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Perspectives on Poverty

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Policy at Massey University, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand

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Abstract

The idea that there is poverty experienced in countries that have an abundance of natural resources and accumulated wealth has attracted much public discussion in recent times. This thesis examines the perspectives on poverty of thirty-seven people living in New Zealand communities and situates these perspectives in a wider academic and public discussion. By examining these perspectives a gap in the research on poverty is addressed by taking into account the views and opinions of New Zealanders and relating these perspectives to broader governing processes. The main research strategy is a discourse analysis of thirty-seven semi-structured participant interviews. The time period covered in the review of New Zealand literature and public discussion on poverty is from 1972 to the time of the commencement of the interviews in 2008. By employing a Foucauldian theoretical framework drawing on governmentality, the findings from the discourse analysis of thirty-seven participant interviews are explicated and situated within wider social and governing practices. This study highlights a general level of social distancing and “othering” directed at situations described as poverty and how social welfare beneficiaries become the main target for people’s concerns about poverty. Of key interest was the tendency of the participants to spontaneously racialise and define poverty using non-material terminology. As this thesis looks at the implications of a governmentality involved in the development of a self-managing population, it draws attention to the processes of responsibilisation in place for those defined as “poor” in the context of social welfare provision.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................ iv

**Chapter One:** Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

**Chapter Two:** Philosophical Underpinnings .............................................................................. 15

**Chapter Three:** Scholarly Notions and Ideas about Poverty ..................................................... 33

**Chapter Four:** New Zealand Dialogue and Debate 1972-2008 ................................................ 61

**Chapter Five:** Fieldwork Process and Analytical Method ......................................................... 85

**Chapter Six:** “There is no real poverty in New Zealand” ......................................................... 105

**Chapter Seven:** “It’s not just about money” ............................................................................. 129

**Chapter Eight:** “Learn how to work the system” ....................................................................... 153

**Chapter Nine:** “Work hard and get ahead” .............................................................................. 173

**Chapter Ten:** Discussion ........................................................................................................ 195

**Chapter Eleven:** Conclusion ................................................................................................... 221

Reference List ............................................................................................................................... 266
Appendices

Appendix One:
Human Ethics Application.........................................................231

Appendix Two:
Letter to Social Service Agencies...............................................251

Appendix Three:
Advertisement in Social Service Agencies..................................252

Appendix Four:
Advertisement on Public Notice Boards.....................................253

Appendix Five:
Advertisement in Suburban Newspapers.....................................254

Appendix Six:
Information Sheet........................................................................256

Appendix Seven:
Participant Consent Form..............................................................258

Appendix Eight:
Interview Guide...........................................................................259

Appendix Nine:
Aids for Analysis..........................................................................262

Appendix Ten:
Demographic Breakdown...............................................................264

Appendix Eleven:
Government Reviews....................................................................265
List of Tables

Table 1: Age breakdown of participants..........................................................264

Table 2: Ethnicity as reported by participants................................................264