly on individuals. It is the implied responsibility of the Department of Education to increase the number of individuals that FET colleges and universities can handle through better funding and resource allocation. This formulation implies that individuals have the responsibility to remain in education for as long as they can before entering the labour force.

The representation implicit in employment creation through infrastructure projects is that more labour intensive employment opportunities need to be created. This construction of the problem has been put forward by all the actors. The interpretation of the problem of

unemployment is underscored by the assumption that the problem is caused by a surplus of labour which can be absorbed through government infrastructure projects. This formulation has the effect of placing the responsibility for job creation on the government. It leaves out the role that business and entrepreneurs have in creating employment through the use of more labour-intensive techniques, expansion and innovation (Lewis, 2001:28). The implication is that it is the government that needs to respond to the unemployment problem. The effect is to direct attention to government infrastructure projects and to leave unproblematised the capital-intensive production methods used by business.

Government has viewed the construction of the problem as a lack of stakeholders' commitment and concerted action by government and business. Stakeholders and public private partnerships-based solutions are founded on the premise that the public and the private sector need to work together to create employment. The effect is to place responsibility for action on both government and business. The implication is that business and government have to find new and innovative ways of cooperating to increase job creation. The representation acknowledges the roles that the private and public sectors have in creating employment and that more can be achieved together (Holl, 1999:2). This formulation suggests that a more cooperative approach is needed to combat unemployment and that only cooperation of all key stakeholders can result in significant decreases in unemployment and perhaps even full employment. Full employment means that all available labour resources are being used in the most economically efficient way (Investopedia, 2012).

The interpretation of the problem as too many restrictive labour laws which increase the cost of labour and conducting business has been put forward by business (Mahadea, 2003:30). The assumption underlying this formulation is that the high costs of labour and business mean that businesses are able to hire fewer workers than they would if costs were lower. The effect of this representation is to place the responsibility for action on the government and in particular the legislature, which is the law-making body. This implies that the government needs to respond to the issue of high labour costs and reduce

restrictive labour practices to increase employment by making labour cheaper for business to hire. The government is seen as responsible for reducing costs to business so as to foster growth. This problem representation will be discussed further under political effects.

#### 4.2.2 *What is left unproblematised?*

Public policy dealing with the issue of unemployment is based on the representation of the problem as a lack of training and skills. The formulation of the problem as a lack of training and skills ignores other issues. Business' construction as a mismatch between the skills produced and those required by employers highlights what is excluded from the other representations. The assumption that a lack of training and skills underlies the unemployment problem does not touch on the issue of graduate unemployment (Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van der Westhuizen, 2006:2). There currently are approximately 600 000 unemployed graduates in South Africa (Mbanjwa, 2012). While the graduate unemployment is low compared to overall unemployment, it has risen rapidly since 1995 (Pauw *et al*, 2006:2). The incidence of graduate unemployment varies greatly between study fields, with the highest percentage in the arts and humanities, and the lowest percentages in the economic and management sciences and the natural sciences (Moleke, 2006:15). This provides evidence for business' representation that there is a mismatch of skills produced and the skills required by the market.

A consequence of presenting the problem as due to a lack of training and skills is that there is no problematisation of the gap between demand and supply of labour. Formulating the problem as one of unskilled labour ignores the fact that there is a larger supply of labour than there is demand for labour in South Africa. The underlying assumption that individuals are on some level responsible for being unemployed, prevents the exploration of the problem as too many people in the labour force and not enough new jobs. The representation of the problem as a lack of cooperation by government and other stakeholders also leaves the gap between demand and supply of labour unproblematised. By the representation precluding the issue of a too large labour

force, there is the appearance that the issue is being addressed without making significant reductions in unemployment as the excess supply of labour is not dealt with (McCord, 2005:565). Thus, the construction prevents the surfacing of policies that may prove unpopular with business (enforcement of labour-intensive production methods), labour (reducing labour regulations) or citizens (population control).

While skills development and training may serve to reduce unemployment, it is possible that smaller reductions in unemployment will be made than would be possible under a different interpretation of the problem. If the problem was represented as the supply of labour outstripping the demand for labour, there may be a drive toward fostering entrepreneurship or encouraging more labour-intensive production in existing South African businesses. This construction of the problem makes it easier for skilled individuals to find work. However, the representation also makes it more difficult to gain employment for those with skills that are not sought after in the market and those unable to acquire entrance to skills and training programmes (Siphambe, 2000:298).

This interpretation of the problem as a lack of work experience problematises access to work, as work experience cannot be gained without interning in a business, volunteering for unpaid work or working. This representation does not problematise labour demand and supply. It ignores the part that business can have in reducing unemployment. Focusing on this construction of unemployment, it is apparent that business' potential role in job creation via investment in more labour-intensive projects is ignored. The effect of this is to create the impression that business is not contributing to the problem of unemployment through the use of capital-intensive production methods (Lewis, 2001:24). By not problematising the use of capital-intensive production, there is a greater likelihood that labour supply will continue to outstrip the demand for labour, thus, resulting in the continuation of the unemployment problem.

Viewing unemployment as caused by a lack of work experience prevents the examination of South African labour regulations. The strict labour market regulations in South Africa contribute to the low levels of job creation by discouraging employers from hiring new

workers (Natrass & Seekings, 2001:494). This is because labour legislation makes it expensive to dismiss workers and because the remuneration for workers is not dependent on productivity. The growth in real wages outpaces the labour productivity growth, thus making workers more expensive (Klein, 2012:1). The imbalance between wages and labour productivity has impacted negatively on job creation, as capital has become cheaper in comparison to labour (Bernstein, 2011:3).

The effect of the problem representation of unemployment as a lack of work experience is to problematise access to work. The representation also directs attention to government to provide the unemployed with work experience through the EPWP and state-owned enterprises. A lack of work experience does not problematise the high costs of labour or the large surplus of labour in South Africa. Thus, the effect of this formulation of the unemployment problem is to limit the possibility for reducing unemployment substantially. This is because it does not take into consideration the creation of more jobs through labour-intensive methods, for example, but only focuses attention on work experience, which creates the impression that, if an individual has previous work experience, they should not struggle to find work. Constructing the problem as a lack of work experience only problematises the employability of individuals and leaves unproblematized how jobs can be created through labour-intensive production or the reduction of the costs of hiring new labour.

The assumption that a good education will lead to employment does not consider the problem of graduate unemployment and removes from consideration technical skills and aptitudes which cannot be pursued through the standard schooling system. The assumption that education is the key to reducing unemployment excludes the aptitudes of individuals from consideration as not everyone is academically inclined and can excel at school (Doerr & Ferguson, 1968:29). The consequence could be that individuals attempt to pursue tertiary education although their aptitude lies elsewhere, as they attempt to conform in order to increase their chances of finding employment.

The interpretation of the problem as a lack of education does not problematise the lack of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs have been acknowledged as possessing the potential to create jobs and grow the economy (Dempsey, 2010:2). The effect is to exclude the increase of and investment in entrepreneurial courses from consideration. One effect of this may be to serve to reduce the numbers of entrepreneurs by emphasising other solutions and problem representations. By ignoring this potential for growth, there may be a lot resources and time funnelled into existing businesses which may not have the same potential for expansion and job creation as entrepreneurs (Dempsey, 2010:2). By not focusing on entrepreneurs, not only will an avenue for job creation be overlooked, but it is likely that entrepreneurial training and entrepreneurship in general may go into decline. A lower number of entrepreneurs in South Africa would be likely to have a very negative impact on employment (Dempsey, 2010:2). Potential for job creation may be missed if not enough training and money is not invested in those potential entrepreneurs who can provide other means of unemployment alleviation

Viewing the problem as too many young people in the labour force implies that working age population needs to be reduced. This could be achieved either through tertiary education or military service. The effect would not be a real reduction in unemployment but a temporary measure to delay resolving the problem. Increasing the numbers of people enrolled in tertiary education removes them from the labour force, but it merely postpones the problem until these individuals graduate (Hill, 2012). This solution would make it appear that the problem of unemployment is being dealt with, without a permanent solution to the problem being found.

The construction of the problem as too many people searching for work, precludes from consideration the qualifications of the unemployed individuals. The formulation of the problem also removes from consideration the restrictive labour laws in South Africa. The labour laws increase the costs of employing more people (Flower, 2006:9). The effect is that the high costs of labour in South Africa, due to these laws, are ignored and by ignoring these costs, there is little chance of increasing employment in the long run when businesses find labour more expensive than capital (Lewis, 2001:26). Because of the

costs associated with restrictive labour law, businesses and entrepreneurs are more likely to invest in capital-intensive production and not labour intensive production, which serves to exacerbate unemployment. This construction does not focus attention on how capital-intensive practices by business impacts on unemployment, nor does it focus on the high costs of labour due to restrictive labour legislation and extensive workers' rights fought for by COSATU and the SACP.

The construction of the problem as a lack of labour-intensive employment opportunities is underlined by the assumption that the government can afford to provide large scale work and wages through infrastructure projects. This assumption is problematic as the government currently has large commitments in terms of social grants and is likely to be unable to provide jobs for all those who are unemployed (Dlamini, 2012:3). This is due to the fact that the South African tax base, the number of individuals who pay taxes, is much smaller than the numbers of individuals in need of work. The government's income would be far outstripped by its expenditures. This is as the tax base stood at 5.9 million 2009-10 and the unemployed reached 7 396 000, using the broad definition (Thornton, 2011). The implication of the problem representation is that the South African government should be the main provider of work. This leaves the role of business unproblematised as a large scale work provider. If the government does take on this role as main provider of work, it could have large financial implications for the employed.

Constructing the problem as too many restrictive labour laws makes the assumption that businesses are currently employing the maximum of individuals at which it remains profitable to do so. There is also the assumption that businesses will hire more workers if tax breaks and exemptions were extended to them. This does not account for businesses that may try to take advantage of certain measures suggested, through the possible substitution of younger labour in order to enjoy the benefits of exemptions (Byrne & Buchanan, 1994). This representation emphasises the private sector's ability to create jobs if the costs of business and labour were reduced.

Formulating the problem as too many restrictive labour laws directs attention to what business requires in order to contribute to reductions in the unemployment rate. This construction leaves unproblematised the employability of individuals. An effect of ignoring the employability of individuals is that while there may be a reduction in unemployment, it may not be significant due to the shortage of skilled labour. The construction could perpetuate the skills shortage that South Africa suffers from (Department of Labour, 2003:1). The lack of employment opportunities is not addressed by this interpretation, which is problematic as it is the innovation of entrepreneurs that is needed to create more employment (Dempsey, 2010:2). Entrepreneurs create more employment by seeing opportunities where others do not and it is such creative thinking which provides the opportunities for employment (Ortmans, 2012). This representation has the effect of ignoring the training of new entrepreneurs and sees job creation as dependent on existing businesses.

Problematising the high cost of business excludes the issue of employers' preference in terms of capital goods. The effect of viewing the problem this way is that incentives may be created for businesses to create more jobs, which in turn would cost the government and tax payers a large amount of money that cannot be utilised (Sharp, 2011). This may be due to business not wishing to incur the expenses of creating more jobs and the expenses of training and skilling labour when the productivity of capital is greater (Sharp, 2011). The implication is that the government is seen as responsible for providing an environment in which businesses can and do create more jobs. The blame is laid partly on labour regulations which need to be relaxed or incentives that need to be extended for businesses to hire more labour. The solution constructs the role of government as helping the market to increase employment through the private sector.

The problem of unemployment has been formulated as the high cost of business being the obstacle to creating more employment by COSATU. The presumption underlying this construction appears to be that businesses are currently employing the maximum number of individuals that they can afford with the current costs of conducting business. The construction of the problem draws attention to taxes, electricity and other payments by

business that increases the cost of the product and move money away from the allocation of more labour. The assumption that business would hire more labour if costs of business was reduced, does not take into consideration that businesses may prefer to make use of capital-intensive methods of production instead of hiring labour (Van Aardt, Ligthelm and Van Tonder, 2011). Businesses are generally more inclined to buy capital goods than hire labour because tax distortions make capital cheaper compared to labour, the shortage of skilled workers and higher productivity of capital than labour (Samson, Quene & Van Niekerk, 2001:6).

The formulation of the problem of unemployment as due to the high costs of hiring new labour is how business and government have presented the problem. This has been seen as the reason that businesses have not been hiring young first-time employees. Constructing the problem in this way problematises the cost of training first-time employees as well as the costs of supervision and firing the employee if he or she does not do the work properly (Schnotz, 2012). It also does not take into account the possible preference employers may have for capital-intensive production. This representation of the problem as the high costs of hiring first-time employees places the responsibility on the legislature and government to foster an environment for businesses to grow and hire more new labour.

The various ways in which the problem of unemployment is represented by South African government and non-governmental actors contain within them transference and acceptance of blame. Business' problem representations direct attention to government and the way in which government needs to respond to the problem. Business constructs their representations so as to avoid acceptance of its role in combating unemployment. Business directs attention away from its role by placing an emphasis on tax breaks, exemptions and looser labour restrictions. These solutions serve business' interests as they reduce the costs of business. These representations serve business' interests as they allow for a greater profit margin. Thus, the representations protect the interests of business by focusing on government's responsibility to act and highlighting solutions

where business stands to gain via lower labour costs or lower costs of doing business (taxes and so forth).

### **4.3 Political effects of problem representations**

This section focuses on the political effects of problem representations. The political effects refer to the possible political consequences of problem representations. The political effects can be defined as those consequences which come from problem representations and affect the interests or politics surrounding unemployment. Political effects in this study are for example strains in relationships between actors, the tripartite alliance members for instance, due to different problem representations or the interests served by the dominant problem representations. The discussion on the potential political effects is used to further demonstrate the utility of applying the WPR approach to the problem of unemployment in South Africa.

The section begins by discussing the political effects of problem representations. The discussion is organised around the potential political effects of problem representations. The discussion on strains in relationships is more focused on the tripartite alliance and the political effects of disagreement on the representations of the problem. The tripartite alliance consists of COSATU, the SACP and the ANC, thus the relationship between them is of interest. The reason for the focus on the tripartite alliance is that the alliance has shaped the political landscape, and if a split in the alliance were to occur there could be a reconfiguration of the South African political landscape (Faull & February). This could occur if COSATU split from the alliance as it is believed that COSATU would take the voting power of its workers to whichever party it endorses. This can be evidenced by the many discussions to this effect with some evidence to support this notion (Pillay, 2011:8). The persistent question of a possible split in the tripartite alliance and the consequences which could follow from such a split make it important for this study to consider the tripartite alliance. The chapter includes a discussion on the dominant problem representations and how these are established. This is done as the interests served by the dominant problem representations can then be discussed.

#### *4.3.1 Representations which could strengthen relationships between actors*

The problem representation which all actors share with government is that of the problem as a lack of employment opportunities. It shows that all actors view the unemployment problem in the same way in this regard. This makes it more likely that the non-governmental actors will not take actions which will further reduce the number of employment opportunities. The fact that all actors share this representation with government makes it more likely that the actors will support government's preferred policies addressing unemployment as a lack of employment opportunities. If problem definitions, which are very similar to problem representations, are shared between actors, it is more likely that there will be support for measures from those sharing the problem definition (Morss, 2005:182). The implication of the representation being shared by all actors is that there is a better chance that actors will not oppose policies recommended to increase employment opportunities and that the potential for concerted action exists. Shared problem definitions increase the chances that those sharing the definition will back policies based on those problem definitions (Morss, 2005:185). This increased likelihood of support can be evidenced by business's support for the youth wage subsidy which will be discussed below.

The representation of the problem as a lack of skills and training is shared by all actors. One political effect of this formulation is to bring together all the actors, thereby providing common ground for the alliance to strengthen its bonds, as well as a basis for labour and business to improve their relationship. This shared problem representation increases the likelihood that business, COSATU and the SACP will support the measures that the South African government implements to ensure that more people receive training and skills.

COSATU shares the government's representation of the problem as a lack of work experience. The implication of this shared representation is that it demonstrates that these two alliance members are in agreement on some issues therefore there is still agreement between the two members. Thus, COSATU and the ANC may not be as estranged and

ready to split as recent reports have made them out to be (Ngamlana, 2011; Meersman, 2012). The shared problem representation makes it more likely that COSATU will support the policies recommended by government to address the issue and reduce the chances that there will be a political backlash from the imposition of policies dealing with this representation of the problem.

Government and South African business share the representation of the problem of unemployment as a youth unemployment problem due to the high costs of young workers. The implication of this shared construction is that attention is directed to the costs of employees as a factor that leads to less employment of young workers in South Africa. The shared interpretation has benefits for business if government adopts policy solutions that reduce the cost for business, business would benefit from more employees at a lower cost. The increase in employees and decrease in cost would lead to greater profit through both lower costs and more output of the product. Thus, this formulation is likely to make the current government more popular with South African business as this representation benefits business through lower labour costs. This popularity is important for government and specific government officials to help further their political careers through re-election. The sharing of this construction is likely to also work in government's favour as business may be more inclined to support government's recommendations concerning unemployment. Government sharing problem definitions with other actors increases the other actors' likelihood for support for government's recommendations (Morss, 2005:182).

The solutions based on reducing costs to businesses serve the interests of business by directing attention to the high costs of conducting business which is incurred due to South Africa's restrictive labour legislation. By problematising this and reducing these costs through the policy of youth wage subsidies, South African business stands to benefit. These solutions secure less spending on labour by business and allow business to better maximise their profit margins. Business would also benefit from more employees and the resultant higher output of the product, which, in turn would equal more profit. The South African government's interests would also be served as this interpretation increases the

chances for support from business. By government benefiting South African business, the government is likely to receive support from business. This could be realised in terms of supporting government policy proposals, or it could be through finance pledged to an election campaign. This endearment of government to business through business-friendly policies is likely to benefit members of the government. This is could benefit government through securing the favour of business in South Africa which may translate into funding for the next election campaign or greater influence among business members.

#### *4.3.2 Representations that could create political tensions*

There is divergence of problem representations among the various actors. The researcher chose to mainly focus on divergence between the representations of the tripartite alliance members, COSATU, the SACP and the ANC which is the ruling party and occupies the vast majority of government positions. The tripartite alliance is an important part of South African politics as it has shaped the political landscape in South Africa since the democratic transition. The importance of discussing these problem representations is that points of tension between the ANC and its alliance partners can be identified. Exploring the potential tensions between the alliance members is of great importance as a split in the alliance could change the political landscape in South Africa.

The tensions over different representations of unemployment can be explored. The question of whether a split will occur in the tripartite alliance has been asked for many years and the rumbling of discontent from alliance members has increased in recent years (Marrian, 2012). There have already been signs of tension between COSATU and the ANC over the top position in the ANC (Marrian, 2012). The battle over the South African Reserve Banks' inflations targeting policy and the lifestyle audit that COSATU called for are only some of these tensions (Ngamlana, 2011). The examination of divergent problem representations may highlight some of the strains in the relationship and thus, may add to the mounting evidence that there may be a split in the alliance in future. The dismissal of COSATU's concerns over e-tolling and labour brokering seems

to point to a reduction in the power that COSATU commands within the tripartite alliance.

There has also been contention between the SACP and COSATU. This is in regards to their competing stances over nationalisation with COSATU supporting nationalisation and the SACP opposed to nationalisation, claiming that it is not necessarily progressive (Marrian, 2012). The ANC has made it clear that nationalisation is not ANC policy and that there will not be any policy shift to nationalisation, thereby demonstrating the party's opposition to COSATU's stance on the matter (ANC reiterates nationalisation stand, 2012).

The government's interpretation of the problem as due to a lack of cooperation between government, business and other actors is not shared by any of the other tripartite alliance members. This construction works to the governments' benefit as it directs attention to the roles that business, labour and other stakeholders have to play in the reduction of unemployment. The representation serves government's interests as it steer attention away from the continual emphasis placed on government action by the other actors. The representation suggests that the other actors are also needed in combating unemployment and that the government cannot deal with the problem on its own. The way the problem of unemployment is presented here suggests a different way for the South African government to deal with the problem.

The most noticeable divergence of representations is over the youth unemployment problem. COSATU and the SACP present the issue as too large a youth labour force whereas the government and business present the problem as the cost of labour. This divergence in representations has been most apparent in government's youth wage subsidy policy, which both COSATU and the SACP are steadfastly resisting (SACP Central Committee, 2010; COSATU, 2012a). Both COSATU and the SACP refuse to accept the youth wage subsidy as a solution to the youth unemployment problem. COSATU and the SACP have claimed that the youth wage subsidy will have large

substitution effects with employers retrenching unsubsidised labour for subsidised labour (SACP Central Committee, 2010; COSATU, 2012a).

The SACP also raises the concern that the youth wage subsidy will be used to dilute workers' rights mainly through the substitution of labour. COSATU has argued that there is ample international literature on wage subsidy schemes which shows that they are very wasteful and costly, with massive deadweight losses (COSATU, 2012a:1). The SACP and COSATU argue that these substitution effects exist. Both argue that the substitution effects exist, because this will affect workers who are represented by COSATU. This solution of the problem therefore does not serve the interests of the workers who are established in employment and it does not work in the interests of the SACP or COSATU. This resistance to the subsidy has led to a lack of implementation of the subsidy due to COSATU protesting against the subsidy. Political tension has also been sparked between COSATU and non-alliance members. This was seen with the Democratic Alliance march for the implementation of the youth wage subsidy when COSATU members allegedly threw rocks and pieces of cement at Democratic Alliance (DA) supporters, thus stopping the protest (Zille: DA march a turning point for SA, 2012).

Steadfast refusal to accept the youth wage subsidy by COSATU and the SACP has not only caused a lengthy delay in the implementation of the subsidy, but has throughout caused tension within the tripartite alliance. These tensions have once again brought the possibility of a split in the alliance to the fore. These tensions have once again brought up the possibility of a split in the alliance (Marrian, 2012). Tensions within the alliance have remained just under the surface for a long time (Helen Suzman Foundation, 2000). Recently COSATU has openly disagreed and have made known their displeasure with the ruling party, even going so far as to suggest that the country may soon have a president Zille (leader of the DA opposition) (News24, 2011 While this statement was made by Zwelinzima Vavi as an individual, he is the general secretary of COSATU and is seen as speaking for the organisation. Thus, there could be ramifications for the alliance if the South African government decides to disregard COSATU's objections to the wage

subsidy just as it has disregarded their concerns over e-tolling and labour brokers (COSATU, 2012b). A conflict over the youth wage subsidy may add to the tensions which may one day break up the alliance.

While it may appear that COSATU is concerned about a displacement of unemployment, it is more likely that they are concerned that older workers will be retrenched in favour of younger subsidised labour. Older workers make up a large portion of COSATU members (COSATU, 2001) and thus it is more likely that COSATU is worried its members will suffer. It could possibly decrease their bargaining power because it would adversely impact their membership. The SACP has also resisted the youth wage subsidy, stating that the potential abuse of the wage subsidy had not been seriously considered and it could be used as a cover by unscrupulous employers to dilute workers' rights, because it could be used to substitute current fulltime workers with temporary subsidised workers (SACP Central Committee, 2010:10). The SACP is resisting the youth wage subsidy because it goes against the tenets of socialism and is most likely to affect its members adversely. The contention between alliance members over this solution has led to a deadlock in the policy process. The youth wage subsidy has not been implemented by government. The negotiations on the implementation of the youth wage subsidy are still dragging on, more than two years after the announcement of the subsidy, making it unlikely implementation will occur soon (Visser, 2012).

The representation of the problem as caused by a high cost of labour, while agreed upon by business and the government, puts both at odds with COSATU and the SACP. The divergence in representations could have implications for the tripartite alliance, as mentioned above, but also for business. If the solutions, from which this representation was extracted, are implemented to reduce labour costs, it is very likely that COSATU will call for strike action. That COSATU often calls for strikes in an attempt to influence policy is demonstrated by COSATU's strikes over labour brokers (Wide support for Cosatu strike, 2012) and the strike action taken over the Gauteng e-tolling system (Serrao, 2012). Such strikes have a large negative impact not only on business in the area surrounding the protest, but also have a substantial negative impact on the South African

economy as a whole (Styan, 2012). If the youth wage subsidy were to be implemented without considering COSATU's concerns, it could result in COSATU calling for large-scale strike action. The economy would suffer losses that could run up to R 8.2 billion in the event of mass strike action (Styan, 2012). Divergent representations thus have economic implications as well as political implications.

#### *4.3.3 Interests served by dominant problem representations*

While Bacchi does not use her approach to understand how and why certain problem representations become dominant, it does allow the examination of dominant representations, which aids the analyst in identifying the interests served by those representations. Dominant problem representations are those representations which inform South African public policy and are shared by government and at least one non-governmental actor. By highlighting the dominant representations, the politics surrounding unemployment policy can be better unpacked. The representations of the problem of unemployment as a lack of employment opportunities, lack of skills and training, lack of quality education, high costs of labour and a lack of work experience are the dominant representations. These representations are considered dominant as they have been repeated throughout previous macroeconomic strategies and policy documents.

Bacchi argues that the way in which a problem is represented is to the benefit of some and to the detriment of others (Bacchi, 1999:6). The dominant, accepted representations of unemployment, as seen through the South African government's policies to address the issue of unemployment, work to the benefit of some actors only. This section examines the dominant problem representations of unemployment to identify whose interests are being served and how they are being served. In this study, interest in terms of serving an actor's interests, means that the problem representation secures that actor a benefit of some kind.

All the actors share the construction of the problem as a lack of skills and training. This formulation serves the interests of business, COSATU and the SACP as it directs

attention to the South African government's responsibility for action. In directing the attention to government's responsibility for providing skills and training, the burden of providing training and investing in the skills development of workers is removed from business. COSATU represents employed workers and, thus, can use this interpretation of the problem to escape any responsibility for the current unemployment situation. The solutions to unemployment under this representation allow the government to accept limited responsibility for the issue. By constructing the problem in this way, the unemployed are seen as part of the problem. This works to government's benefit as it allows part of the responsibility for the problem to be shifted to the unemployed. Government is offered the scapegoat of the unemployed themselves, by claiming that it is doing what it can to reduce unemployment but that the unemployed have not acquired the right skills or training to become employed. The blame game is often played in South African politics when the public attempt to keep politicians accountable (Thom, 2012). Thus, it serves the interest of government by limiting its culpability when questioned on its achievements in reducing unemployment.

All the actors' interests are served by the shared interpretation of the problem as a lack of employment opportunities. This formulation serves the interests of business, COSATU and the SACP, as the suggested solutions direct the attention to government. Attention is directed to government's role in creating employment opportunities through the EPWP and other infrastructure projects. This representation serves both business and COSATU interests as it directs attention away from their contribution to the unemployment problem. The solutions that reveal this representation of unemployment serve the interests of government, as the temporary reductions in unemployment achieved by the implementation of infrastructure projects provides the government with figures to demonstrate the success of their term in office. While there is no permanent decrease as these schemes are only temporary, the government is able to show a reduction in unemployment under their watch, which allows the government to be seen as making inroads into the problem.

The interests of South African business are served as the presentation of the problem as a lack of quality education emphasises government's role in adequately preparing individuals to be able to function in a workplace environment. Business is able to secure the benefit of better educated employees who are better equipped for the workplace, without having to spend money on educating those individuals themselves. Therefore, business benefits as they do not incur any costs which could affect profits and better educated employees are less likely to cost the business in terms of lost revenue through incompetence. Government's interests are served by this construction as attention is directed to the Department of Education and the minister in charge of the department. The solutions allow government officials to shift accountability for the unemployment problem to different members of the Department of Education. This has already been seen with the government shifting accountability to the minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga, who then blamed the former Limpopo education administrator for the textbook saga in the Limpopo province of South Africa (Hlongwane, 2012). The interests of those politicians in higher government positions are served, as the responsibility for action or the responsibility of failure to provide better education can be passed on to those in the Department of Education. Thus, if government is seen as failing in its aim of creating 5 million jobs by 2020, it can focus the attention to the state of education and fault those in the Department of Education for what it could not achieve.

The representation of the unemployment problem as a lack of work experience is shared by government and COSATU. The Expanded Public Works Programme is informed by this representation. These solutions serve the interests of COSATU as it directs attention to government through state-owned enterprises and business, for providing work experience. COSATU's interests are served as attention is directed to those responsible for providing work experience and away from its role in exacerbating the problem of unemployment through the high wages they sought for members. COSATU secures the benefit of high wages for their members, which through its collective bargaining, has helped to increase the costs of business (Kenny & Webster, 1998:220). This solution also serves the interests of government by emphasising that it is not only government which needs to play a role in reducing unemployment. The sharing of this representation of the

unemployment problem with COSATU has the effect of appearing to take COSATU's concerns to heart and makes it more likely for them to remain part of the tripartite alliance. Thus, this construction works in the interests of government.

The government's representations of unemployment contain acceptance of some of the responsibility for action. These representations place an emphasis on government's role to create employment but the constructions also highlight the responsibilities that individuals have in ensuring their employability. Government's emphasis on the individual for improving their employability is in line with government's interests as it provides a safety net if it is seen as not providing enough employment. This emphasis on the individual can be seen in the Bill of Responsibilities for the Youth of South Africa in which the responsibility is given to the individual to ensure they study hard to increase their employability (Department of Education). There is the safe guard of making the case that the unemployed individuals contributed to their employment status, through lack of education and other deficiencies. The representation of unemployment gleaned from the stakeholder and Public Private Partnership (PPP) solution directs attention to the role that business and labour, represented by COSATU, have in the creation of employment.

Neither COSATU nor the SACP mention the high costs of labour within their representations of the problem of unemployment. This is because it goes against their interests as both represent employed workers who benefit from high labour costs because it translates into high wages (COSATU, 2001). Thus, COSATU and the SACP direct attention to the need for government to react to the problem of unemployment while attempting to negate their role so as to best serve their interests and those of their members.

The solutions work in the interests of non-governmental actors by securing benefits for members, such as high wages, lower labour costs or by directing attention away from the role that the actor could have in lowering the unemployment rate. The government's solutions to unemployment work to government's advantage by ensuring that just enough

of each non-governmental actor's interests are served so that none are alienated. By ensuring that none of these significant non-governmental actors are alienated, government removes the need for the actors to seek other means to make their concerns known.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Bacchi's approach highlights the effects of problem representations in particular, the discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects. By highlighting the effects of problem representations, the approach allows one to demonstrate the insights and utility of applying Bacchi's approach to the problem of unemployment. The focus of this chapter was the effects of the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa. The effects which Bacchi highlights in her approach were outlined before an explanation for the study's focus on discursive effects was provided. The discursive effects of the constructions of unemployment as they were observed through this research were explored and the discussion was organised around the various problem representations of unemployment.

Following this, the discussion turned to the politics of unemployment, referred to as the political effects of problem representations. This study has taken the effects discussed within Bacchi's approach a step further by including the political effects of the problem representations of unemployment. The dominant representations of unemployment were discussed briefly. The interests served by the solutions contained in those dominant problem representations were examined. These comprised potential political effects of problem representations shared with government and divergent representations were explored. The most notable divergence of representations was the representation of government and business of youth unemployment as problem due to the high costs of labour, and the representation presented by the SACP and COSATU of youth unemployment as too large a youth labour force. The implication of this divergence is strained relations between the tripartite alliance members. There is also the possible economic consequence as strike action would negatively affect the South African

economy. The next chapter shows how this study achieved its aim of providing a different way of analysing unemployment. The following chapter will also provide recommendations for further research before concluding.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Unemployment is a topic of central concern in South Africa. Much research has been devoted to the topic of unemployment across many fields of study, for instance economics, political science, sociology and psychology. The causes, trends, character of and determinants of unemployment in South Africa take up a large amount of the literature on the subject. Positivist literature on the topic is abundant, but little research has been undertaken outside of that paradigm. This research project was designed to approach unemployment from the post-positivist paradigm. This research applied an interpretivist approach to the issue of unemployment in South Africa in order to highlight the different understandings of the unemployment problem by significant actors in South African employment policy. The study aimed to provide a different way of analysing unemployment. The study also highlighted the potential effects of the various ways of representing unemployment. The aim of the study was achieved and the application of Bacchi's approach demonstrated. The addition of the effects - both discursive and potential political effects - allowed the insights and utility of Bacchi's approach to be properly illustrated.

This chapter seeks to bring together the research that was conducted with the aim set out in the first chapter. The main aim of the study and how this aim was achieved is set out. Related to the aim of the study, is the effects of the problem representations of unemployment. The effects of problem representations take the study beyond just providing a different way of analysing unemployment, it adds value to the unemployment literature. The study does this through effects as it provides insights into the politics surrounding unemployment in South Africa. This was done by examining the potential effects of unemployment problem representations and this chapter briefly discusses these to demonstrate the utility of the approach. Throughout the research different areas of interest appeared and these are discussed in the chapter as areas for further research.

## 5.2 Achieving the aim of the study

The main aim of this study was to provide a different and useful way of analysing unemployment. The study used Bacchi's approach to provide analyse unemployment in South Africa. Bacchi's approach was chosen as it is an interpretivist approach and a review of the literature on unemployment revealed that the majority of the literature was undertaken from a positivist stance. There was an abundance of positivist work on unemployment and little available interpretivist or any other post-positivist research on unemployment. This indicated that the literature could benefit from a post-positivist approach to the topic. The justification for providing a different way of analysing unemployment is that a post-positivist approach has valuable insights and that the use of an alternate way of analysing unemployment opens up other avenues for exploration through the different insights into the problem that it provides.

The interpretivist approach allows the analyst to identify common understandings shared by the significant actors in unemployment that are considered. The contradicting or competing representations of the problem, as occurring within one group of actors or between groups of actors can also be identified and explored. For example, government's representation of unemployment as due to a lack of employment opportunities, contradicts the assumption underlying the representation of the problem as a lack of training and skills, which suggests that those with the appropriate skills will find work. This identification of shared problem representations and divergent problem representations allowed the research to go a step further than just providing the different way of analysing unemployment, as it aimed. It allowed the researcher to uncover the dominant problem representations of unemployment in South Africa.

The identification of shared representations of unemployment, specifically between government and non-government actors, allowed for identification of dominant problem representations and the exploration of the discursive effects of shared representations. Chapter three highlighted the problem representations that non-governmental actors shared with government which were uncovered during the analysis of data. This

examination of shared problem representations allowed the analyst to take the research even further by including the potential political effects of unemployment representations. The main discussion on shared representations demonstrated that having the same problem representations as non-governmental actors, may make it possible for the government to increase their chances of gaining support from the actors for employment initiatives that represent the problem in the same way as in the shared representations. Another potential implication of these shared representations is that government may use them as way to strengthen their relationships with the other actors.

The investigation of shared problem representations facilitated the exploration of the interests served by the dominant problem representations of unemployment. Analysis of the dominant as well as shared problem representations demonstrated that each problem representation of each actor served their own interests. The analysis also showed that the dominant problem representations which underlie the policy solutions adopted by government, serve government's interests as well as those of other non-governmental actors with whom the representation is shared.

It was found that the problem representation of unemployment as a lack of training and skills development worked in the interests of all actors as removes the burden of the costs of training from the non-governmental actors and provides a scapegoat should the government be seen as not doing enough about unemployment. This representation of the problem of unemployment was found to work in the interests of business, COSATU and the SACP as it directed attention solely to the government for action. This problem representation serves their interests as it allows the roles of these non-governmental actors in reducing unemployment to go unquestioned. The government's interests are also served by the EPWP as it creates temporary reductions in unemployment while not addressing more structural causes of unemployment and thus, does not provide a lasting solution to the problem. The study shows that the other shared representations have also served the interests of those who shared the representations.

Although it was not a specifically stated aim of the study, the study was able to provide better insight into the politics surrounding unemployment. This was facilitated through the inclusion of the shared and divergent problem representations of unemployment. The political strains on the tripartite alliance relationship could be commented on through the discussion on the political effects of representations of unemployment. This was best illustrated in the section on the implications of divergent problem representations. The most noticeable divergence of representations was in the area of youth unemployment, with COSATU and the SACP presenting the problem as too large a youth labour force while business and the government present the problem as the high cost of labour.

The analysis showed that this divergence of representations may put pressure on the government to subscribe to the same view as their alliance partners, as implied by the current delay in implementing the youth wage subsidy. The current deadlock concerning the implementation of the policy was found to be related to the limited but noticeable influence on policy that the government's alliance partners are able to effect. This becomes obvious when considering that government forged ahead with certain policies regardless of the other members' opposition, but has taken a step backwards by stalling the implementation of the youth wage subsidy to avoid alienating the SACP and COSATU. This divergence may result in significant economic costs for business and government if the representation of high costs of labour as the problem is pursued.

### **5.3 Recommended further research**

This study has provided a stepping stone for further research to the issue of unemployment from a post-positivist perspective. The study provided insights into the politics of unemployment as well as into problem definition and the impact it has on dealing with the problem. Other exciting avenues for research have been opened during this study and through some of the insights from this study.

The first recommended area of research would be into the influence of different non-governmental actors on the government's problem representations of unemployment. The

researcher suggests that research be conducted and an appropriate measure developed to determine who influences whom in a relationship between two actors. The development and the appropriate application of such a measure would allow one to examine which actors influenced the other in their shared problem representations. It would be of great interest to see whether the government was or is currently being influenced by any of the significant non-government actors. This research could then be expanded to other actors and determine the influence of non-governmental actors on the government's representations of unemployment. The development of such a tool could be beneficial in other fields of research.

If government would be found to be influenced by one of these actors, one would also wish to understand how the actor was able to influence government. Extending research to understand how government can be influenced by outside actors would prove useful for providing better insight into the actual policy process. If a tool were developed to determine influence and the direction of influence, and if one were able to determine how government is influenced, the policy process could be better understood. The development of a tool to measure influence and research to determine how one can be influence could potentially add to other areas in political science and perhaps other social sciences. For instance, a tool like this could be useful in international relations to understand who is influence by whom when examining two countries connected through trade.

Another suggestion for further research using this approach which is closely related to the first would be to increase the number of actors considered. The inclusion of think tanks, academics, important community organisations and international organisations such as the International Labour Office and World Bank would provide a more complete picture of the problem representations of unemployment in South Africa. The inclusion of these actors would prove most intriguing if shared interpretations of the problem between these actors and the South African government could be identified and examined. It would prove interesting to see if academics, think tanks and international organisations have an influence on how the problem of unemployment is framed. Research into this area could

also be fruitful, with the possible arguments being that the IMF, ILO and World Bank's neo-liberal orientation can be seen in the problem representations of unemployment, should there be evidence of this. Thus, Bacchi's approach would also be useful in exploring the ideological underpinnings which inform problem representations.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated how a post-positivist approach to analysing unemployment opens other avenues for investigating unemployment as a policy problem in South Africa. The research conducted adds value to the unemployment literature and real world value as it allows problem representations (also known as problem definitions) to be interrogated. The research adds real world value as it demonstrates how the problem of unemployment is understood by significant actors in South Africa and shows the implications of the various ways in which the problem is construed. Understanding how problems are defined and whose interests are served by the problem definitions, has real world value as it allows people to advocate for solutions which mitigate negative effects and best serve the interests of those they are meant to serve, in this case the unemployed.

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