



Investigating Precarious Workers' Motivations to Seek Support from Grassroots Organizations within Legal Frameworks in Gauteng: A Case Study of CWAO

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Declaration

I, Lerato Violet Pitso, student number 2722132, earnestly declare that this research report is entirely my own work, and it has not been submitted for examination at any other academic institution. I'm fully aware of the ethical implications of plagiarism, as well as the significance of academic integrity. Therefore, all external sources used in this research have been cited and referenced in compliance with academic standards of the University of the Witwatersrand.

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I am delighted to have reached the completion of this research report. The inspiration for this study stems from my own brief experience as a casual worker in Lesotho, which gave me firsthand insight into the hardships of precarious employment. I sincerely hope that conditions for workers in similar situations improve.

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Abstract

This study examines the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from grassroots organizations, focusing on the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO). It explores how workers navigate the challenges of precarious employment and interpret their experiences within South Africa's labour relations landscape, characterized by what Von Holdt (2013) refers to as a *violent democracy*. The research argues that precarious workers' motivations extend beyond immediate material needs, reflecting broader aspirations for justice, empowerment, and systemic transformation. However, a key finding reveals that worker solidarity often dissipates once individuals secure permanent employment, even though permanency does not guarantee improved wages or working conditions. This exposes a persistent tension between individual survival and collective organizing. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with precarious workers and a founding member of CWAO, the study highlights the organization's dual role as both a site of resistance against structural violence and a mechanism for worker empowerment. The findings emphasize the limitations of formal trade unions and state institutions in addressing precarity and underscore the significance of grassroots organizations in filling these gaps. By situating workers' motivations within the framework of violent democracy, the study contributes to broader debates on labour relations, social justice, and grassroots activism in post-apartheid South Africa. It calls for sustained worker solidarity and stronger legal and policy interventions to protect precarious workers.

Keywords: Precarious work, grassroots organizations, Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO), labour relations, violent democracy, structural violence, worker agency, trade unions, labour exploitation, South Africa, legal frameworks.

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List of Abbreviations

- **CWAO** – Casual Workers Advice Office
- **ANC** – African National Congress
- **LRA** – Labour Relations Act
- **BCEA** – Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- **CCMA** – Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration
- **NUM** - National Union of Mineworkers
- **NUMSA** – National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
- **COSATU** – Congress of South African Trade Unions
- **SADTU** - South African Democratic Teachers Union
- **SATAWU** - South African Transport and Allied Workers Union
- **SWF** – Simunye Workers’ Forum
- **PPE** – Personal Protective Equipment

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Precarious work has become a pressing global issue, particularly in South Africa, where historical and structural inequalities exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by these workers (Barchiesi, 2011; Standing, 2011). This form of employment often lacks job security, social protections, and fair wages, contributing to workers' reliance on grassroots organizations like the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO), which provides legal assistance and advocates for workers' rights. The concept of violent democracy, as theorized by Von Holdt (2013), serves as a critical framework for understanding how structural, symbolic, and enacted violence shape labour relations in South Africa, illustrating the precarious conditions workers navigate daily. This study investigates the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from the CWAO, situating their experiences within broader socio-political dynamics, understood as the political, economic, and historical forces that shape workers' realities (Webster & Francis, 2019).

1.2. Background of the Study

In the context of an increasingly insecure labour market, precarious workers are often left vulnerable. In Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub, many individuals find themselves trapped in such precarious conditions. Precarious work, characterized by insecure employment, low wages, and minimal access to benefits and protections, has a long history that predates the 20th century (Van Onselen, 1996; Barchiesi, 2011). This study is grounded in the long-standing issues of labour precarity in South Africa, shaped by the country's colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid histories. Each era's labour policies and practices have either entrenched or sought to address precarious labour conditions, particularly for marginalized groups. These histories have left legacies of inequality, thus influenced contemporary labour dynamics, and contributed to the rise of organizations like the CWAO, which provide crucial support to precarious workers.

Historically, colonial and apartheid systems utilized coercive labour practices to control and exploit Black South African workers (van Staden, 2025). Before the advent of industrialization in Europe and the colonization of Africa, labour in many societies was organized around subsistence farming, small-scale artisan work, and communal production systems. In these pre-capitalist economies, work was often precarious in the sense that it was shaped by the unpredictability of agricultural seasons and the absence of state protection for workers. However, these labour systems were generally not exploitative in the modern sense because they were embedded within community-based networks of reciprocity and shared responsibility i.e.

the concept of precariousness was often mitigated by communal practices such as resource-sharing, collective ownership of land, and mutual aid, which buffered individuals against economic hardship (Perry, 2015; Van Onselen, 1996). The introduction of colonialism in South Africa brought about significant changes in labour relations, transforming traditional forms of work into highly exploitative and precarious arrangements. The Dutch East India Company, which established the first colonial settlement in the Cape in 1652, relied on the forced labour of enslaved people to build the colony's economy. Enslaved Africans, indigenous Khoisan peoples, and later Asian labourers were subjected to harsh working conditions, long hours, and minimal protections. These workers had little autonomy, and their labour was seen as a disposable commodity (Worden, 1985). The Dutch colonial economy laid the foundation for the systemic exploitation of Black labour in South Africa, a pattern that would persist into the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. When looking at the South African legal framework in this period, labour laws were explicitly designed to exploit and control African labour. The foundation of South Africa's colonial labour system was built on coercive and restrictive legal frameworks that institutionalized precarious labour, particularly in the mining and agricultural sectors. The introduction of pass laws, starting in the early 1800s, is one key example. These laws restricted the movement of Black workers and ensured their availability for temporary, low-wage employment in colonial industries (Harries, 1994). Workers were subject to short-term contracts, lacked legal protections, and were easily dismissed, making their employment inherently precarious. In the mining industry, the Masters and Servants Act of 1856 was a critical piece of legislation that cemented the subordination of Black workers. The Act criminalized breaches of contract by workers, allowing employers to use harsh legal penalties, including imprisonment, to enforce labour discipline (Worden, 1985).

Furthermore, the apartheid era (1948–1994) saw the consolidation of racially discriminatory labour laws that deepened the precariousness of Black workers. Apartheid legislation explicitly aimed to secure a racially segmented labour market, ensuring that Black workers remained at the bottom of the hierarchy with limited access to formal protections. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 is a prime example of legislation that entrenched the racial division of labour. This Act excluded Black workers from legally recognized trade unions, preventing them from engaging in collective bargaining and further weakening their position in the labour market (Barchiesi, 2011). The apartheid regime's notorious pass laws continued to control the mobility of Black workers, ensuring that they were confined to temporary, insecure employment, particularly in the mining, agriculture, and domestic work sectors. The migrant

labour system, enforced through laws such as the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1964, meant that many Black workers were forced into temporary contracts, with no access to job security, benefits, or labour rights (Bhorat, 2001). These legal mechanisms reinforced the structural precariousness of Black labour, institutionalizing their exploitation and economic vulnerability.

While the end of apartheid in 1994 marked a significant political transformation, the economic structures that had sustained precarious work largely remained intact. The African National Congress (ANC) government, under pressure to integrate South Africa into the global economy, adopted neoliberal economic policies in the mid-1990s. The Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, introduced in 1996, aimed to liberalize the economy, reduce public sector spending, and promote labour market flexibility. These policies, however, led to the casualization of labour and the proliferation of precarious work in both the formal and informal sectors. One of the key features of the post-apartheid labour market has been the outsourcing of labour, particularly in sectors such as cleaning, security, and retail. Companies seeking to cut costs have increasingly turned to temporary employment agencies and labour brokers to provide flexible, low-wage workers. This has resulted in the growth of a large informal workforce, which exists outside the protections of labour law. Informal workers, such as street vendors, domestic workers, and day labourers, often face extreme precarity, as they lack access to social security, healthcare, and unemployment benefits (Standing, 2011; Webster, 2015). The persistence of precarious work in post-apartheid South Africa has deepened the country's existing inequalities. Black workers, women, and youth are disproportionately represented in precarious employment, and the gap between secure, well-paying jobs and insecure, low-wage work has widened. This has led to growing levels of poverty, unemployment, and social unrest, as precarious workers struggle to make ends meet in an increasingly competitive and unequal labour market (Von Holdt, 2013).

It is important to note that the current situation is happening with the presence of progressive labour laws that were introduced by the ANC government which sought to extend rights and protections to all workers. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1997 were two pivotal pieces of legislation that aimed to improve the working conditions of precarious workers by promoting fair labour practices, collective bargaining, and establishing minimum standards for employment (Benjamin, 2005). While the LRA and BCEA offered legal avenues for protection, enforcement has been weak, and many precarious workers remain excluded from formal protections, particularly in the informal economy. Informal workers—such as street vendors, domestic workers, and casual

labourers—often do not benefit from the same level of legal coverage as formal workers. This has contributed to the ongoing precariousness of a large portion of the South African workforce (Theron, 2010).

Labour relations in South Africa cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the broader historical context in which they developed. Throughout the country's history, struggles over work, wages, and rights have often been accompanied by conflict, resistance, and repression. Against this backdrop, the issue of violence emerges as a central thread, shaping both the dynamics of labour struggles and the responses of the state and employers. Violence is, therefore, not a new concept in South Africa. It is deeply embedded in the country's colonial and apartheid histories, during which violence—both state-sanctioned and private— was used to maintain racial and economic hierarchies (Bolt & Rajak, 2016, Pons-Vignon & Anseeuw, 2009). The colonial and apartheid states utilized violence as a means to suppress labour movements and enforce exploitative labour conditions. For instance, Black workers during these periods faced not only direct physical violence from the police and security forces but also structural violence in the form of discriminatory labour laws and pass systems that controlled their movements and employment opportunities (Harris, 1994). The migrant labour system, as discussed earlier, is one example of how structural violence shaped labour relations, confining workers to precarious, insecure work while excluding them from basic protections and rights (Bhorat, 2001). In the post-apartheid period, while overt racial discrimination in labour laws has been abolished, the legacy of structural violence persists. The persistence of high unemployment, economic inequality, and informal labour markets perpetuate conditions where precarious work remains a dominant feature of the labour landscape. Scholars such as Von Holdt (2013), Makino (2020), and Paret (2018) argue that violent democracy has morphed in the post-apartheid era, taking on new forms such as economic exclusion and the systematic marginalization of groups.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is particularly useful for analysing labour relations in South Africa because it highlights how domination is sustained not only through physical coercion or structural inequalities but also through the internalisation of social hierarchies. Symbolic violence, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe it, refers to the subtle and often invisible ways in which power operates through cultural norms, language, and everyday practices, making relations of domination appear natural and legitimate. In the South African labour market, this is evident in how precarious workers come to accept insecure contracts, low wages, and exclusion from collective bargaining as “normal” conditions of employment. Such acceptance naturalises exploitation and diminishes resistance, thereby reinforcing the structural

subjugation of precarious workers (von Holdt, 2011). By situating symbolic violence within Von Holdt's (2013) framework of violent democracy, it becomes clear that domination in the labour market is not only enacted through physical repression or structural exclusion but also through the normalization of inequality. Symbolic violence thus complements structural and enacted violence by showing how precarious workers are persuaded, often unconsciously, to accept their marginalization as inevitable. This reinforces the cycle of precarity and highlights why grassroots organizations like the CWAO are crucial sites of resistance, as they provide spaces where workers can contest both the visible and invisible dimensions of violence shaping their lives. Where symbolic violence sustains inequality by normalizing it, many workers turn to more visible and disruptive strategies of resistance—most notably strike action—to challenge these conditions.

In this context, direct, often violent strike action has become a common method of contesting the status quo, illustrating the ongoing tensions within the country's labour relations (Theron, 2015). This is illustrated by recent statistics from the South African Police Service (SAPS) and other reports that indicate a significant rise in public unrest and violent strike actions. From August 2020 to January 2021, over 900 service delivery protests were recorded in just six months (Martin, 2021). This reflects a broader trend of escalating violence during protests, particularly related to socio-economic frustrations and demands for improved living conditions (Minister Bheki Cele, 2024). The frequency of protests has remained high, with an average of 2.26 protests daily in recent years (defenceWeb, 2021). In particular, provinces like KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng are notable hotspots for violent demonstrations, which frequently involve road blockades, property damage, and clashes with law enforcement (BusinessTech, 2022). The enactment of violence through protests and strikes has become a prevalent strategy for workers to demand change, yet these actions rarely yield substantive responses from the state or employers. The exclusion of informal workers from traditional labour frameworks diminishes the impact of enacted violence as a means to address their concerns (Webster & Joynt, 2011). This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of unrest without resolution, highlighting the limitations of protest in achieving meaningful improvements for precarious workers.

Within this broader context of persistent unrest and structural marginalization, grassroots organizations such as the CWAO emerge as critical actors, working to address both the immediate and systemic forms of violence that shape precarious workers' experiences. Scholars such as Weininger (2005) and Swartz (2013) note that symbolic violence is effective precisely because

it is misrecognized as legitimate, producing compliance without overt coercion. By exposing these hidden forms of domination, CWAO provides precarious workers with tools to reinterpret their conditions as unjust and to resist them collectively. As a non-profit and independent entity, the CWAO plays a key role in helping workers navigate the complex regulatory environment, challenging both structural and symbolic violence (CWAO, n.d.). However, as the only grassroots organization that protects all workers in Gauteng, there has been limited research on the CWAO. Lenka (2017) examined the implications of the 2014 Labour Relations Act (LRA) amendments on precarious workers in South Africa, focusing specifically on how these legislative changes affect workers associated with the CWAO. The research explored both the opportunities and challenges presented by the new legal framework, analyzing how precarious workers engage with and leverage these rights to improve their employment conditions. While this study looked primarily at the legislative amendments and their practical implications, a study that delves into the socio-political context that surrounds these actions is necessary. Specifically, investigating how workers perceive and respond to their precarious situations within the framework of violent democracy—a concept that highlights the interplay between structural, symbolic, and enacted violence in shaping labour relations and worker mobilization in South Africa.

1.3. Research Problem

The research problem focuses on why precarious workers in Gauteng, particularly contract, part-time, and labour broker workers, seek support from the CWAO. This issue is rooted in broader structural challenges within South Africa's labour system, where legal frameworks, despite their intent to protect workers, often fail to address the lived realities of precarity. Precarious workers continue to face insecurity, exploitation, and limited recourse, compelling them to turn to grassroots organizations like the CWAO. This study examines how structural symbolic, and enacted violence - conceptualized as aspects of violent democracy - shape the motivations and decisions of these workers. Understanding these motivations is crucial in the context of South Africa's ongoing labour struggles, as it sheds light on the disconnect between legislative advancements and their practical implementation. By addressing this gap, the research highlights the persistent inequalities and systemic failures in the labour market, emphasizing the importance of alternative forms of advocacy and support in empowering vulnerable workers.

1.4. Rationale for the Study

The rationale for choosing this study is grounded in the pressing need to address the persistent

challenges faced by precarious workers in South Africa, particularly in the context of violent democracy. The gap that this study aims to address is twofold. First, it fills a conceptual gap by embedding CWAO's work within the theory of violent democracy, revealing how structural and symbolic forms of violence drive workers to seek out grassroots organizations. This allows for a nuanced understanding of the barriers that persist despite legal protections and highlights how these challenges are both systemic and symbolic. Second, it fills an experiential gap by focusing directly on workers' motivations, offering insights into their lived experiences and perspectives, which were less emphasized in the prior research that focused on legal frameworks (Lenka, 2017). This approach not only broadens the understanding of CWAO's role but also contextualizes it within the broader socio-political environment, adding depth to our comprehension of why precarious workers engage with grassroots organizations as a response to systemic issues in South Africa's labour landscape. Furthermore, understanding these dynamics has practical implications for policy reform, labour advocacy, and the broader discourse on economic justice and worker agency in South Africa. This study also contributes to academic literature by expanding the understanding of precarious work in South Africa and its intersection with concepts like violent democracy, adding to the growing body of research that critiques structural inequality and explores the potential for alternative forms of worker support and resistance.

1.5. Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on precarious workers that are affiliated with the CWAO, and investigates their motivations for seeking support within the socio-political framework of violent democracy. While precarious work encompasses various forms, including gig work, seasonal work, and independent contracting (Campbell & Price, 2016), this research is limited to part-time, contract, and labour-broker workers. These categories were chosen because they represent a substantial and visible portion of precarious employment in South Africa, characterized by low job security, inadequate wages, and restricted access to benefits (Theron, 2010). The exclusion of other forms of precarious work, such as the gig economy, is driven by practical considerations, including accessibility and research feasibility. For instance, workers in the gig economy often lack formal connections to advocacy groups, making their inclusion in this study challenging. Additionally, focusing on part-time, contract, and labour-broker workers allows for a more concentrated examination of workplace precarity while ensuring the data remains manageable and relevant to the study's objectives.

1.6. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivations driving precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from grassroots organizations like the CWAOW. This study seeks to understand how these workers' experiences reflect the broader context of structural inequalities in South Africa's labour market, specifically within the framework of violent democracy. By analysing CWAOW's role and the structural, symbolic, and enacted forms of violence that affect precarious workers, this research aims to shed light on the challenges these workers face and how grassroots organizations provide a vital support system in addressing their needs despite limitations within South Africa's labour laws.

1.7. Study Objectives

- 1.7.1. To identify and analyze the key obstacles and forms of exploitation experienced by precarious workers, providing insight into the socio-economic and workplace conditions that compel them to pursue external support.
- 1.7.2. To evaluate CWAOW's interventions, including legal advice, organizing strategies, and advocacy, assessing their role in alleviating workers' grievances and offering an alternative form of support where traditional protections fall short.
- 1.7.3. To contextualize the motivations of precarious workers within the concept of violent democracy, exploring how experiences of marginalization, and inequality shape their relationships with grassroots organizations like CWAOW.

1.8. Research Questions

Main Research Question:

What motivates precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from the CWAOW?

Sub-questions:

1. What pushes precarious workers to seek external support?
2. How do precarious workers perceive the role of grassroots organizations within South Africa's labour context?
3. What broader insights do these motivations and experiences provide about the relationship between precarious work and violent democracy in South Africa?

1.9. Key Concepts

Precarious Work: Precarious work encompasses forms of employment characterized by instability, low wages, and limited access to social protections or benefits. These jobs are often temporary, casual, part-time, or performed under contractual arrangements. They typically lack

long-term security, career progression opportunities, and workplace protections. In addition to the contract, part-time, and labour-broker work examined in this study, precarious work can include informal sector jobs, gig and platform-based work (such as food delivery), seasonal labour, domestic work, and freelance arrangements (Theron, 2010; Standing, 2011; Webster et al., 2021). Such employment conditions are prevalent globally but are particularly significant in South Africa, where high unemployment and economic inequalities exacerbate the vulnerabilities of precarious workers. These various forms of precarious work collectively highlight a structural issue within modern labour markets, often leaving workers excluded from the protections provided by formal labour laws.

Grassroots Organisations: Grassroots organizations are locally driven, community-based groups that aim to address social, economic, and political issues affecting marginalized populations. In the labour context, grassroots organizations focus on advocacy, education, and providing direct support to workers who face systemic challenges. These organizations often fill gaps left by formal systems, working to empower individuals and communities through collective action (Piper & Barchiesi, 2010).

Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO): CWAO is a grassroots organization based in Gauteng, South Africa, dedicated to supporting precarious workers. The CWAO provides advice, legal assistance, and advocacy for all workers as well as workers employed under insecure conditions, including contract, part-time, and labour-broker workers. The organization operates within a framework of worker empowerment, emphasizing collective action and challenging the systemic inequalities that perpetuate precarious work (Lenka, 2017).

Violent Democracy: Violent democracy refers to a socio-political framework in which democratic institutions coexist with structural, symbolic and enacted forms of violence. In this context, violence is not only physical but also systemic, manifesting through exclusionary labour practices, inequalities, and the inability of marginalized groups to access justice or economic stability. This concept is particularly relevant to South Africa, where historical and ongoing disparities in labour relations expose workers to different forms of violence despite the country's democratic constitution (Von Holdt, 2013; Makino, 2020).

1.10. Theoretical Foundation of the Study

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand human behaviour and social phenomena through the subjective experiences and meanings individuals attach to their actions and environments. The interpretivist approach is appropriate for this

research as it focuses on exploring the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng who seek support from the CWAO. These motivations are shaped by their lived realities within the socio-political context of South Africa's labour relations, characterized by structural inequalities and symbolic violence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Von Holdt, 2013).

The study also adopts a constructivist epistemology, which asserts that social realities are actively constructed through human interaction and shaped by historical, cultural, and structural influences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this context, the constructivist approach provides a lens to understand how precarious workers' experiences of structural and symbolic violence are shaped by systemic inequalities and how these experiences influence their decisions to engage with grassroots organizations like the CWAO. The study's emphasis on violent democracy further aligns with constructivism, as it examines how structural and enacted violence are normalized in democratic systems that fail to provide equitable labour protections (Makino, 2020; Webster et al., 2021).

1.11. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of violent democracy, a concept that explores how structural, symbolic, and enacted violence persist within democratic systems, particularly in contexts of inequality and marginalization. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid, combined with neoliberal economic policies, has created a labour environment where precarious work thrives, perpetuating systemic inequalities despite the country's democratic ideals (Von Holdt, 2013; Webster et al., 2021).

Structural violence refers to the institutionalized inequalities embedded in labour laws and economic systems that marginalize workers, particularly those in precarious work. These workers often lack access to benefits, fair wages, and legal protections, exacerbating their vulnerability (Galtung, 1969; Makino, 2020). Symbolic violence, as conceptualized by Bourdieu, involves the normalization of these inequities through societal attitudes and power dynamics that make exploitation appear natural or inevitable (Weininger, 2005). This is evident in how precarious workers are often devalued and excluded from formal labour advocacy. Enacted violence manifests in the physical or psychological harm experienced by workers during protests, strikes, or confrontations with employers and state authorities. In South Africa, examples such as the Marikana massacre highlight the intersection of labour struggles and state-sanctioned violence, underscoring the precarious position of marginalized workers (Sinwell, 2016).

This theoretical framework not only contextualizes the motivations of precarious workers to seek support from grassroots organizations like the CWAO but also explains how these organizations challenge the systemic violence embedded within South Africa's labour relations. By framing the study within violent democracy, it becomes possible to critically analyze the dynamics between precarious work, grassroots advocacy, and the structural forces that perpetuate inequality.

1.12. Overview of the Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng who seek support from the CWAO. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews, the research provides participants with the flexibility to share their experiences and perspectives in detail. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, facilitated by CWAO staff, who identified workers that had sought or were currently seeking assistance. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes to foster comfort and openness during discussions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The data collected was analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to workers' motivations and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and safeguarding confidentiality, were central to the study. While qualitative research may limit generalizability, its strength lies in capturing the depth and context of participants' lived experiences.

1.13. Organisation and Structure of the Study

This report is organized into six chapters to systematically address the research problem and objectives:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation

This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the research problem, rationale, objectives, key concepts, and theoretical framework. It sets the stage for understanding the motivations of precarious workers within the context of violent democracy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines responses to precarious work in South Africa and explores the concept of violent democracy. It integrates discussions on symbolic, structural, and enacted violence, framing the study within existing scholarly debates.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative research approach, detailing the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant selection through purposive sampling, and the process of data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations and the limitations of the methodology are also addressed.

Chapter 4: Precarious Struggles and Fading Solidarities – Workers’ Pathways to Support and Exit

This chapter presents the findings derived from interviews with precarious workers and CWAO staff, offering insights into their motivations and experiences.

Chapter 5: Navigating Violent Democracy – Worker Motivations, Grassroots Resistance, and the Struggle for Lasting Change

This chapter interprets workers’ motivations through the lens of violent democracy, examining how CWAO operates as a response to systemic structural violence. It also discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, highlighting their relevance for labour activism and policy reform.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This concluding chapter reflects on the study's findings and their implications for labour advocacy and policy. It provides recommendations for addressing the systemic challenges faced by precarious workers and considers the role of grassroots organizations in fostering change.

1.14. Conclusion

This chapter has laid the groundwork for the study by introducing its core components, including the research background, problem, rationale, objectives, and theoretical framework. Key concepts such as precarious work, grassroots organizations, and violent democracy have been defined to establish the context for the research. The structure of the report has also been outlined, providing a roadmap for how the study's findings and analysis will unfold. The next chapter will build on this foundation by reviewing relevant literature on precarious work and the concept of violent democracy, further contextualizing the research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive theoretical and empirical context for understanding the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from the CWAO (Von Holdt, 2013). This chapter aims to examine key theories, concepts, and previous studies relevant to precarious labour, grassroots advocacy, and the socio-legal frameworks governing labour relations in South Africa. By situating this study within the broader discourse of violent democracy (Von Holdt, 2013) and within that, looking at structural violence (Galtung, 1969) in South Africa, the chapter seeks to highlight the systemic challenges precarious workers face and the role grassroots organizations play in addressing these challenges.

The structure of the review is designed to achieve several objectives. First, it outlines the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, focusing on the concepts of violent democracy (Von Holdt, 2013), precarious work (Standing, 2011), and structural violence (Galtung, 1969). These frameworks provide a lens to understand the systemic inequities in South Africa's labour market. Second, the review synthesizes empirical studies on precarious employment (Theron, 2010; Benya, 2016) and the role of grassroots organizations like CWAO in mitigating the effects of labour precarity. This synthesis underscores the gaps in existing research and highlights the unique contribution of this study. Finally, the review integrates these insights to situate the research within the "bigger picture" of labour relations, economic inequality, and advocacy in South Africa.

This chapter is guided by the following considerations: the relevance of the literature to the study's title, problem statement, and research questions; the integration of seminal and recent sources to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic; the identification of gaps in existing knowledge to justify the need for this study; and the logical structuring of content to ensure clarity and alignment with the study's objectives. Relevance is achieved by ensuring that the selected literature directly informs the research questions and objectives, while the inclusion of recent studies underscores the timeliness of the research. By addressing these aspects, the literature review not only lays a solid foundation for the research methodology and subsequent analysis but also positions the study within the broader academic discourse on labour relations and grassroots advocacy, demonstrating its contribution to filling

critical gaps in understanding.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Violent Democracy as a Lens for Labour Relations

Von Holdt's (2013) concept of violent democracy describes a political and social order in which violence is not merely a tactic but a deeply entrenched resource within the social fabric, wielded by elites, communities, and collective actors to achieve their ends. This perspective moves beyond an instrumentalist view, proposing that violence is a recurring element that fundamentally shapes societal dynamics and power structures. In South Africa, violent democracy manifests through a spectrum of practices, including political violence, community protests, and labour disputes, all of which reveal systemic inequities. These confrontations often expose the weaknesses and failures of democratic institutions, particularly in addressing the needs and rights of marginalized groups. Von Holdt underscores that this violence operates as a tool for contesting and negotiating power, particularly when traditional avenues of redress are perceived as ineffective or inaccessible. This dynamic creates an environment where violence is normalized and even expected in socio-political interactions, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and vulnerability that profoundly impacts precarious workers and their ability to secure fair treatment and protections.

Violent democracy is particularly relevant to this study because it highlights the inherent tensions within South Africa's labour relations system, where precarious workers are often excluded from adequate protections and resources. Von Holdt (2013) describes how elite interests, political contestations, and institutional shortcomings perpetuate cycles of marginalization and vulnerability, particularly for groups already disadvantaged by systemic inequities. These failures create a socio-political environment in which violence becomes a normalized resource to negotiate power or resolve disputes, rather than an exception. Grassroots organizations like the CWAO emerge within this context, stepping in to address the gaps left by state and traditional labour unions, offering a form of resistance and redress for precarious workers. By situating the CWAO within the dynamics of violent democracy, this demonstrates how such organizations not only respond to institutional voids but also provide a space for precarious workers to reclaim agency and contest the broader socio-political inequities of labour relations (Paret, 2018).

The connection between violent democracy and structural violence (Farmer, 2009; Paret, 2018) is critical to understanding the socio-political environment in which the CWAO operates.

Structural violence refers to the systematic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals, often invisibly embedded in laws, policies, and economic systems (Farmer, 2009). In South Africa, structural violence manifests through exploitative labour practices where precarious workers endure low wages, lack of job security, and minimal protections, often with little recourse to legal or institutional support. Employers, for example, may utilize practices such as unilateral contract terminations, excessive monitoring, or withholding wages to exert control over precarious workers, effectively silencing dissent and maintaining compliance. These actions not only deny workers agency but also deepen systemic inequality by perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and economic marginalization (Paret, 2018; Webster & Omar, 2003).

Violent democracy amplifies these conditions by embedding confrontational and coercive mechanisms within labour relations. Von Holdt (2013) underscores that violence (whether physical or structural), becomes a normalized tool within power negotiations, impacting how both employers and workers interact with labour laws and institutional protections. For instance, during strikes, the use of security forces, threats of dismissal, or union co-optation by employers highlights how institutional weaknesses are exploited to suppress worker dissent. In this context, violent democracy and structural violence intersect as frameworks that expose the systemic barriers faced by precarious workers and the broader socio-political dynamics that undermine their rights. By situating the CWAO within this landscape, this study examines how grassroots organizations respond to these intertwined forms of violence, providing precarious workers with tools and platforms to navigate and challenge exploitative labour systems (Benya, 2016; Paret, 2018; Webster & Omar, 2003).

Critically examining von Holdt's framework within this study reveals both its strengths and limitations. On the one hand, violent democracy provides a powerful lens to understand the socio-political dynamics driving the precarity of workers and the necessity for grassroots advocacy. It highlights the systemic nature of the challenges faced by precarious workers and positions organizations like the CWAO as vital actors responding to these tensions. However, its application may require adaptation to fully capture the lived experiences of precarious workers who seek support from grassroots organizations. While von Holdt's analysis focuses heavily on elite and collective actors, this study aims to centre the motivations and agency of precarious workers themselves, thereby adding a nuanced dimension to the discourse on violent democracy.

2.2.2. Precarious Work and Structural Violence

The concept of precarious work in South Africa reflects the conditions of the "precariat," a term popularized by Standing (2011) to describe a growing class of workers characterized by instability, insecurity, and lack of protections. This group is distinct from traditional working classes in that their employment is marked by short-term contracts, low wages, and little to no social benefits. The precariat lives with chronic uncertainty, often moving between unemployment and informal work, unable to access stable, dignified livelihoods. These labour conditions align closely with Johan Galtung's (1969) definition of structural violence, which emphasizes how systemic barriers—manifested in unequal power structures, legal frameworks, and socio-economic systems—create harm by denying people the ability to meet their basic needs. In South Africa, these systemic barriers have entrenched the precariat as a marginalized and vulnerable class, systematically excluded from the benefits of formal employment and legal protections.

Structural violence is evident in the mechanisms that govern precarious work in South Africa, where workers face exploitative labour practices such as outsourcing, labour brokering, and temporary contracts. These practices reflect deeper systemic inequalities rooted in South Africa's apartheid history and perpetuated by neoliberal economic policies. For example, labour brokers exploit legal loopholes to perpetuate temporary and rotational employment, ensuring that workers remain excluded from the benefits and protections guaranteed to permanent employees (Theron, 2010). This legal exclusion exemplifies what Galtung (1969) described as the invisibility of structural violence: harm is embedded within the system itself, making it appear as a natural or inevitable outcome of the labour market.

Systemic barriers such as poverty, job insecurity, and restricted access to legal recourse further reinforce structural violence within South Africa's labour market. Many precarious workers operate outside the formal regulatory framework, leaving them vulnerable to abuse without mechanisms for redress. For example, domestic workers and informal labourers often lack access to formal dispute resolution processes, effectively rendering them invisible within the legal system (Ally, 2009). This invisibility mirrors the broader structural violence described by Galtung, where the denial of rights and protections systematically dehumanizes and marginalizes these workers. Moreover, the economic precarity experienced by this group exacerbates their inability to organize collectively or demand better conditions, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and exclusion.

The intersection of precarious labour and structural violence also manifests in the lack of state intervention and institutional support for precarious workers. Despite legal frameworks intended to protect workers' rights, implementation often falls short, particularly for those in precarious employment. Employers exploit weak enforcement of labour laws, engaging in practices such as wage theft, arbitrary dismissals, and excessive surveillance to maintain control over workers. These forms of economic and psychological coercion are emblematic of structural violence, as they undermine workers' dignity and agency while perpetuating systemic inequality (Webster & Omar, 2003). Unlike the overt dynamics of violent democracy discussed in Section 2.2.1, structural violence operates in subtler but equally harmful ways within the realm of labour relations. While violent democracy emphasizes confrontational tactics and visible acts of coercion, structural violence underscores the everyday normalization of inequality through laws, policies, and socio-economic structures. In the context of precarious work, these two frameworks intersect, revealing a dual burden for workers: visible oppression through coercive labour practices and invisible harm through systemic exclusion.

By contextualizing violent democracy within the framework of structural violence, this section demonstrates how the CWAOW's role is both reactive and transformative. Reactive responses address immediate issues such as unfair dismissals or wage disputes, while transformative approaches aim to fundamentally alter the structural conditions that perpetuate precarity and inequality. Grassroots organizations like the CWAOW are critical in addressing this structural violence by advocating for systemic reforms while supporting workers in navigating the legal and economic barriers that define their precarity. This transformative role is evident in CWAOW's efforts to empower precarious workers through education, legal advocacy, and collective organization (CWAOW, n.d.), which not only respond to existing grievances but also challenge the systemic inequities embedded in labour laws and practices. For instance, the organization's campaigns against labour brokering aim to dismantle one of the most visible manifestations of structural violence in South Africa's labour market, seeking to secure stable, equitable employment for precarious workers (Theron, 2010; CWAOW, n.d.). By fostering worker agency and facilitating sustained advocacy, CWAOW works to dismantle the socio-economic structures that enable exploitation, thereby contributing to long-term changes in labour relations. This dual focus on immediate redress and systemic transformation positions CWAOW as a critical actor in contesting both the visible and invisible forms of violence that characterize South Africa's labour landscape (Benya, 2016; Paret, 2018). By addressing both immediate grievances and systemic inequities, CWAOW mitigates the harms of structural violence while

offering precarious workers, a pathway to contest and navigate the socio-political structures that perpetuate their marginalization.

In essence, precarious work in South Africa provides a clear lens through which to understand the broader dynamics of structural violence. Drawing from Standing's (2011) concept of the precariat, this section highlights how systemic barriers such as legal exclusion, economic insecurity, and limited institutional support function as forms of structural violence, entrenching vulnerability and inequality among precarious workers. This framework situates the CWAO's work within the broader struggle against labour precarity, emphasizing the need for transformative advocacy to address both the visible and invisible harms experienced by the precariat.

2.2.3. Legal Framework and Worker Support

South Africa's labour legislation, particularly the Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1997, represents a critical framework for protecting workers' rights. These laws were introduced as part of post-apartheid reforms to address historical inequities in labour relations and ensure fair practices. The LRA promotes collective bargaining, fair labour practices, and dispute resolution through institutions like the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA). Meanwhile, the BCEA establishes minimum employment conditions, including wages, working hours, and leave entitlements.

Over the years, amendments to these laws have sought to address challenges faced by precarious workers, including those employed through labour brokers, part-time arrangements, and fixed-term contracts. A pivotal case in this regard is *Assign Services v. NUMSA and Others* (2018). This Constitutional Court ruling clarified the legal status of temporary workers placed through labour brokers. The court upheld the "deeming provision" in Section 198A(3)(b) of the LRA, which states that after three months of continuous employment, a temporary worker is deemed to be an employee of the client company rather than the labour broker. This judgment aimed to prevent the exploitation of temporary workers by ensuring that they receive the same rights and benefits as permanent employees once the threshold period is surpassed. The *Assign Services* case marked a significant step in addressing the vulnerabilities of workers employed through labour brokers, but its implementation has exposed critical gaps. Employers have adopted various strategies to circumvent the ruling, such as rotating workers between different assignments to avoid the three-month threshold or simply terminating contracts before the

period elapses. As Theron (2010) notes, these practices reflect the persistent exploitation of legal ambiguities to undermine the intended protections of precarious workers.

Contract workers and part-time employees face similar challenges in accessing the protections promised by these laws. Although the BCEA includes provisions for fixed-term contracts, enforcement has been inconsistent. Many employers exploit gaps in the legislation to deny workers benefits such as paid leave or severance pay. Webster et al. (2015) highlight how the lack of legal literacy among precarious workers exacerbates their vulnerability, as many are unaware of their rights or how to enforce them. Furthermore, part-time workers are often excluded from collective bargaining processes, as trade unions prioritize full-time employees in formal sectors (Mosoetsa & Tsoeu, 2015).

The CCMA, while designed to offer accessible dispute resolution, also presents challenges for precarious workers. The process of lodging disputes can be complex and time-consuming, often requiring legal expertise that workers cannot afford. In cases involving labour brokers, workers have reported delays and procedural obstacles that deter them from pursuing claims. Additionally, the geographic inaccessibility of CCMA offices for workers in rural areas, particularly domestic workers and farm labourers, further limits the institution's effectiveness. Bischoff and Wood (2012) argue that these barriers undermine the principles of justice and equality enshrined in the LRA and BCEA. A case that illustrates these challenges involved 500 contract workers from a manufacturing company who were employed through a labour broker. Despite working for the company for over two years, they were dismissed without severance pay when their contracts were abruptly terminated. Although the CCMA ruled in favour of the workers, citing the protections for labour broker employees under the LRA, the employer appealed the decision, prolonging the workers' legal battle. By the time the case was resolved, many workers had moved on to other precarious jobs, highlighting how procedural delays can undermine substantive justice (Theron, 2010; Webster et al., 2015).

While the LRA and BCEA have made strides in formalizing worker protections, their ability to address the realities of precarious employment remains limited. The *Assign Services* case exemplifies the tension between progressive legal frameworks and their practical enforcement. Loopholes in the law, coupled with systemic barriers like legal illiteracy and resource constraints, perpetuate the vulnerability of precarious workers. These systemic barriers highlight the gap between formal rights and their practical realization, necessitating further reforms to strengthen enforcement and close legal ambiguities.

2.2.4. Labour Conflict and the Marikana Massacre

The Marikana massacre of August 2012 remains one of the most significant events in post-apartheid labour relations, illustrating how violent democracy manifests in the South African workplace. During a wage strike at Lonmin's platinum mine, 34 workers were killed by police, while many more were injured and arrested. Scholars argue that Marikana exposed the deep fractures in South Africa's industrial relations system, where workers' grievances over wages and living conditions escalated into a violent confrontation emblematic of state repression and corporate power (Alexander, 2013; Sinwell, 2016). This event highlights how structural and enacted violence intersect with symbolic violence, as workers' demands for dignity were criminalized and delegitimized through dominant discourses. Situating Marikana within the framework of violent democracy provides important context for understanding the persistence of worker precarity and the limitations of institutional mechanisms for labour dispute resolution.

2.2.5. Protest Regulation and the Regulation of the Gatherings Act

Another important dimension of labour struggles in South Africa involves the state's regulation of collective action. The Regulation of Gatherings Act (RGA) of 1993 has been criticized for its restrictive provisions that hold protest conveners criminally and financially liable for damages during demonstrations. Scholars note that this legal framework has often been used to suppress rather than enable democratic participation, with cases such as *Garvas v. SATAWU* (2012) highlighting the risks faced by unions and grassroots movements when organizing protests (Duncan, 2016). This legal environment intensifies the vulnerability of precarious workers who rely on protest as a primary form of resistance. By embedding protest within a framework of liability and criminalization, the RGA reproduces forms of structural and symbolic violence, further marginalizing already precarious groups (Kane-Berman, 2017).

2.3. Empirical Context: Precarious Workers and Grassroots Organisations

2.3.1. Defining Precarious Work in South Africa

Precarious work, a concept gaining prominence in global labour studies, is marked by insecurity, instability, and lack of protection. As mentioned in the previous section, Standing (2011) characterizes the "precariat" as a distinct social class comprising individuals in temporary, part-time, and otherwise insecure forms of employment. These workers experience high levels of job uncertainty, limited access to social protections, and often lower wages compared to permanent employees. Kalleberg (2009) underscores precarious work as a

byproduct of neoliberal labour market transformations, emphasizing the decline in traditional employment relationships and the rise of contingent labour.

Globally, precarious work reflects structural economic changes such as outsourcing, labour market deregulation, and the rise of the gig economy. These shifts, driven by global capitalism, have eroded job security and weakened labour protections, especially in developing countries. Precarious workers are often concentrated in informal sectors, where they face exploitation and minimal legal recourse (Barchiesi, 2011). In developed economies, the gig economy has further blurred the boundaries of formal and informal work, leaving many without basic labour rights (Wood et al., 2019). In the South African context, precarious work is deeply rooted in historical and systemic inequalities. The apartheid regime entrenched a dual labour market, with formal protections largely reserved for a minority of skilled, predominantly white workers, while the majority, particularly Black workers, were relegated to informal, low-wage jobs (Webster et al., 2015). Despite post-apartheid reforms, precarious employment persists, with labour brokers, fixed-term contracts, and part-time work dominating sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, and domestic work.

Theron (2010) highlights Gauteng as a focal point for precarious employment in South Africa due to its status as the country's economic hub. Industries reliant on contract and temporary workers, such as mining, retail, and logistics, dominate the province. Empirical studies show that labour broker arrangements are particularly prevalent in Gauteng, with workers frequently cycling between temporary jobs without long-term security. Benya (2016) underscores how women, especially in mining and domestic work, bear the brunt of precarious labour, often facing unsafe working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social protections. One illustrative example is the logistics sector in Gauteng, where workers employed through labour brokers report high job turnover and a lack of benefits such as medical aid or unemployment insurance. While these workers technically fall under the protections of the LRA, enforcement gaps and employer non-compliance render these rights largely ineffective in practice. Studies also highlight the role of informal settlements in Gauteng, where precarious workers often reside near industrial hubs, further exposing them to economic and environmental vulnerabilities (Theron, 2010; Benya, 2016).

Alternative discussions emphasize the agency of precarious workers in resisting exploitation. Barchiesi (2011) argues that despite their marginalization, these workers often engage in informal collective action to demand better conditions. In Gauteng, grassroots movements and community-

based organizations have become pivotal in addressing the systemic challenges faced by precarious workers. Webster et al. (2015) suggest that while precarious work is a manifestation of global and local economic pressures, it also reflects broader struggles for social and economic justice in post-apartheid South Africa. In essence, precarious work in South Africa must be understood within both global and local contexts. While global capitalism drives the erosion of traditional labour protections, the legacy of apartheid and systemic inequality exacerbates the precarity experienced by workers in Gauteng. By examining empirical studies and alternative perspectives, it becomes evident that precarious work is not merely a labour issue but a broader socio-economic challenge requiring systemic reform.

2.3.2. The Role of Grassroots Organisations

Grassroots organizations are community-driven groups formed by ordinary individuals who unite to address local issues and advocate for change. These movements emphasize collective action, local participation, and direct involvement in decision-making processes (Bergan, 2024). The term "grassroots" signifies initiatives originating from the common populace, distinguishing them from elite-driven efforts. Historically, such organizations in South Africa emerged in response to systemic inequalities, including apartheid and economic injustice. During the anti-apartheid struggle, movements like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) mobilized workers nationwide (Bergan, 2024; Webster & Buhlungu, 2004). In the post-apartheid era, grassroots organizations continue to respond to new challenges such as precarious employment and exploitation (Von Holdt, 2003).

Unions and State Mechanisms

Unions in South Africa, including COSATU, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), have historically focused on representing workers in formal sectors. Their hierarchical structures and bureaucratic frameworks are effective for negotiating labour rights within established industries but often overlook the complexities of precarious work arrangements (Buhlungu & Webster, 2011). For instance, COSATU has successfully advocated for permanent workers in industries such as mining and manufacturing but struggles to address the needs of those employed by labour brokers or in informal settings (Von Holdt, 2003). NUMSA, despite its progressive stance, faces similar challenges in representing temporary and contract workers, leaving many without access to collective bargaining or labour protections (Buhlungu & Webster, 2011). Furthermore, state mechanisms, including labour laws and enforcement

agencies, are similarly limited in their ability to protect precarious workers. Legislative frameworks often fail to encompass informal and atypical work arrangements, leaving gaps in protection and enforcement (CWAO, 2024). As a result, workers in the informal economy frequently lack legal recourse for exploitation and unsafe conditions.

The Role of the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO) and the Simunye Workers' Forum (SWF)

The CWAO, established in 2011 in Germiston, South Africa, addresses the challenges faced by precarious workers who are often excluded from traditional union representation. These workers, employed through labour brokers or in atypical and informal arrangements, frequently experience exploitation and marginalization in labour markets. CWAO's primary role is to bridge the gaps left by unions and state mechanisms through a combination of legal assistance, worker education, advocacy, and support for collective organizing. The organization provides free legal advice to workers dealing with issues such as unfair dismissals, wage disputes, and breaches of labour laws, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to justice (CWAO, 2024). Additionally, CWAO conducts workshops and training sessions to educate workers about their rights under South African labour law, empowering them to assert their rights in complex employment relationships (CWAO, n.d.).

Beyond individual support, CWAO is actively involved in broader advocacy efforts, campaigning for reforms in labour policies to enhance protections for precarious workers. For instance, the organization has highlighted the exploitative practices associated with labour brokering and has called for changes to the Labour Relations Act to include more comprehensive safeguards (SWF, 2023). Recognizing the limitations of formal legal mechanisms, CWAO also facilitates collective organizing by helping workers form networks and associations. This approach creates platforms for collective action and solidarity, amplifying workers' voices and fostering community resilience.

In collaboration with CWAO, the Simunye Workers' Forum (SWF) was established as a worker-led initiative designed to unify and mobilize precarious workers across different sectors. Unlike traditional unions, SWF adopts a non-hierarchical, decentralized structure that is more accessible and responsive to the needs of marginalized workers. This structure fosters trust and inclusivity, addressing the disenchantment many precarious workers feel toward conventional labour institutions (CWAO, 2024). SWF operates as a democratic platform where workers can address grievances, strategize for systemic reforms, and engage in collective bargaining. It

emphasizes solidarity across sectors, uniting workers from diverse industries to confront shared challenges. The SWF also implements community-based strategies that focus on localized organizing and collective action. By encouraging workers to build networks within their communities, SWF empowers them to challenge exploitative practices directly. This grassroots approach has been particularly effective in enabling workers to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and achieve tangible outcomes. Furthermore, the SWF's pan-sectoral movement seeks to transcend the traditional boundaries of labour organizing, creating a unified front that strengthens the collective power of precarious workers (SWF, 2023).

Together, CWAO and SWF represent a transformative model of labour advocacy in South Africa. By addressing the unique vulnerabilities of precarious workers through legal support, education, and grassroots organizing, they fill the void left by unions and state mechanisms. Their work demonstrates the potential of grassroots organizations to redefine worker advocacy, emphasizing inclusivity, empowerment, and systemic change. Through these efforts, CWAO and SWF not only protect precarious workers but also inspire them to lead their own struggles for dignity and justice in the workplace.

2.3.3. Challenges of Grassroots Advocacy in a Violent Democracy

Grassroots organizations like the CWAO face numerous challenges as they navigate the complexities of labour advocacy within the context of a violent democracy. This term, as articulated by scholars like Von Holdt (2013), describes a sociopolitical landscape where systemic violence—both symbolic and structural—undermines democratic processes and perpetuates inequality. For grassroots organizations, these challenges are deeply embedded in South Africa's broader labour dynamics, characterized by limited resources, state resistance, and employer pushback.

Limited Resources

One of the most significant challenges for grassroots organizations is the chronic shortage of financial and human resources. Unlike unions, which often have access to membership fees and established funding structures, organizations like CWAO and SWF rely heavily on donor funding and volunteer support. This dependency limits their capacity to scale their operations and respond effectively to the growing demand for their services. SWF, as a worker-led initiative, faces similar constraints. Its decentralized and non-hierarchical structure, while empowering, often results in organizational inefficiencies and delays in decision-making. The

lack of stable funding also affects its ability to sustain long-term campaigns, conduct workshops, or expand its reach to more precarious workers across South Africa (CWAO, n.d.; SWF, 2023).

State Resistance

Grassroots organizations advocating for labour rights often encounter resistance from the state, which views their efforts as a challenge to established labour relations frameworks. The South African government has been criticized for prioritizing stability in industrial relations over addressing the systemic exploitation of precarious workers. State resistance can manifest in various forms, including bureaucratic hurdles, restrictive legislation, and even direct interference. For example, CWAO has faced difficulties in accessing government platforms for labour dispute resolution, as these platforms often favour traditional unions and formal employment sectors. The state's reluctance to engage with grassroots organizations undermines their ability to influence policy and advocate for reforms that would benefit precarious workers (Bezuidenhout, 2008; CWAO, 2024).

Employer Pushback

Employers also actively resist grassroots advocacy, particularly when it threatens to disrupt exploitative labour practices. Employer pushback can take the form of intimidation, threats, or even legal action against workers who participate in grassroots movements. For instance, workers associated with SWF have reported being targeted by employers for their involvement in collective organizing efforts, facing unfair dismissals or reductions in work hours as a form of retaliation. Labour brokers, a significant force in precarious employment, often exacerbate this challenge by leveraging their intermediary role to evade accountability. These brokers frequently resist transparency and exploit gaps in labour law enforcement to maintain exploitative practices, making it difficult for grassroots organizations to hold them accountable (CWAO, 2024).

Systemic Violence and the Broader Labour Landscape

These challenges are deeply rooted in the systemic violence that characterizes South Africa's labour landscape. Symbolic violence—manifested through exclusionary policies and the marginalization of precarious workers—creates an environment where grassroots advocacy is consistently undermined. Structural violence, including economic inequalities and the commodification of labour, further entrenches the power imbalances that grassroots organizations seek to address (Von Holdt, 2013). For example, despite their efforts, CWAO and

SWF often find themselves at odds with traditional unions, which are seen as complicit in maintaining the status quo. Established unions, such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), have historically focused on formal-sector workers, neglecting the growing segment of precarious labour (CWAO, 2024; SWF, 2023; CWAO, n.d.). This failure creates a dual system of labour advocacy, where precarious workers are left vulnerable to systemic exploitation and grassroots organizations struggle to fill the void.

2.3.4. Emerging Strategies: Digital Activism and Grassroots Alliances

Recent scholarship highlights the emergence of new strategies that grassroots organizations employ to navigate restrictive legal and political contexts. Digital activism, including the use of social media platforms, has become a critical tool for precarious workers to mobilize support, document injustices, and bypass traditional gatekeepers of public discourse (Hlatshwayo, 2020). At the same time, alliances with broader civil society organizations and transnational solidarity networks have strengthened local struggles by linking them to global movements for labour rights and social justice (Friedman, 2012). These strategies underscore the adaptability of grassroots organizations like the CWAO, which, despite resource constraints, draw on both digital tools and coalition-building to amplify workers' voices. Integrating these strategies into the analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of how precarious workers navigate violent democracy.

2.4. Motivations for Seeking Support from CWAO

2.4.1. Socioeconomic Drivers

Conceptualisation: In this study, socioeconomic drivers are conceptualised as the material and financial factors that compel workers to seek external support, including wage theft, unfair dismissals, lack of social benefits, and unsafe working conditions. These drivers shape workers' vulnerabilities and influence their engagement with advocacy and legal support mechanisms.

Contextualisation: In South Africa, precarious workers frequently face wage theft, where employers unlawfully withhold salaries, delay payments, or deny overtime. Informal workers and those employed through labour brokers are particularly affected, resulting in financial instability that pushes them toward organizations like the CWAO for assistance (CWAO, n.d.; Grassroots Justice Network, n.d.). Unfair dismissals—terminations without just cause or due

process—are also common, often contravening the Labour Relations Act (CCMA, n.d.; Labour Law Advice, n.d.). CWAO provides legal support to challenge these practices, offering remedies such as compensation or reinstatement. Beyond these immediate concerns, workers often lack social benefits, job security, and safe working conditions. CWAO addresses these structural challenges through education, advocacy, and litigation support, mitigating financial and social vulnerabilities and promoting socioeconomic empowerment among precarious workers (CWAO, n.d.; Grassroots Justice Network, n.d.).

2.4.2. Perception of Legal Frameworks

Conceptualisation: Conceptually, this study defines workers’ perceptions of legal frameworks as how individuals interpret and evaluate the ability of laws and dispute resolution mechanisms to protect their rights. These perceptions influence whether they rely on formal institutions or turn to alternative support systems.

Contextualisation: In South Africa, labour broker, part-time, and contract workers often perceive existing legal frameworks as insufficient for protecting their interests. Many experiences job insecurity, low wages, and exclusion from benefits, leading to a sense that labour laws favour employers (Bezuidenhout, 2015; Webster & Omar, 2020). Dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the CCMA, are seen as bureaucratic and difficult to navigate, further discouraging workers from seeking formal recourse (Buhlungu & Tshoaedi, 2012; Theron, 2016). Consequently, many workers turn to grassroots organizations like the CWAO, which offer accessible, community-based legal support and advocacy. By bridging the gap between formal protections and lived realities, CWAO provides workers with practical tools to challenge unfair practices effectively (Motala, 2018).

2.4.3. Community Solidarity and Advocacy

Conceptualisation: In this study, community solidarity is conceptualised as the sense of collective identity and shared purpose among workers that motivates mutual support and collaborative action. This form of social cohesion underpins grassroots advocacy and empowers workers to resist exploitation collectively.

Contextualisation: Among South African precarious workers, shared experiences of insecurity, poor working conditions, and exploitation foster solidarity, which becomes a critical motivator for seeking support from organizations like CWAO (Barchiesi, 2011). CWAO leverages this

solidarity by creating spaces for workers to share experiences, build networks, and access participatory support structures. Through legal advice, advocacy, and community organizing, the organization reinforces workers' agency, enabling collective action and enhancing their capacity to navigate systemic and structural barriers. Beyond immediate support, these efforts contribute to broader societal awareness and policy advocacy, addressing the root causes of precarious work and promoting long-term structural change (Theron, 2016; Webster & Omar, 2020; Bezuidenhout, 2015).

2.5. Identifying Gaps in the Literature

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of grassroots organizations like the CWAO in advocating for precarious workers (Lenka, 2017), significant gaps remain in understanding how these organizations operate within the context of South Africa's violent democracy. Specifically, there is a lack of empirical research examining the intersection of structural violence, legal advocacy, and worker agency, and how these dynamics influence workers' motivations to seek support from grassroots organizations.

2.5.1. Gaps in Empirical Research on Grassroots Organizations in the Context of Violent Democracy

Grassroots organizations such as CWAO play a critical role in providing legal and community-based support to precarious workers. However, there is a dearth of empirical studies that connect these organizations' activities with the concept of "violent democracy" (Von Holdt, 2013). South Africa's violent democracy is characterized by deep-seated inequality, high levels of unemployment, and the persistence of exploitative labour practices (Webster & Buhlungu, 2004). The ways in which grassroots organizations navigate this environment and challenge the systemic violence that impacts precarious workers remain underexplored. Existing studies often focus on the broader political economy of labour in post-apartheid South Africa but fail to examine how grassroots organizations respond to the structural violence embedded in the political and economic systems (Buhlungu & Webster, 2006).

2.5.2. Understanding Workers' Motivations in the Legal and Socio-Political Context

A significant gap also exists in understanding why workers seek support from grassroots organizations like CWAO, particularly in relation to the complex legal and socio-political landscape in which they operate. While studies such as that of Webster (2015) have explored general motivations for workers to seek support from informal networks, few studies have directly linked these motivations to the specific constraints and failures of the formal legal

system, which is heavily influenced by the violent democratic context. Workers often turn to grassroots organizations not only because of the inadequacies of the formal legal system but because they experience legal frameworks as inaccessible, slow, and frequently biased (Theron, 2010). However, the broader socio-political context of violent democracy, which perpetuates worker precarity through unequal power dynamics, has not been fully integrated into the analysis of why workers choose to engage with grassroots organizations (Von Holdt, 2013). This gap highlights the need for more nuanced qualitative studies that examine the role of violence in shaping workers' experiences and decisions to seek support.

2.5.3. The Overlooked Intersection of Structural Violence, Legal Advocacy, and Worker Agency

A critical gap in the literature is the failure to fully explore the intersection of structural violence, legal advocacy, and worker agency within the context of South Africa's labour struggles. While scholars such as Theron (2014) and Von Holdt (2013) have discussed the broader socio-political and economic violence that underpins the exploitation of precarious workers, there has been limited focus on how grassroots organizations like CWAO intervene in this space to empower workers. This intersection of structural violence and legal advocacy is crucial to understanding the role of worker agency in resisting systemic exploitation. Grassroots organizations like CWAO do not simply provide legal advice or assistance but actively engage in challenging the broader socio-political systems that perpetuate inequality and violence (Buhlungu & Webster, 2006). The failure of mainstream unions and state mechanisms to address these issues, combined with the increasing criminalization and marginalization of precarious workers, demands further investigation into how grassroots organizations foster worker agency within a violent democracy.

2.6. Conclusion

This literature review has explored the complexities of precarious labour and the critical role of grassroots organizations, such as the CWAO, in addressing the systemic exploitation faced by workers in South Africa. Drawing on studies of labour relations and the concept of violent democracy, it has become evident that precarious workers—particularly those employed through labour brokers, part-time contracts, or in informal sectors—face multifaceted challenges in securing their rights and demanding justice. While much of the existing literature provides valuable insights into the socio-political dynamics shaping precarious labour, there remains a gap in understanding the role grassroots organizations play in navigating these

challenges within the framework of South Africa's violent democracy.

The reviewed literature has shown that while unions and state mechanisms have historically been central to labour struggles in South Africa, their limitations are increasingly apparent in addressing the specific needs of precarious workers. Studies by Von Holdt (2013) and Theron (2010) have highlighted how structural violence, entrenched inequality, and political resistance create an environment where formal labour systems fail to protect vulnerable workers. This has led to the emergence of grassroots organizations, such as CWAO, which offer legal aid, community organizing, and advocacy to fill the gaps left by unions and the state. However, as highlighted in the literature, these organizations face significant challenges, including limited resources, state resistance, and employer pushback, which hinder their ability to fully address the needs of precarious workers.

This review has established that the intersection of legal frameworks, worker agency, and structural violence in South Africa's violent democracy presents a unique context for understanding how precarious workers engage with grassroots organizations. By focusing on the work of CWAO and its SWF, this study aims to bridge the gap in literature by exploring the motivations of workers seeking support from these organizations. Specifically, it examines how these grassroots initiatives provide a space for workers to assert their rights in the face of systemic exploitation and the failures of formal labour institutions.

The research questions guiding this study seek to understand the factors that drive precarious workers to seek assistance beyond traditional labour structures, examining their perceptions of grassroots organizations within South Africa's labour landscape. It also investigates how these motivations and experiences shed light on the broader connection between precarious work and the concept of violent democracy in the country. The findings from this review underscore the significance of these questions and highlight the need for further empirical investigation into how workers navigate the legal and labour landscapes, particularly in a context marked by violence and systemic inequality.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed provides a theoretical foundation for this study while also underscoring the gaps in understanding the role of grassroots organizations within the broader framework of violent democracy. This research will contribute to filling these gaps by providing empirical insights into the experiences and motivations of precarious workers in South Africa. By linking theoretical insights with empirical findings, this study aims to enhance

our understanding of labour struggles in violent democracies and contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective advocacy strategies for precarious workers. The subsequent chapter will outline the methodology employed to explore these issues further, ensuring that this study addresses the gaps identified in the literature and advances knowledge in this critical area of labour research.

CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in this study, which aims to investigate the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng province to seek support from the CWAO. The primary objectives are to understand the subjective experiences of labour broker, contract, and part-time workers and to explore how grassroots organizations like CWAO contribute to their support and advocacy. The research is guided by the central question: "What motivates precarious workers in Gauteng to seek support from the CWAO?" This inquiry is well-suited to a qualitative research design, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of personal narratives and subjective views, which are essential for understanding the complexities of precarious work and the role of grassroots organizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The choice of Gauteng province as the study location is justified by its status as the economic hub of South Africa, attracting a significant number of people from neighbouring countries and within South Africa in search of job opportunities. This influx has led to a proliferation of precarious work, making Gauteng a critical area for studying labour dynamics (Meyer, 2023). The selection of CWAO in Germiston is strategic, given its dual role in providing legal assistance and labour rights education to precarious workers. Additionally, the office's proximity to my residence facilitated ease of access and frequent engagement, enhancing the depth of data collection.

The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this study as it enables the collection of rich, detailed data that captures the nuances of workers' experiences. By employing semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling, the research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the workers' perspectives, which might be overlooked in quantitative studies. This methodological choice underscores the commitment to amplifying the voices of precarious workers, aligning with the research's objective to reveal the lived realities of those often marginalized in the labour market (Bryman, 2016).

3.2. Research Strategy

This study adopts a qualitative research strategy to explore the motivations of precarious workers in seeking support from the CWAO. The primary data collection method involves semi-structured interviews, complemented by snowball sampling to reach a broader participant

base. This approach allows for the capture of in-depth personal accounts and subjective experiences, which are crucial for understanding the nuanced realities of precarious workers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe further into specific areas of interest. This method is well-suited to exploring complex social phenomena such as precarious work, where participants' perspectives provide valuable insights that might not be fully captured through quantitative methods (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Additionally, this research includes a multi-sectoral sample, with participants drawn from sectors such as manufacturing and retail. This diversity ensures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by precarious workers across different industries (Silverman, 2016). By encompassing a range of sectors, the study aims to capture a collective experience, highlighting common issues and sector-specific challenges.

Beyond primary data collection, the strategy also incorporates the analysis of secondary data. Articles detailing the work of CWAO and theoretical frameworks such as von Holdt's (2013) concept of "violent democracy" were reviewed to contextualize and frame the research findings. This secondary analysis supports the understanding of structural and symbolic violence in South Africa's labour relations, further enriching the study's analysis (von Holdt & Langa, 2011).

3.3. Research Design

The research design of this study is rooted in a qualitative framework, chosen to deeply explore the motivations behind precarious workers seeking support from grassroots organizations like the CWAO. Qualitative research is well-suited to examining complex social phenomena, allowing for a nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences and the socio-economic factors influencing their decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design aligns with the study's objective to reveal the intricate realities of precarious employment and the role of grassroots support systems.

Initially, the research plan was to conduct interviews at the CWAO office, with fieldwork scheduled from the 21st of November 2024 until the 12th of December 2024. This location was selected for its convenience and to ensure my safety, providing a neutral space where participants could share their experiences without interruptions. However, the nature of precarious work, characterized by irregular and often unpredictable work hours, presented a significant logistical challenge. Many participants work on-call, receiving job notifications

with little notice, which meant they could not commit to scheduled interviews (Standing, 2011). This unpredictability necessitated a shift in the research design. To accommodate participants' fluctuating availability, the decision was made to conduct interviews at their homes. This adaptation was crucial in accessing participants who might otherwise have been excluded due to their erratic work schedules. Conducting interviews in participants' homes also had the advantage of providing a comfortable and familiar environment, which can encourage more open and honest dialogue (Seidman, 2019). The home setting allowed me to gain insights not only through verbal accounts but also through observation of participants' living conditions, which often reflect their socio-economic status and further contextualize their narratives.

The research design also involved selecting a diverse sample from multiple sectors, including manufacturing, retail, and services. This multi-sectoral approach was critical to capturing a comprehensive view of precarious work, as different industries have unique characteristics that impact the nature of employment and workers' experiences (Kalleberg, 2018). For instance, while retail workers might face different challenges compared to those in manufacturing, such as varying degrees of job security or work intensity, the underlying precarity of their employment remains a common thread. This sectoral diversity helps to paint a broader picture of precarious work in Gauteng, making the findings more generalizable to similar contexts within the region. While analyzing the initial interviews during the December 2024 holidays, I identified the need to include precarious workers not directly referred by CWAOW. This was to ensure a broader range of perspectives and to mitigate the potential for bias that could arise if participants felt compelled to present only positive accounts.

Moreover, incorporating secondary data into the research design enriched the study by providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the structural challenges faced by precarious workers. The concept of "violent democracy" by Von Holdt (2013) was particularly relevant, offering a lens through which to examine the systemic and symbolic violence embedded in labour relations in South Africa. This theoretical perspective helped frame the primary data collected through interviews, allowing for a deeper analysis of the socio-political dynamics influencing workers' motivations to seek support from organizations like CWAOW.

3.4. Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy for this study combined purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure a rich and diverse pool of participants, crucial for understanding the multifaceted experiences of precarious workers in Gauteng. The initial participants were selected through

purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting individuals who are particularly knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this case, the CWAO staff referred the first set of participants, who were known to be actively seeking support from the organization. Purposive sampling was particularly effective in identifying participants who could provide deep insights into the motivations and challenges of precarious workers, especially those involved in labour brokerage, part-time, and contract work. These groups are often at the forefront of precarious employment, characterized by job insecurity, low wages, and lack of benefits (Kalleberg, 2018). By focusing on these categories, the study aimed to capture a wide range of experiences reflective of the broader precarious workforce in Gauteng.

Starting in early January 2025, snowball sampling was employed, wherein initial interviewees were asked to recommend other precarious workers. This method involves existing study subjects recruiting future subjects from among their acquaintances, a process particularly useful in reaching populations that are difficult to access (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Given the unpredictable and transient nature of precarious work, snowball sampling allowed me to connect with additional participants who might otherwise have been difficult to identify, and not potentially influenced by the organization. This approach ensured that the sample was not only extensive but also diverse, encompassing workers from various sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and services.

The inclusion of one of the CWAO founding members in the sample was a strategic decision to provide context and insight into the organization's operations and its impact on the workers it supports. The founding member offered a unique perspective on the challenges faced by precarious workers and the effectiveness of CWAO's interventions. This perspective was essential for understanding the broader context within which the workers operate, complementing the direct accounts gathered from the workers themselves (Webster & Omar, 2020).

3.5. Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews, a widely used technique in qualitative research due to its flexibility and depth. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a blend of predetermined questions and the opportunity for participants to share their experiences and insights in their own words, thus generating rich, detailed data (Kallio et al., 2016). This method was particularly suited for exploring the complex and

personal nature of precarious work, as it enabled me to delve into specific issues while remaining open to emergent themes and perspectives.

3.5.1. Overview of the Participants

The participants in this study represented a diverse yet interconnected group of precarious workers in Gauteng. Of the nine participants, six were women and three were men, highlighting a significant gendered trend in the willingness to share experiences. Men exhibited notable reluctance to participate, often expressing concerns about potential exposure despite reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity. This gendered dynamic underscores the complex interplay of trust, vulnerability, and societal expectations within precarious work environments and research engagement.

In terms of employment arrangements, 66.7% of the participants were employed through labour brokers, while 33.3% worked as casual workers. The predominance of labour-brokered employment reflects the widespread use of intermediaries in South Africa's labour market—a practice that fosters job insecurity and deepens workers' precarity (Webster, 2015). While casual workers operated outside of formal intermediaries, they remained vulnerable due to the absence of institutional protections or benefits, reinforcing their precarious positions.

Sectoral representation was also notable, with 77.8% employed in the manufacturing sector and 22.2% in retail. Both sectors are widely recognized for their reliance on flexible, low-wage labour, which perpetuates precarious working conditions (Barchiesi, 2011). Workers across these sectors shared common experiences of unpredictable schedules, lack of benefits, and susceptibility to exploitation, while also facing sector-specific challenges.

The “years living in Gauteng” variable revealed important insights into internal migration patterns. Only one participant was born in Gauteng, while others had lived in the province for varying periods, with one participant having resided in Gauteng for 34 years. This demonstrates Gauteng's role as a major economic hub that attracts internal migrants from provinces such as Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. Migration was driven by the search for employment opportunities, reflecting the stark economic disparities between provinces. Importantly, migration also contributed to the participants' vulnerabilities, as many were disconnected from family and social support systems, increasing their reliance on precarious, low-paying work.

Participants were predominantly between the ages of 31 and 40 (77.8%), reflecting a working-age group actively engaged in precarious labour. Educational attainment showed that 55.6%

had completed matric, 22.2% had no matric, and only 22.2% had attained tertiary education. This trend points to the systemic difficulties of accessing tertiary education in South Africa, where financial barriers, limited university spaces, and structural inequalities restrict upward mobility for many (Gumede, 2022). Consequently, a significant number of matriculants remain trapped in precarious employment due to the lack of qualifications needed for secure jobs.

These sociodemographic characteristics offer a critical foundation for understanding the motivations and lived experiences of precarious workers in Gauteng. The intersection of gender, employment type, sector, migration, and education paint a holistic picture of the structural vulnerabilities this group faces. Including both labour broker and casual workers allows for a nuanced analysis of precarity, revealing both commonalities and differences in their experiences. This overview sets the stage for the thematic analysis that follows, situating the findings within broader conversations about structural inequalities, labour precarity, and internal migration in South Africa.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

Sample Characteristics	N	%
Age		
21-30	1	11.1
31-40	7	77.8
41-50	1	11.1
Level of Education		
No Matric	2	22.2
Matric	5	55.6
Tertiary	2	22.2
Years Living in Gauteng		
Born in Gauteng	1	11.1
0-10 years	1	11.1
11-20 years	6	66.7

21-30 years		
31-40 years	1	11.1
Sector		
Manufacturing	7	77.8%
Retail	2	22.2%
Type of Employment		
Labour Broker	6	66.7%
Casual	3	33.3%

$n = 9$

The selection of these variables—age, sector, type of employment, years living in Gauteng, and level of education—is essential in understanding the diverse experiences of precarious workers in South Africa’s labour market. Age helps explore generational differences in vulnerability and access to resources, while sector (manufacturing or retail) captures the specific working conditions and sectoral challenges faced by precarious workers. Type of employment, distinguishing between labour brokered and casual workers, is significant in assessing the nature of precarity and levels of protection each group may have. Years living in Gauteng offers insight into migration patterns, settlement experiences, and access to support networks. Lastly, the level of education is critical in understanding how educational attainment influences job opportunities, knowledge of rights, and capacity to navigate the labour market. Together, these variables provide a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the motivations and challenges faced by precarious workers seeking support from grassroots organizations.

Table 2: Description of variables

Variable	Description
Age	The age of the participant during the time of the study.
Sector	The industry where the participant works—either Manufacturing or Retail.
Type of Employment	Specifies whether the participant is employed through a labour broker or as a casual worker.
Years in Gauteng	The number of years the participant has been living in Gauteng Province.
Level of Education	The participant's highest level of education (categorical: e.g., Matric, Tertiary).

3.5.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated a nuanced exploration of the motivations of precarious workers in seeking support from the CWAO. This approach allowed me to ask open-ended questions that guided the conversation while providing the flexibility to follow up on interesting or unexpected responses. Such interviews are known for their ability to yield deep insights into participants' lived experiences, making them ideal for research that seeks to understand the subjective dimensions of social phenomena (Bryman, 2016). The interview schedule was carefully designed to cover key topics related to the participants' work conditions, their interactions with CWAO, and their broader experiences in the labour market.

3.5.3. Focus on Subjective Views

A central focus of the study was on capturing the subjective views of the precarious workers, prioritizing their voices over institutional narratives provided by CWAO staff. This methodological choice aligns with the goals of qualitative research, which seeks to understand phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). By prioritizing the workers' accounts, the research aimed to uncover the realities of precarious work as experienced by those directly affected, thus providing a more authentic and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study, given the sensitive nature of precarious work and the vulnerabilities of the participants. The research adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants and the integrity of the data collected.

3.6.1. Informed Consent

Informed consent was a crucial aspect of the study. Before conducting any interviews, participants were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without any repercussions. This process was designed to ensure that participants fully understood what their involvement entailed and consented to it knowingly and willingly (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

3.6.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Maintaining confidentiality and safeguarding the anonymity of the participants were critical. The identities of the workers were protected by using pseudonyms and omitting any identifiable information from the data and subsequent reports. This was particularly important given the potentially sensitive nature of their work conditions and their interactions with grassroots organizations like the CWAO. The measure taken to secure all collected data was using password-protected smartphone during data collection, ensuring that only I had access to the raw data files (Wiles et al., 2008).

3.6.3. Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without any negative consequences. This provision was reiterated at the beginning of each interview to remind participants of their autonomy and control over their participation in the research process.

3.6.4. Power Dynamics

Addressing power dynamics between the researcher and the participants was a significant ethical consideration. I made concerted efforts to minimize any perceived hierarchy or imbalance by adopting a respectful and empathetic approach during interviews. The aim was to create a space where participants felt valued and comfortable sharing their experiences, thus enhancing the authenticity and depth of the data collected (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

3.6.5. Potential Risks

The study also considered potential risks to participants, particularly the emotional discomfort that might arise from discussing precarious work conditions and any fear of reprisal for their involvement with grassroots organizations. To mitigate these risks, I provided assurances of confidentiality and took care to conduct interviews in a manner sensitive to the participants'

comfort levels.

3.7. Trustworthiness and Rigour

Ensuring the trustworthiness and rigour of this qualitative study was crucial to provide credible and reliable findings. Several strategies were implemented to enhance the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.7.1. Credibility

Credibility was achieved through in-depth engagement with participants. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for rich, detailed data collection, capturing the nuances of precarious workers' experiences. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, data saturation was pursued by continuing interviews until no new themes emerged. Additionally, after the initial interviews, I engaged in member checking by chatting with participants to confirm their statements and clarify any ambiguities. This iterative process helped to validate the findings and ensured that the participants' perspectives were accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.2. Transferability

To enhance transferability, a detailed description of the research context was provided. The study took place in Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub, where precarious work is prevalent. By detailing the socio-economic environment and the specific conditions under which precarious workers operate, the findings can be applied to similar contexts. This thick description enables readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings with analogous characteristics (Shenton, 2004).

3.7.3. Dependability

Dependability was ensured through consistent documentation of the research process. The methodology, from participant selection to data collection and analysis, was clearly outlined to provide transparency and allow for replication. Maintaining a comprehensive audit trail helped document the research decisions and changes made during the study, contributing to the study's reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

3.7.4. Confirmability

Confirmability was addressed by acknowledging the researcher's potential biases and efforts to minimize subjectivity. Data triangulation was achieved by including diverse participants from various sectors, such as manufacturing and retail, and incorporating contrasting perspectives, as well as the insights of a founding member of the CWAOW. This diversity enriched the data

and ensured a balanced representation of experiences. Additionally, conducting interviews at participants' homes offered an opportunity for observation, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the holistic effects of precarity on workers' lives. Observing participants' living conditions provided context to their narratives, further grounding the findings in their lived realities. This approach helped confirm that the findings were shaped by the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's predispositions. The use of member checking further reinforced confirmability by allowing participants to verify the accuracy of their responses, ensuring that the data accurately reflected their views (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.8. Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this study employed thematic analysis, a method particularly suited for qualitative research focused on identifying shared experiences and meanings across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed for the systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data.

The process began with the transcription of all recorded interviews to create verbatim accounts of the conversations. Transcription was critical for ensuring accuracy and allowed for comparison with the written notes taken during the interviews. Transcribing the data also enabled immersion, which is an essential step in familiarizing oneself with the data and identifying initial insights. Next, I identified key points across all interviews, highlighting recurring ideas, narratives, and experiences shared by the participants. These points were then narrowed down to common themes that arose consistently throughout the interviews. Themes were carefully refined to ensure they reflected the participants' collective experiences and provided insights into their motivations and challenges as precarious workers (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

One significant challenge encountered during data analysis involved a participant who could not speak English. While I could understand the participant's native language, there were difficulties with spelling and formal translation. To address this, an online translation tool was utilized to ensure the meaning of the participant's responses was captured as accurately as possible. This additional step, while time-consuming, ensured that the participant's experiences were represented alongside others without being lost due to language barriers.

The use of thematic analysis was justified by its flexibility and suitability for exploring subjective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By focusing on the richness of participants' narratives, the method enabled the study to uncover patterns that reflect the broader realities of

precarious work. Despite the challenges, measures such as triangulating data through multiple sources and careful cross-checking ensured the reliability of the analysis and the validity of the findings.

3.9. Limitations of the Study

This research encountered significant challenges in accessing participants due to the unpredictable and irregular work schedules characteristic of precarious employment. Many precarious workers lack fixed schedules and can be summoned to work at any time, often with little notice. This unpredictability made it difficult for participants to commit to interview appointments, leading to frequent postponements and cancellations. Consequently, the sample size was smaller than initially anticipated, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

The difficulty in scheduling interviews not only constrained the number of participants but also introduced time constraints that affected the depth of data collection. The limited availability of participants necessitated shorter interviews, potentially restricting the richness of the data obtained. Moreover, the reliance on a smaller sample size may have resulted in a narrower range of perspectives, thereby affecting the comprehensiveness of the study's conclusions.

These limitations underscore the inherent challenges in researching populations with unstable work schedules. Future studies might mitigate these issues by employing more flexible data collection methods, such as asynchronous interviews or digital surveys, to accommodate participants' variable availability. Additionally, building longer-term relationships with worker organizations could facilitate better access and trust, potentially leading to more robust participation.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the research design and methodology employed in this study, focusing on qualitative methods to explore the motivations of precarious workers in seeking support from grassroots organizations like the CWAOW. Key elements of the research strategy, including purposive and snowball sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis, were discussed alongside the ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in the research process. The chosen methods proved highly appropriate for addressing the research objectives, as they allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data that captured the complexities of precarious workers' experiences. By engaging directly with participants in their homes and accommodating their unpredictable work schedules, the research was able to contextualize their challenges and motivations holistically.

Observational insights, derived from visiting participants' living environments, further enriched the data and deepened the understanding of the impacts of precarity.

The methodologies outlined in this chapter provide a strong foundation for the findings and analysis presented in the subsequent chapters. The emphasis on participant-centred approaches and the integration of multiple perspectives ensures that the study's conclusions are grounded in the lived realities of precarious workers, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their experiences and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing their needs.

CHAPTER 4: Precarious Struggles and Fading Solidarities – Workers’ Pathways to Support and Exit

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which sought to investigate the motivations of precarious workers in Gauteng for seeking support from grassroots organizations, with a focus on the CWAO. The chapter builds on the research objectives, which were to understand the lived experiences of precarious workers, examine their perceptions of the role of grassroots organizations in addressing precarity, and contextualize these motivations within the broader framework of violent democracy in South Africa. The findings are derived from semi-structured interviews with precarious workers across multiple sectors, such as manufacturing and retail, as well as an interview with one of the founding members of CWAO.

The decision to present the findings thematically ensures that the diverse and complex experiences of precarious workers are organized in a manner that highlights commonalities and differences among participants. This thematic approach allows the study to address the research questions comprehensively, while emphasizing the significance of participant narratives. The key research questions explored are:

1. What pushes precarious workers to seek external support?
2. How do precarious workers perceive the role of grassroots organizations within South Africa’s labour context?
3. What broader insights do these motivations and experiences provide about the relationship between precarious work and violent democracy in South Africa?

The thematic structure enables the findings to be grouped into four key areas that emerged during the analysis:

1. ***Motivations for Seeking Support from the CWAO***: This theme examines the specific reasons that led workers to engage with the organization, including issues such as workplace injustices, lack of support from unions, and the need for legal assistance.
2. ***Experiences of Precarity in Different Sectors***: This theme highlights how precarious work manifests in various industries, revealing common struggles such as job insecurity, low wages, and poor working conditions.
3. ***Perceptions of Legal Frameworks and Grassroots Support***: This section explores how workers perceive the effectiveness of South Africa’s labour laws and the role grassroots

organizations like CWAO play in addressing gaps left by formal mechanisms.

4. ***The Impact of Precarity on Workers' Lives:*** This theme delves into the broader implications of precarious work, including its impact on workers' mental health, family dynamics, and community engagement.

By organizing the findings in this way, the chapter ensures that each theme is tied directly to the research questions and objectives. This approach allows for a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by precarious workers, the interventions provided by grassroots organizations, and the broader socio-political implications of these dynamics. Furthermore, it is also important to emphasize the unique methodological approach of this study, which involved conducting interviews at participants' homes. This approach was not only logistically necessary due to the irregular working hours of participants but also provided an opportunity for me as the researcher to observe their living conditions. These observations added depth to the analysis, revealing the tangible effects of precarious work on workers' day-to-day lives.

Ultimately, this chapter provides a foundation for discussing the implications of the findings in subsequent chapters. By grounding the discussion in the lived realities of precarious workers, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of labour precarity and the role of grassroots organizations like CWAO in addressing systemic inequalities in South Africa's labour market.

4.2. Thematic Findings

4.2.1. Theme 1: Motivations for Seeking Support from CWAO

The motivations for seeking support from the CWAO were diverse and deeply rooted in the everyday struggles and systemic challenges faced by precarious workers in Gauteng. Participants consistently detailed how a combination of workplace disputes, protracted delays in receiving a response from employers, and exploitative practices collectively pushed them toward seeking external assistance.

4.1.1.1. Persistent Contract Extensions and Job Insecurity

One of the key issues that motivated the participants to approach CWAO was the persistent extension of short-term contracts without the prospect of permanent employment. In one company, workers were initially placed on three-month contracts, which were later extended to six months, and then to a year. Despite their continued service, they remained contract employees without benefits, job security, or direct access to management. When workers began questioning why they were not being made permanent, the response from employers was

dismissive, stating that they were merely contract workers, and that “what they say goes” (V, 24 November 2024). One participant, for instance, worked as a casual employee for seven and a half years before securing permanent employment in 2021. She explained how workers were constantly reminded of their casual status and that contract renewals were given without the prospect of job security, “The permanent will always remind you that you are a casual here. Don't forget” (M, 28 November 2024). Workers were repeatedly assured that their contracts would eventually be converted to permanent positions, but this never materialized. Instead, they were strung along with short-term renewals that reinforced their precarity. This prolonged sense of uncertainty created widespread frustration and anxiety among the participants.

4.1.1.2. The Failure of Formal Legal Mechanisms

Another significant aspect that emerged was the wearisome process of engaging with formal dispute resolution mechanisms such as the Department of Labour and Employment, with 66.7% of the participants reporting to have gone through three and above years seeking help. In one striking account, two participants, having endured prolonged periods of uncertainty, decided to take their case to the Department of Labour and Employment. However, instead of receiving the anticipated support, the department contacted their employer, leading to an immediate negative consequence: the workers were subsequently not allocated to any shifts:

Before I went to CWAO, I went to labour. And then it was me and this other guy, we just decided that, you know what, enough is enough. Then we decided that we are going to labour. And then we got to labour, only to find out that labour is going to call our company to ask if they know these two people. And then the company said they do. And then it was a matter of them no longer calling us to work (M, 28 November 2024).

Furthermore, the CCMA was another avenue where workers sought justice but often found little relief. Participants reported that after opening a case at the CCMA, they were met with prolonged delays, during which time their employment prospects remained uncertain. M described how her case, initiated in 2018, dragged on for four years before any resolution was reached, “It took years. We went to CWAO in 2018, and only in 2021 did the company offer us a settlement” (M, 24 November 2024). Such lengthy legal battles placed an enormous financial and emotional strain on workers, many of whom struggled to survive without a stable income. The delays at the CCMA reinforced the perception that the system was designed to exhaust workers into submission rather than provide swift justice. This experience highlights the deep-seated mistrust in formal mechanisms; the workers' expectation of fair treatment was replaced by a sense of betrayal and disillusionment when the system, which was supposed to

offer protection, instead compromised their employment further.

4.1.1.3. Employer Neglect and Retaliation

All participants described a broader pattern of neglect by employers. Many shared stories of how they were made to wait for long periods for responses or interventions from both their labour brokers and direct employers. Even when responses were eventually given, these were often insufficient or completely ineffective, leaving the workers in a state of prolonged uncertainty. One participant explained that the constant waiting period, during which they were repeatedly reminded of the impending end of their contracts, added a layer of anxiety that was almost unbearable:

...we decided that let's start engaging with the employer. And told the employer... there was no money... We started with the labour broker employer. We said, look at the money that you are giving us. It's not enough for us to live. And in this money, you can't pay even, it was hard to pay even a rent... So the employer said, you will go and speak to the boss, which is ****. Then they went to speak to ****. And then they came back and promised us that, no, we will add something on your salary. Then when they came back to us, we waited for all those months. I think they said we have to wait for about six months, and then we waited. When the six months came in, there was no money again. No one, no one want to entertain us. No one want to listen to us. Even the labour broker boss doesn't want to listen to us (V, 24 November 2024).

This cycle of delays and non-responsiveness underscored the systemic failure to address the precarious conditions that workers faced daily. Additionally, when the labour brokers informed the employer about two employees that reported their issues to the department, this led to direct retaliation. As abovementioned, the two employees were cut from shifts. The informal nature of their employment meant that being excluded from the shift list was equivalent to being dismissed without recourse.

4.1.1.4. Collective Action and Awareness of Rights

Beyond the immediate issues of dispute resolution and employer responsiveness, a strong element of collective action emerged as a key motivator. While some workers initially approached CWAO out of desperation, others did so as part of an organized collective effort to challenge their employers. One participant emphasized the role of group solidarity in making the process more bearable, “We were comrades, a group of 23. Whenever I needed to go to CWAO, they would contribute R10 for my transport” (K, 20 November 2024). This sense of unity not only helped with logistical challenges, such as transportation to the CWAO office in Germiston, but also strengthened workers’ resolve to fight against exploitation. Workers

described how, when faced with ongoing challenges, they banded together to approach the CWAO as a unified group. In one detailed account, a participant noted how, after several colleagues had dropped out due to fear or resignation, the remaining ten workers decided to re-engage with the CWAO, only to organize themselves over a three-month period. The intent was to strengthen their collective bargaining power against an employer that constantly replaced them with new staff members:

When we went there, at least the number was high. And we were able to have more of support because 200 people can beat the number of ten. Imagine that first ten that the others gave up from. Now we're 200 and that's a lot of backups from us (K, 20 November 2024).

The narrative emphasizes that the sheer number of workers—growing from an initial small group to eventually 200—served as a powerful catalyst for change. It was through this collective mobilization that the workers began to claim some control over their precarious work conditions as they eventually became permanent.

4.1.1.5. Self-empowerment and Education

Additionally, the personal vulnerabilities of the participants, many of whom were internal migrants with limited education and minimal social support, further reinforced their need for external assistance. Many participants felt that, without the intervention of organizations like CWAO, they would be left to navigate a labyrinth of systemic exploitation alone. This was particularly poignant among female participants, who, in addition to facing the inherent instability of precarious work, had to contend with additional challenges such as single parenthood and the struggle to provide for their families on meagre wages, as one respondent said, “I'm renting, I have to buy food, I have to pay school fees, transport” (K, 20 November 2024). Their stories revealed that turning to the CWAO was not merely an act of desperation, but a deliberate step towards empowerment and self-advocacy in the face of systemic neglect.

In sum, the motivations for seeking support from the CWAO were multifaceted. Participants were driven by the immediate need to address specific disputes—such as those involving transport benefits and contract extensions—by turning to a support system that promised a fairer resolution. The failure of formal mechanisms, as exemplified by the labour court incident where the employer was contacted instead of helping, further eroded trust in existing structures. Moreover, the chronic delays and non-responsiveness from employers compounded these issues, leading to a growing consensus among workers that only a collective, grassroots effort

could effectively challenge the status quo. These factors, combined with the personal vulnerabilities inherent in their migrant status and limited educational background, underscored the necessity of seeking help from the CWAOW.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Experiences of Precarity in Different Sectors

Precarious work manifests differently across various sectors, but all participants from both the manufacturing and retail industries reported common struggles, including job insecurity, low wages, lack of benefits, and employer exploitation. While sector-specific challenges emerged, the underlying conditions of precarity remained consistent, highlighting the systemic nature of labour insecurity in Gauteng.

4.2.2.1. Precarity in the Manufacturing and Retail Sectors

Manufacturing was the most (77.8%) represented sector among participants, with many working under labour brokers for extended periods without ever being made permanent. A key feature of precarity in this sector was the continuous extension of short-term contracts, where workers remained classified as casuals for years despite performing the same duties as permanent employees. One participant, who worked for seven and a half years as a casual worker before being made permanent, described the emotional and financial strain of prolonged temporary employment:

I have been a casual worker for seven and a half years as a casual worker. The struggle was just too much, and then until I went to CWAOW, and then that was when I got help, but then it was after some time. So, as I am a 32-year-old female, a mother of two, you can just imagine seven years of being a casual worker in this economy (W, 28 November 2024).

In addition to contract instability, manufacturing workers also faced wage disparities between permanent and contract employees. All participants reported doing the same work as their permanent counterparts but earning significantly less and being excluded from workplace benefits such as medical aid and bonuses. This unequal treatment created resentment and further reinforced the notion that casual workers were viewed as expendable labour. One participant recounted how casual workers were even given different-coloured overalls to distinguish them from permanent staff, symbolically and practically reinforcing their inferior status:

I remember when we got there, they were wearing same, they were given same PPE, which is the overalls, overalls, and then they'll be casuals. Casuals, they'll give them grey overalls (W, 28 November 2024).

Safety was another critical concern. Several participants highlighted that casual workers were not provided with the same level of protective equipment as permanent employees, exposing them to hazardous working conditions. Despite working in physically demanding environments, precarious manufacturing workers were denied access to on-site medical clinics, leaving them vulnerable in cases of workplace injuries.

Unlike retail workers who typically had structured shifts, manufacturing employees were frequently expected to be available on short notice, making it difficult to plan financially or maintain a stable work-life balance. One participant described the uncertainty of waiting for a call each week to know whether they would be working, leaving them unable to seek additional employment opportunities:

...you can't go out there and market, go look for a job. Because by the time, let's say maybe it's a Friday, they don't call you, and then you decide, you know what, on Monday I'm gonna wake up and go hand my CVs. On Monday you'll be like, waiting for the call. You'll be waiting for the call, and then, okay, eventually you get that call, but you'll be like, ready to go out there and look for another job. I remember one day I was at Grainstone, looking for a job with this other lady. And then, just when I got there, they called me at work, saying that, can you please come to work. They don't even ask you if you are busy or you can come or what. They tell you to come to work (W, 28 November, 2024).

Manufacturing workers also faced issues of wage theft, with some reporting that they were not paid for all hours worked. Excuses such as system failures or payroll errors were commonly used to justify delayed or missing payments, leaving workers in a constant state of financial precarity. One participant detailed how they would repeatedly be told they would receive their wages next month, only for the issue to persist indefinitely.

Additionally, the manufacturing sector was characterized by strict hierarchical relationships between employees and management, with workers reporting frequent intimidation and favouritism. Of the seven participants in manufacturing, five expressed that those who complained about working conditions were penalized by being given fewer shifts or being excluded from opportunities for contract renewals. On the other hand, retail workers had more bearable situations although they reported similar issues with job insecurity, low pay, and lack

of benefits.

4.2.2.2. Similarities and Differences Across Sectors

Despite sectoral differences, precarious workers in both manufacturing and retail shared common struggles, including:

- 4.2.2.2.1. **Lack of Job Security:** All the participants faced continuous contract renewals without any long-term stability.
- 4.2.2.2.2. **Low Wages and Wage Disparities:** Regardless of the sector, casual workers earned significantly less than their permanent counterparts for the same work.
- 4.2.2.2.3. **Lack of Benefits:** Casual and labour broker workers were excluded from medical aid, bonuses, and leave policies.
- 4.2.2.2.4. **Employer Neglect and Exploitation:** All reported that their employers ignored grievances, delayed responses, or failed to process payments fairly.

However, key differences also emerged:

- 4.2.2.2.5. **Scheduling and Work Hours:** While retail workers had more structured shifts, manufacturing employees had highly irregular and unpredictable schedules.
- 4.2.2.2.6. **Physical Demands and Safety:** Manufacturing work posed greater risks of physical harm, yet casual workers in this sector were denied access to proper safety gear and medical facilities.
- 4.2.2.2.7. **Employer Intimidation:** While both sectors experienced employer hostility, retail workers reported more subtle forms of retaliation, such as scheduling manipulation, while manufacturing workers faced direct exclusion from workplace benefits.

Precarity in manufacturing and retail manifests in both similar and sector-specific ways, reinforcing the reality that precarious work is structurally embedded across industries. The unequal treatment of casual workers, the withholding of wages, and the constant fear of job loss collectively define the precarious experience, regardless of the sector. The next section will explore workers' perceptions of labour laws and grassroots organizations as mechanisms for addressing these injustices.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Perceptions of Legal Frameworks and Grassroots Support

66.7% of the participants expressed varied perceptions of South Africa's legal frameworks and the role of grassroots organizations like the CWAO in addressing labour disputes. All participants acknowledged that CWAO played a crucial role in educating them about their rights and providing legal assistance, 66.7% also highlighted the slow and often frustrating nature of the legal process. Several workers encountered systemic delays that prolonged their struggles, reinforcing a sense of powerlessness despite the intervention of advocacy organizations.

The founding member of CWAO confirmed these frustrations, stating that South Africa's labour laws are designed to appear protective on paper but often fail to provide immediate relief to precarious workers. They emphasized that the legal system is structurally tilted in favour of employers, making it difficult for workers to secure justice in a timely manner. Instead of ensuring fair labour practices, the system often enables companies to exploit legal loopholes, delaying cases for years while workers continue to suffer.

4.2.3.1. The Limitations of South Africa's Labour Laws in Protecting Precarious Workers

Many participants shared a common view that South Africa's labour laws do not effectively protect precarious workers, especially those employed under labour brokers. Workers frequently attempted to address their grievances through formal legal channels, such as the CCMA or the Labour Court, but encountered significant obstacles. One participant detailed how they approached the CCMA after experiencing unfair treatment at work, only to be met with further victimization which resulted in them losing their jobs.

So, in October 2022 I lost my job because me and other workers were fighting for permanent positions since we had been working there for a long time. Others had worked for about 7 to 8 years. I was working for 5 years. They fired us for fighting for our rights (N, 25 November 2024).

This incident reflects a broader concern among precarious workers—formal dispute resolution mechanisms often fail to offer real protection and, in some cases, expose workers to retaliation. This has led many to lose trust in state institutions meant to uphold labour rights, leaving grassroots organizations like CWAO as their only viable option. The founding member of CWAO confirmed this, stating that many workers arrive at CWAO only after being betrayed by the very institutions meant to protect them.

Sometimes the CCMA is very biased, you know, so it's better if maybe Simunye register as a union where workers get to represent each other with no organiser will be like tempered or trying to be bribed and then sell the workers so they will be rotating their own. If maybe four people are chosen today to meet the management, next time they're going to choose another one, not stable. Even if you have a shop steward, we've seen the trend (Z, 12 December 2024).

4.2.3.2. Prolonged Legal Processes and the Challenge of Section 198 Appeals

A significant frustration expressed by participants was the length of time it took for labour cases to be resolved. One participant, for instance, sought assistance from CWAO in 2015, but their case remained unresolved until 2018 due to repeated employer appeals under Section 198 of the (LRA). Such experiences highlight a major flaw in the system—while workers can file legal cases against their employers, companies often use legal loopholes and appeals to delay justice. The LRA Section 198 was initially meant to protect workers by ensuring that labour broker employees who work for more than three months are deemed permanent. However, many companies challenged this provision, dragging cases through the courts for years. For workers relying on unstable jobs for survival, these delays often meant that, by the time a case was resolved, they had already suffered immense financial hardship:

After we got fired, we went back to the CWAO and they took us to CCMA. Even CCMA failed so they took the case to labour court. As we speak we are at labour court (N, 25 November 2024).

Several participants (66.7%) noted that, although CWAO provided crucial legal assistance, it could not change the fact that the legal process itself was slow and unpredictable. The delays often left workers in limbo, uncertain about whether they would ever see justice.

4.2.3.3. The Role of CWAO in Providing Support and Education

Despite these frustrations, workers consistently expressed gratitude for the role that CWAO played in their struggles. Many participants (77.8%) were initially unaware of their labour rights and had resigned themselves to exploitative conditions. CWAO not only provided legal representation but also empowered workers with knowledge, helping them understand their rights and how to advocate for themselves:

It was a victory for us to find CWAO because they have taught us many things that we didn't know, that we have rights. They woke us up, actually (C, 15 January

2025).

One participant emphasized that, before discovering CWAO, they were afraid to question their employer, believing that they had no right to challenge unfair treatment. However, after attending workshops and receiving guidance from CWAO staff, they felt more confident in asserting their rights:

Firstly, we attend the meetings and then we saw that we got the right. Even if we were a labour broker, we still got a right... And some of our rights, they [the employers] don't want us to know about. So, the office helped us a lot... the other thing that is that you don't have to pay for a PPE... And when you are sick, you've got a sick leave. Some things that we never knew (V, 24 November 2024).

The founding member of CWAO described this transformation as one of the organization's biggest successes, stating that the primary goal is not just to win legal cases but to create a generation of workers who understand their rights and are willing to fight for them.

... our mission is to get more workers to know their rights and we do have means that we invite them to our spaces for the trainings, the workshops and, you know, get to what they need most (Z, 12 December 2024).

Beyond legal education, CWAO also facilitated collective action among precarious workers. By uniting workers facing similar struggles, the organization helped them gain the courage to fight back against exploitative labour practices. However, as one participant noted, even with CWAO's support, success was not guaranteed, and workers sometimes had to settle for compromises rather than achieving their full demands.

It was very difficult for us, everyone who was part of the forum [SWF] – to get opportunities like to get promoted or something [at work] ...at the time of our case they would keep on threatening us, and some were even fired (O, 20 January 2025).

Another significant aspect of CWAO's role in assisting precarious workers was providing transport support. Many participants (88.9%) lived far from Germiston, where CWAO is based, and could not afford to travel frequently to seek help. All participants explained that their precarious wages made it difficult to budget for transportation costs, and many would not have been able to attend meetings or legal proceedings without assistance. In most cases, CWAO provided direct financial assistance for transport to ensure that no worker was excluded from seeking justice simply due to lack of funds. The founding member of CWAO highlighted the importance of transport support and stated that, "At CWAO, the help is for free" (Z, 12 December 2024), noting that without this assistance, many workers would simply not be able to

access legal aid. This aspect of CWAO's work reflects a broader reality: for precarious workers, legal assistance is not just about filing cases—it is also about ensuring that workers have the practical means to access the help they need.

4.2.3.4. The Reality of Legal Outcomes: No Guaranteed Victory

While CWAO played a crucial role in assisting workers, participants acknowledged that legal victories were not always complete victories. 33.3% of the participants fought for permanent employment status or higher wages but, after years of legal battles, had to settle for partial solutions such as variable-hour contracts instead of full-time employment. One participant described how, after years of legal struggles, they were granted a 40-hour guaranteed contract—a partial improvement but still far from full job security.

It took years because we went to CWAO around 2018. Yeah, it was 2018. And then from 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021. 2021, it was where the company just said they will make us the variable employees, whereby they will give us 40 hours guaranteed. Whenever they didn't call us for that month, then we know we've got 40 hours guaranteed that they are going to pay us. So, that was the settlement that we agreed on. In 2021 (W, 28 November 2024).

All participants' perceptions of South Africa's legal frameworks and grassroots support highlight both the necessity and the limitations of organizations like CWAO. While all participants deeply valued CWAO's efforts in providing legal assistance, education, and a sense of solidarity, they also recognized that the legal system itself remains slow, inefficient, and often biased toward employers. As abovementioned, they experienced years-long legal battles, delayed justice, and partial victories that fell short of full job security.

The founding member of CWAO reinforced this, stating that while grassroots organizations can offer crucial support, they cannot fully overcome the systemic flaws that allow precarious labour to persist. They stressed that, to achieve lasting change, worker-led movements must continue beyond the legal victories, pushing for broader structural transformations in labour policies and employer practices.

This section illustrates that, while grassroots organizations play a critical role in helping precarious workers fight for their rights, they cannot entirely overcome the systemic flaws that sustain precarious labour. The next section will explore the broader impact of precarity on workers' lives beyond the workplace.

4.2.4. Theme 4: The Impact of Precarity on Workers' Lives

The precarious nature of employment does not only affect participants in the workplace—it extends deeply into their personal lives, influencing their housing conditions, family structures, and overall well-being. The findings revealed that participants struggle to afford decent housing, often living in overcrowded, poorly maintained spaces that are not conducive to raising children, with only 11.1% living in a decent housing. The lack of financial stability forces participants to make painful sacrifices, including being separated from their children for extended periods. Even during the process of seeking justice through legal mechanisms, workers experience prolonged emotional and financial hardship, as cases often take years to be resolved.

4.2.4.1. Poor Living Conditions and Overcrowded Homes

Observations made during visits to participants' homes revealed the harsh realities of precarious work. Many precarious workers lived in single-room dwellings, where entire families had to share cramped and cluttered spaces. In such conditions, privacy was non-existent, and children had no safe space to play or study. These environments reflected the deep economic struggles the participants faced, making it clear that their wages were insufficient to secure better living arrangements. The physical and psychological toll of living in such conditions was evident. 33.3% of the participants reported constant worry about rent, often having to borrow money or cut back on food and other essentials just to keep a roof over their heads.

I was sharing a flat with another lady from Zimbabwe. I was sharing the flat because I couldn't stay on my own... So, the other fortnight, we would buy food, and the other fortnight, that would be for that rent (V, 24 November 2024).

4.2.4.2. Separation from Children and Family Struggles

A particularly devastating consequence of precarious work was family separation. One participant shared that she only saw her children once a year, as she had no choice but to leave them in the Eastern Cape while she worked in Gauteng. When asked why he saw her children only once a year, she said, “Where do you get the money to go home? And even if you went to the kids, where are you going to get the money to buy for them these Christmas clothes? Because the kids don't understand” (V, 24 November 2024). The unpredictability of her work schedule and low wages made it impossible to afford proper childcare or bring her children to

live with her.

Another participant, a single mother of two, had no family support nearby and was forced to lock her children—aged six and three—inside their home while she went to work. Since she had no one to look after them, she left an extra key hidden inside in case of emergencies and would call them throughout the day to check if they were okay.

I would lock the room to go to work, but I would leave an extra key somewhere up there, so that they don't... My daughter was, I think, was six. I think she was six, and then the other one was three, because they are three years apart (W, 28 November 2024).

These accounts illustrate how precarious work disrupts family life and forces workers to make heartbreaking choices, putting their children's safety at risk due to the absence of affordable childcare. The emotional strain of being away from their children for long periods was a recurring theme, with many participants (77.8%) expressing guilt, sadness, and frustration at being unable to provide a stable home life.

We had to be there [at work] all the time. So, I couldn't even literally live, do my personal stuff at that time. I wouldn't be able to... Or even look after my child, I wouldn't be able to sit with him like more than or less than two hours unless I sacrificed and I say, you know what? Today, I'm going to sit with him.

4.2.4.3. The Psychological and Financial Toll of Long Legal Battles

Even during the process of seeking help, precarious workers continued to suffer. Legal battles often lasted several years, with some participants waiting four or more years for a resolution. While CWAO provided support, the reality was that these extended cases put precarious workers under immense financial strain, as they still had to survive while awaiting justice. One participant who is currently going through the court case stated, “For now I’m still surviving on R350 grant. Then my cousin and sisters give me money to buy food” (K, 20 November 2024).

In essence, the impact of precarious work on participants’ lives extends far beyond the workplace. The inability to afford proper housing, the separation from children, and the psychological burden of waiting years for justice collectively demonstrate the far-reaching consequences of precarious labour. The observations made during home visits reinforced these findings, showing that many workers live in cramped, overcrowded spaces, struggling to make

ends meet despite working long hours. While CWAO plays an important role in providing legal assistance and support, it cannot fully mitigate the ongoing suffering workers experience throughout the legal process.

4.3. Reflections on Unexpected Findings

Although the study set out to explore the motivations of precarious workers in seeking support from the CWAO and the broader effects of precarity, an unexpected finding emerged regarding the erosion of worker solidarity after legal victories. Initially, the struggle for better working conditions and job security united workers, fostering a strong sense of collective resistance. However, once workers achieved permanent employment status, this solidarity began to disintegrate.

4.3.1. The Breakdown of Worker Solidarity After Legal Battles

44.4% of the participants described how, during the process of challenging their employers, workers operated as a united front, offering each other emotional, financial, and strategic support. However, once some workers secured permanent positions, many disengaged from the collective struggle. A significant number of those who became permanent no longer saw the need to continue advocating for those still trapped in precarious employment. This shift was particularly striking given that many of these workers had previously relied on CWAO and their fellow workers for support during the legal battles. Instead of using their newly secured positions to push for broader change, many distanced themselves from the movement, focusing solely on their individual stability rather than collective empowerment.

One participant reflected on how their former comrades, who once stood beside them during protests and legal proceedings, gradually withdrew after receiving permanent contracts.

We have separated. The love that we had has ended. The time we got permanent, the time we got the variable hour permanent, that was when things went south. Because they started seeing themselves getting R8,000 and then it was just too much for them (V, 24 November 2024).

This pattern suggests that the fight for permanency, rather than broader workplace improvements, was the goal for most workers. The broader structural issues—such as low wages, lack of upward mobility, and continued worker exploitation—remained unchallenged.

4.3.2. The Shift in Priorities: From Collective Struggle to Individual Security

Another unexpected outcome was that permanent workers showed little ambition for career advancement after securing their positions. The data revealed that for many, becoming

permanent was the ultimate achievement, regardless of whether the job provided opportunities for growth or offered decent working conditions. Instead of aspiring for promotions or better-paying positions, permanent workers tended to remain stagnant in their roles. This lack of ambition was not necessarily due to laziness but rather a deeply ingrained survival mentality—after years of job insecurity, simply having a stable income outweighed the desire for professional growth.

However, a contradiction emerged: while many workers showed no desire to advance, jealousy surfaced when one of them did. Participants described instances of resentment toward colleagues who managed to secure higher-paying roles or move into more stable employment outside of the company. This tension led to divisions among workers, reinforcing competition over limited opportunities rather than continued collective struggle for better workplace conditions for all:

I was supposed to celebrate my new position, I started last month, but I'm feeling bad because someone sent me a voice note that sent in another union. It was saying, yeah, this is bad because this is our leader we were looking up to, now she's in a better position, and which means we are left here (V, 24 November 2024).

This insight is critical in understanding how precarity conditions workers not just economically but psychologically. Years of uncertainty lower expectations, leading workers to accept minimal gains as ultimate victories. The system, therefore, not only exploits workers during their precarious years but also ensures that, once permanent, they remain in a state of complacency—effectively neutralizing further demands for change.

4.3.3. The Role of Shop Stewards in Weakening Worker Unity

Another surprising discovery was the shift in behaviour among workers who became shop stewards. Shop stewards, meant to represent and advocate for employees, often ended up prioritizing their own status over the workers they once fought alongside. One participant noted that once some of their colleagues became shop stewards, they distanced themselves from the struggles of precarious workers. Instead of using their new positions to push for improved labour conditions, they became absorbed in the hierarchical structures of the workplace, enjoying their newfound authority rather than challenging the system:

The shop stewards get the positions, then they must be in the management team, then the workers left alone. That's why the Simunye Workers Forum said, no, we don't want shop stewards, we don't want organisers, we want workers, all of us. We need to know the law, we need to be able to represent each other (Z, 12 December

2024).

This finding is significant because shop stewards play a crucial role in labour relations. When those in these positions fail to challenge injustices or actively disconnect from the struggles of precarious workers, it further weakens worker unity. This reality aligns with broader critiques of trade union bureaucracy, where worker representatives often become distant from the rank-and-file workers they were meant to serve.

4.3.4. Understanding Precarity Beyond the Workplace: The Psychological Impact

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of precarity as not just an economic condition, but a psychological one as well. The erosion of solidarity after legal victories reveals the long-term effects of labour insecurity—workers become so accustomed to instability and scarcity that, once they achieve a small measure of security, they cling to it without demanding more.

The study also challenges the assumption that achieving permanent employment automatically leads to improved worker conditions. While legal victories provide job stability, they do not guarantee higher wages, better treatment, or meaningful career growth. The system conditions precarious workers to fight for survival rather than long-term transformation, ensuring that their aspirations remain limited to mere permanency rather than structural change.

In sum, the unexpected finding that worker solidarity weakened after permanency was achieved provides a critical insight into the psychological and social impact of precarity. While workers initially fought as a united front, their priorities shifted once they secured individual stability, leaving behind those still in precarious positions. Additionally, the lack of ambition for upward mobility and resentment toward those who advanced further highlights how precarious employment shapes long-term worker expectations and behaviours. The role of shop stewards in reinforcing workplace hierarchies, rather than continuing to challenge unfair labour practices, further weakened collective struggles.

These findings suggest that legal victories alone are not enough to improve the long-term conditions of precarious workers. Without ongoing collective organizing and a shift in mindset toward demanding more than just job security, precarious labour will continue to persist as a normalized condition in South Africa's economy.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented the key findings of the study, highlighting the lived experiences of precarious workers and their motivations for seeking support from the CWAO. The thematic analysis revealed the various ways in which precarity manifests in different sectors, the limitations of legal frameworks in protecting vulnerable workers, the impact of precarious employment on workers' lives, and the unexpected fragmentation of worker solidarity after legal victories.

A significant finding was that participants sought assistance from CWAO primarily due to unfair labour practices, such as contract instability, wage disparities, and employer neglect. Many initially placed faiths in formal legal mechanisms like the CCMA, only to encounter systemic failures, long delays, and even retaliation. The study also uncovered that while CWAO played a crucial role in educating workers and providing legal support, it could not fully mitigate the hardships caused by lengthy legal battles, as cases often dragged on for years.

Additionally, the study found that precarity extended beyond the workplace, affecting workers' housing conditions, family structures, and overall well-being. Observations during home visits revealed that most participants lived in overcrowded and inadequate housing, struggling to provide for their families on low and unstable wages. The reality of precarious work forced some workers to separate from their children, while others had to leave them alone at home in unsafe conditions due to lack of childcare support.

Moreover, the most unexpected finding was that worker solidarity weakened after legal victories. While workers initially fought together for better conditions, many distanced themselves from collective action after becoming permanent employees. Some shop stewards prioritized their new positions over continued worker advocacy, while others showed no ambition for career advancement beyond permanency, yet resented those who did advance. These findings suggest that precarity shapes not only economic survival but also long-term worker aspirations and workplace dynamics, reinforcing individualism over sustained collective struggle.

These findings align with the study's objectives by offering a detailed understanding of why precarious workers seek support from grassroots organizations, as well as the barriers they face within legal and labour frameworks. However, they also reveal deeper psychological and structural effects of precarity, showing that legal interventions alone do not necessarily lead to long-term empowerment or transformation in the labour market.

This chapter has laid the foundation for Chapter 5, which will engage with broader discussions on the structural persistence of precarious work, the limits of legal interventions, and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing labour precarity. The chapter will also critically analyze the study's findings in relation to existing literature, offering theoretical reflections on precarity, worker agency, and the long-term effectiveness of grassroots labour advocacy in South Africa.

CHAPTER 5: Navigating Violent Democracy – Worker Motivations, Grassroots Resistance, and the Struggle for Lasting Change

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses the research findings with the aim of understanding why precarious workers seek support from the CWAO and how their motivations reflect the broader dynamics of violent democracy and structural violence in South Africa. The study demonstrates that when traditional state and union mechanisms fail to protect vulnerable workers, grassroots initiatives such as the CWAO emerge as alternative avenues for justice and support.

Key themes emerged from the data, providing insight into the multifaceted experiences of these workers. First, participants' motivations for seeking support highlight economic insecurity and exploitation as primary drivers behind their turn to CWAO. Second, the experiences of precarity in different sectors reveal that non-standard work conditions—ranging from casual and contract employment to labour brokerage—intensify workers' vulnerability. Third, participants' perceptions of legal frameworks and grassroots support indicate widespread disillusionment with state institutions and traditional trade unions, which are seen as ineffective in enforcing labour rights. Finally, reflections on unexpected findings uncover nuances such as the breakdown of worker solidarity after legal battles, a shift in focus from collective struggle to individual security, the role of shop stewards in weakening unity, and the profound psychological impact of sustained precarity.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.2 presents the analytical framework, detailing how the concepts of violent democracy and structural violence provide a lens through which to interpret the findings. Section 5.3 offers an in-depth discussion of the key themes from Chapter 4, linking empirical insights with theoretical perspectives. Section 5.4 focuses on the participants as the primary unit of analysis, examining their narratives and experiences to further contextualize the findings. In Section 5.5, the discussion synthesizes these analyses to explore broader implications for labour representation and policy reform. Finally, Section 5.6 concludes the chapter by summarizing the key insights and suggesting directions for future research.

By integrating both the institutional analysis of the CWAO and the lived experiences of the workers, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how violent democratic practices and structural violence shape the precarious work environment in South Africa.

5.2. Analytical Framework: Violent Democracy and Structural Violence

This section presents the analytical framework, detailing how the concepts of violent democracy and structural violence provide a lens through which to interpret the findings of this study.

5.2.1. Violent Democracy in the South African Labour Context

The term "violent democracy" refers to the paradoxical coexistence of democratic institutions and pervasive violence within a society. In South Africa, this concept captures the reality where, despite democratic governance, violence remains deeply embedded in political and social interactions. Von Holdt (2013) describes South Africa's democracy as one where "violent practices accompany each of these political forms, as violence remains a critical resource in a struggle for ascendancy which democratic institutions are unable to regulate" (p. 117). This framework is particularly relevant in the labour sector, where workers often encounter violence not only in physical forms but also through systemic injustices that perpetuate their marginalization.

5.2.2. Structural Violence: Galtung's Perspective

Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence offers a lens to understand the indirect forms of harm embedded within social structures. Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as the "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs," resulting from inequitable social, political, or economic systems (p. 171). Unlike direct violence, structural violence is insidious, often normalized within society, and manifests through unequal access to resources, rights, and opportunities. In the South African labour context, structural violence is evident in the enduring disparities that affect precarious workers, limiting their ability to achieve equitable living and working conditions.

5.2.3. Interpreting Precarity, State Inaction, and Grassroots Mobilization

Applying the frameworks of violent democracy and structural violence enables a nuanced interpretation of the challenges faced by precarious workers:

- **Precarity:** The proliferation of non-standard employment arrangements—such as casual, contract, and labour-brokered work—reflects structural violence by creating systemic economic insecurity. These employment forms often lack stability, fair wages, and benefits, perpetuating workers' vulnerability and marginalization.

- **State Inaction:** Despite progressive labour laws, the South African state's failure to effectively enforce these regulations exemplifies violent democracy. The gap between legislative frameworks and their implementation allows exploitative labour practices to persist, undermining the protective intent of democratic institutions.
- **Grassroots Mobilization:** In response to structural violence and state inaction, organizations like the CWAO emerge as critical grassroots entities. They provide support and advocacy for precarious workers, challenging systemic injustices and striving to fulfil unmet needs within the labour sector.

5.2.4. Linkages to Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of violent democracy and structural violence theories offers a comprehensive framework for analysing the lived experiences of precarious workers:

- **Violent Democracy:** This concept elucidates how democratic institutions may coexist with systemic violence, highlighting the complexities within South Africa's political and labour systems. It underscores the limitations of formal democratic structures in safeguarding vulnerable populations, particularly in the labour market.
- **Structural Violence:** Galtung's theory provides insight into the underlying social structures that perpetuate inequality and harm. It emphasizes the importance of addressing systemic issues—such as inequitable economic policies and labour practices—that contribute to the marginalization of precarious workers.

By employing these analytical lenses, this study aims to uncover the multifaceted challenges faced by precarious workers in South Africa and to explore how grassroots organizations like CWAO navigate and contest the intertwined dynamics of violent democracy and structural violence.

5.3. Analysis of Themes from the Study Findings

5.3.1. Theme 1: Motivations for Seeking Support from the grassroots organisations

Workers' decisions to seek assistance from the CWAO are primarily driven by economic insecurity, fear of exploitation, and a quest for alternative justice mechanisms. These motivations are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of violent democracy, where the failure of traditional institutions paves the way for grassroots responses.

Economic Insecurity

The rise of precarious employment in South Africa has led to widespread economic instability among workers. The proliferation of casual, contract, and labour broker-mediated positions has resulted in low wages and a lack of job security. Traditional trade unions have struggled to adapt to these changes, often failing to represent non-standard workers effectively. This gap has left many workers vulnerable, prompting them to seek support from organizations like the CWAO which provides advice and support to precarious workers (CWAO, n.d.).

Fear of Exploitation

The systemic exploitation inherent in precarious work environments fosters a climate of fear among workers. Concerns about unfair labour practices, such as unjust dismissals and inadequate legal protections, drive workers to seek assistance from entities that can offer both legal guidance and a platform for collective action. The CWAO addresses these concerns by offering legal and organizing support, notably aiding precarious workers in their fight for permanent contracts (Notes from Below, n.d.).

Search for Alternative Justice Mechanisms

The inefficacy of traditional institutions, including state bodies and established trade unions, in safeguarding workers' rights has led to the emergence of alternative justice mechanisms. Workers, disillusioned by the lack of effective representation and protection, turn to grassroots organizations like the CWAO. These organizations not only provide legal advice but also create spaces for social support and collective organizing, empowering workers to challenge exploitative practices and advocate for their rights (Suisse, n.d.).

Reflection of Violent Democracy Dynamics

The motivations driving workers to seek support from the CWAO reflect the broader dynamics of violent democracy in South Africa. In this context, traditional institutions have failed to address systemic inequalities and protect vulnerable populations, leading to the normalization of exploitation and structural violence. The state's inability to enforce labour laws effectively and the shortcomings of traditional unions have created a vacuum that grassroots organizations like the CWAO strive to fill. This shift underscores a critical aspect of violent democracy: when formal mechanisms of justice and protection are ineffective or complicit, marginalized groups are compelled to develop alternative structures to advocate for their rights and well-being (Von Holdt, 2013).

5.3.2. Theme 2: Experiences of Precarity in Different Sectors

The research data reveals that precarious employment manifests differently across various sectors, notably manufacturing and retail. Despite these sector-specific variations, common themes emerge that highlight how such precarious conditions are both a product and perpetuator of structural violence, underscoring the critical need for grassroots support.

Precarity in the Manufacturing Sector

In the manufacturing sector, workers frequently encounter prolonged periods of temporary employment under labour brokers, often extending for years without the prospect of permanent positions. This enduring job insecurity contributes to significant emotional and financial strain among workers. Additionally, wage disparities are prevalent, with casual workers earning substantially less than their permanent counterparts despite performing identical tasks. This inequity is further exacerbated by the lack of access to essential benefits such as medical aid and bonuses, reinforcing a sense of expendability among casual workers.

Safety concerns are also prominent, as casual workers often receive inferior protective equipment compared to permanent employees, exposing them to hazardous working conditions. The denial of access to on-site medical facilities further amplifies their vulnerability in the event of workplace injuries. Moreover, the unpredictable nature of work schedules, characterized by last-minute shift assignments, hinders workers' ability to seek alternative employment opportunities, trapping them in a cycle of economic uncertainty.

Precarity in the Retail Sector

Retail workers, while facing a less severe degree of precarity compared to their manufacturing counterparts, still encounter challenges such as job insecurity, low wages, and exclusion from benefits. Their work schedules, though more structured, are susceptible to employer manipulation, affecting workers' financial stability and work-life balance. Employer retaliation, though less overt, manifests in subtle forms such as unfavourable scheduling, creating an environment of fear and compliance.

Structural Violence and the Necessity for Grassroots Support

The conditions described above exemplify structural violence—a form of systemic harm wherein social structures or institutions prevent individuals from meeting their basic needs (Galtung, 1969). In South Africa's labour market, precarious employment arrangements are a manifestation of this violence, systematically disadvantaging workers and perpetuating cycles

of poverty and inequality (Webster et al., 2021). Precarious work, characterized by temporary contracts, low wages, and lack of social protections, has become increasingly normalized, particularly in the manufacturing and retail sectors (Barchiesi, 2011). These exploitative labour practices deepen existing socio-economic disparities and reinforce the marginalization of workers who lack formal employment protections.

The normalization of exploitative practices within both manufacturing and retail sectors underscores the urgency for grassroots organizations like the CWAO. These organizations play a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights, providing legal support, and challenging the systemic issues that sustain labour precarity (Bischoff & Dibben, 2019). Grassroots organizations operate as a counterforce to structural violence by addressing the gaps left by traditional labour unions and state institutions, which often fail to adequately protect precarious workers. Unions, historically a key mechanism for labour advocacy, have struggled to adapt to the changing labour market dynamics, leaving many precarious workers unrepresented (Theron, 2010).

Moreover, grassroots organizations contribute to mitigating structural violence by fostering worker solidarity and empowerment. Through legal assistance, educational workshops, and direct action, organizations like the CWAO equip workers with the knowledge and resources needed to resist exploitative conditions (Kenny & Webster, 2020). Their efforts are instrumental in challenging the broader neoliberal economic structures that prioritize corporate profit over worker well-being (Ferguson, 2015). By advocating for systemic reforms and amplifying worker voices, grassroots movements function as critical agents of social justice, working towards more equitable labour relations in South Africa.

5.3.3. Theme 3: Perceptions of Legal Frameworks and Grassroots Support

Participants in the study expressed significant dissatisfaction with South Africa's formal legal frameworks and state institutions, particularly regarding their effectiveness in protecting precarious workers. They reported that, despite approaching formal legal channels such as the CCMA or the Labour Court, they encountered systemic delays and retaliation from employers (Webster, 1987), such as losing their job after advocating for permanent positions. The founding member of the CWAO corroborated these frustrations, stating that South Africa's labour laws are designed to appear protective on paper but often fail to provide immediate relief to precarious workers. They emphasized that the legal system is structurally tilted in favour of employers, making it difficult for workers to secure justice in a timely manner. This systemic

bias contributes to a sense of powerlessness among workers, even when advocacy organizations intervene (Alexander et al., 2012).

The findings of this study echo what existing scholarship has already highlighted about the violent underpinnings of South Africa's labour relations. The Marikana massacre of 2012, for instance, has been described as a turning point in post-apartheid labour history, revealing the extent to which state violence was mobilized to suppress workers' demands for dignity and better wages (Alexander, 2013; Sinwell, 2016). Participants' reflections on biased legal processes resonate with critiques of the Regulation of Gatherings Act, which scholars argue has often been used to criminalize protest and impose liability on precarious workers and grassroots organizations seeking to mobilize (Duncan, 2016; Kane-Berman, 2017). These findings demonstrate how precarious workers' everyday struggles cannot be separated from broader patterns of violent democracy already documented in the literature.

In response to these challenges, grassroots organizations like the CWAOW have emerged to fill the gaps left by formal legal frameworks. Participants consistently expressed gratitude for the role that CWAOW played in their struggles, noting that the organization not only provided legal representation but also empowered workers with knowledge about their rights. Highlighting that, before discovering CWAOW, they were unaware of their labour rights and had resigned themselves to exploitative conditions. After attending workshops and receiving guidance from CWAOW staff, they felt more confident in asserting their rights. The founding member of CWAOW described this transformation as one of the organization's biggest successes, stating that the primary goal is not just to win legal cases but to create a generation of workers who understand their rights and are willing to fight for them. This empowerment is crucial in challenging the state's inadequate enforcement of labour rights and addressing the structural violence perpetuated by systemic biases within legal frameworks (Webster, 1987).

Despite these efforts, the reality of legal outcomes remains challenging. Many precarious workers fought for permanent employment status or higher wages but, after years of legal battles, had to settle for partial solutions such as variable-hour contracts instead of full-time employment. One participant described how, after years of legal struggles, they were granted a 40-hour guaranteed contract—a partial improvement but still far from full job security. These experiences highlight the critical role of grassroots support in advocating for workers' rights and challenging systemic injustices within formal legal frameworks. While organizations like CWAOW provide essential support and education, the persistence of structural violence

necessitates continued efforts to reform state institutions and ensure the protection of precarious workers.

5.3.4. Theme 4: The Impact of Precarity on Workers' Lives

The precarious nature of employment does not only affect workers in the workplace—it extends deeply into their personal lives, influencing their housing conditions, family structures, and overall well-being. The findings revealed that precarious workers struggle to afford decent housing, often living in overcrowded, poorly maintained spaces that are not conducive to raising children. The lack of financial stability forces precarious workers to make painful sacrifices, including being separated from their children for extended periods. Even during the process of seeking justice through legal mechanisms, workers experience prolonged emotional and financial hardship, as cases often take years to be resolved (Benach et al., 2014; Munck, 2013; Theron, 2010; Kalleberg, 2011).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence, as precarious work entrenches systemic inequalities that negatively impact workers' social and economic well-being. The violent democracy framework further explains how state inaction exacerbates these struggles, as workers are left without viable institutional recourse (Von Holdt, 2013). This aligns with studies on precarious work and economic marginalization, which emphasize that the neoliberal labour market prioritizes employer flexibility over worker security (Standing, 2011; Castel, 2003).

Poor Living Conditions and Overcrowded Homes

Observations made during visits to participants' homes revealed the harsh realities of precarious work. Many precarious workers lived in single-room dwellings, where entire families had to share cramped and cluttered spaces. In such conditions, privacy was non-existent, and children had no safe space to play or study. These environments reflected the deep economic struggles precarious workers faced, making it clear that their wages were insufficient to secure better living arrangements (Benach et al., 2014). The physical and psychological toll of living in such conditions was evident. Participants reported constant worry about rent, often having to borrow money or cut back on food and other essentials just to keep a roof over their heads. This aligns with the structural violence framework, which underscores how systemic economic constraints deprive individuals of basic needs (Galtung, 1969; Bourdieu, 1998; Wacquant, 2009).

Separation from Children and Family Struggles

A particularly devastating consequence of precarious work was family separation, where workers were often forced to leave their children behind in rural areas while they worked in urban centre. The unpredictability of their work schedules and low wages made it impossible to afford proper childcare or bring their children to live with them. The emotional strain of being away from their children for long periods was a recurring theme, with many workers expressing guilt, sadness, and frustration at being unable to provide a stable home life. Some workers had to rely on older children or extended family to care for younger ones, creating additional emotional and logistical burdens. The absence of state-provided childcare and the high costs of private alternatives further exacerbated these challenges (Von Holdt, 2013; Standing, 2011; Kalleberg, 2011). These findings illustrate how precarious work disrupts family life and forces workers to make heartbreaking choices, putting their children's safety and well-being at risk. The broader implications highlight the need for policies that address not only employment conditions but also social welfare provisions to support low-income workers.

5.3.5. Theme 5: Reflections on Unexpected Findings

Subtheme 5.1: The Breakdown of Worker Solidarity After Legal Battles

The fragmentation of worker solidarity following legal struggles highlights a significant shift in collective action dynamics within South Africa's labour movements. During these legal challenges, workers exhibited strong unity, providing each other with emotional, financial, and strategic support. This solidarity was crucial in confronting exploitative employment practices, with many relying on organizations like the CWAO for assistance throughout their legal proceedings. Such unity underscored a shared commitment to challenging systemic injustices, suggesting potential for sustained collective action.

However, as legal battles concluded and some workers secured permanent positions, this solidarity began to wane. Those who transitioned to permanent employment often distanced themselves from collective struggles, focusing on individual stability rather than broader systemic issues affecting their peers in precarious employment. This shift—from collective empowerment to individual advancement—resulted in fragmented unity. Workers who had previously been active in protests and legal actions became less inclined to advocate for systemic change, as their personal circumstances improved.

The decline in worker solidarity among precarious labourers in South Africa can be analyzed through the lens of structural violence and the concept of violent democracy. In South Africa,

historical and ongoing socio-economic inequalities have created an environment where workers, particularly those in precarious employment, face systemic exploitation and marginalization. The legal framework, while ostensibly protective, often reinforces these structural inequities. The South African Constitution guarantees fair labour practices and the right to collective bargaining (Republic of South Africa, 1996). However, legal precedents such as the *South African Transport and Allied Workers Union and Another v Garvas and Others* case have held unions liable for damages arising from public gatherings, even when violence was unforeseeable (Mogoeng, 2012). This ruling imposes significant financial risks on unions, potentially deterring them from organizing protests or strikes, thereby limiting collective action opportunities for workers.

This environment aligns with the notion of violent democracy, where democratic processes and institutions, instead of protecting citizens, contribute to their oppression (Mbembe, 2001). In such a context, the emphasis on individual rights within the legal system can inadvertently promote individualism over collective solidarity. Workers may prioritize personal job security and advancement, perceiving these as more attainable than systemic change, especially when collective actions carry substantial personal and financial risks. Consequently, solidarity weakens, and collective action diminishes, as workers navigate a system that seems to favour individual compliance over collective advocacy.

Subtheme 5.2: The Shift in Priorities: From Collective Struggle to Individual Security

The narratives of South African workers transitioning from precarious to permanent employment reveal a significant shift from collective labour activism to a focus on individual job security. This transition is deeply influenced by South Africa's socio-political landscape, characterized by structural violence and a violent democracy, which shape workers' survival strategies.

Individual Strategies Amid Structural Pressures

Workers' experiences highlight a survival mentality developed under prolonged job insecurity. Achieving permanent employment is viewed as the pinnacle of success, with little ambition for further career advancement. This attitude is not indicative of laziness but rather a rational response to a labour market characterized by high unemployment and limited opportunities. The scarcity of stable jobs leads workers to prioritize securing any permanent position over pursuing professional growth, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation to structural constraints. However, this individualistic focus fosters competition among workers, as evidenced by

feelings of jealousy when colleagues attain better positions. Such sentiments create divisions, undermining solidarity and perpetuating a cycle where collective action is sidelined in favour of personal gain. This competitive environment aligns with the notion of violent democracy, where systemic inequalities and state policies exacerbate social divisions and hinder collective progress (Alexander et al., 2013).

The shift from collective struggle to individual security among South African workers is a complex response to structural violence and a "violent democracy." While seeking personal stability is a rational survival strategy, it inadvertently perpetuates systemic inequalities by undermining collective action. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that not only provides individual security but also fosters a supportive environment for collective labour movements, ensuring that workers' rights and interests are effectively advocated for and protected.

Subtheme 5.3: The Role of Shop Stewards in Weakening Worker Unity

The role of shop stewards within labour structures is critical in shaping workplace dynamics. However, findings from this study indicate that rather than reinforcing solidarity, some shop stewards contribute to its erosion. This shift occurs when stewards prioritize personal status over collective advocacy, aligning themselves with management structures rather than the workers they initially sought to represent. As a result, precarious workers often feel abandoned, further exacerbating workplace divisions. This dynamic reflects broader critiques of trade union bureaucracy, where representatives become detached from the rank-and-file membership (Camfield, 2007).

Leadership Dynamics and the Erosion of Solidarity

Shop stewards occupy a dual position within the workplace—expected to be both worker representatives and intermediaries between labour and management. However, the institutionalization of trade unions within capitalist workplaces often results in a leadership class that becomes distant from the grassroots concerns of workers (Buhlungu, 2010). This bureaucratic shift can transform shop stewards from advocates of worker interests into figures who uphold management interests, leading to frustration and disillusionment among precarious workers.

The decision by the SWF to reject shop steward and organizer positions exemplifies the deep-seated scepticism toward these leadership roles. Instead, the forum promotes worker-led advocacy, where all members acquire legal knowledge and represent themselves in labour

disputes. This alternative model seeks to preserve worker unity and resist hierarchical divisions that weaken collective bargaining power (Webster, 2015).

Power, Control, and Violent Democratic Systems

The shifting role of shop stewards can also be understood through the lens of power and control within violent democratic systems. South Africa's labour relations are marked by tensions between democratic ideals and entrenched inequalities, where worker representation is frequently compromised by institutionalized power structures (Von Holdt, 2013). The co-optation of worker leaders into managerial frameworks aligns with broader patterns of labour control, reinforcing systemic imbalances rather than challenging them. This phenomenon demonstrates how trade unions, rather than purely resisting corporate power, can sometimes act as intermediaries that stabilize exploitative labour regimes rather than dismantle them.

Alternative Approaches: Strengthening Worker-Led Representation

Given the challenges posed by traditional shop steward structures, alternative approaches emphasize decentralized and collective forms of worker representation. Studies on grassroots labour movements highlight the benefits of direct worker participation in negotiations, reducing the risks of bureaucratic alienation and strengthening solidarity (Pillay, 2011). By equipping all workers with legal knowledge and collective bargaining skills, such approaches counteract the detachment of leadership from everyday worker struggles, fostering a more inclusive and democratic labour movement.

In essence, the role of shop stewards is pivotal in shaping workplace relations, yet their detachment from precarious workers illustrates a significant weakness in traditional labour structures. By aligning with management and distancing themselves from collective struggles, shop stewards inadvertently weaken worker unity. This finding highlights the need for labour movements to critically assess their internal leadership dynamics and explore alternative models that ensure sustained worker solidarity.

Subtheme 5.4: Understanding Precarity Beyond the Workplace: The Psychological Impact

Beyond economic insecurity, precarity has profound psychological and emotional effects on workers. This study reveals that precarity does not merely shape working conditions but also influences long-term worker aspirations, expectations, and behaviours. The psychological toll of insecure work extends beyond the workplace, affecting self-perception, resilience, and solidarity among workers (Kalleberg, 2011).

Emotional and Psychological Toll on Workers

The study challenges the assumption that achieving permanent employment automatically leads to improved worker conditions. While legal victories provide job stability, they do not guarantee higher wages, better treatment, or career growth (Standing, 2011). The prolonged experience of precarity conditions workers to prioritize survival over transformation, leading to limited aspirations. Workers become so accustomed to instability that, once they achieve a measure of security, they cling to it rather than advocating for broader systemic change (Munck, 2013). This explains why solidarity often weakens after legal victories, as workers shift their focus toward individual stability rather than collective struggle.

Structural Violence and Mental Health Impacts

The ongoing exposure to structural violence—manifested in job insecurity, low wages, and lack of upward mobility—takes a toll on workers' mental health. Precarious employment fosters chronic stress, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability (Bourdieu, 1998). The resentment towards those who achieve marginal advancements further highlights how precarity shapes long-term worker behaviour, as those who remain in unstable conditions feel left behind.

These findings underscore the need to view precarity beyond its economic dimensions. The psychological and emotional impact of insecure work shapes not only individual workers but also collective labour dynamics. Without addressing the long-term psychological effects and fostering a culture of continuous worker advocacy, legal victories alone will not be sufficient to dismantle precarious labour structures.

5.4.Synthesis and Integration

In examining the labour dynamics within South Africa's post-apartheid socio-political landscape, the interplay between structural violence and violent democracy offers profound insights. The findings from this study, encompassing both the breakdown of worker solidarity post-legal battles and the shift towards individual security, align with and are illuminated by these theoretical frameworks.

Integration of Theme Analyses and Participant Insights

The participants' narratives reveal a trajectory from collective struggle to individualistic survival strategies. Initially, during legal disputes, a strong sense of unity prevailed, with workers supporting each other emotionally, financially, and strategically. However, as legal

resolutions were achieved and some secured permanent positions, this solidarity began to fragment. The focus shifted towards personal stability, reflecting a survival mentality shaped by years of job insecurity.

This shift can be contextualized within the concept of structural violence, which refers to systematic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals (Galtung, 1969). In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has left enduring economic disparities and social stratification. The labour market, characterized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment, perpetuates a cycle of precarity for many workers (Barchiesi, 2011). This environment fosters a survivalist approach, where securing stable employment becomes the primary goal, often at the expense of collective action.

The concept of violent democracy, as articulated by von Holdt (2013), further elucidates this phenomenon. In South Africa's democratic transition, while political freedoms were attained, economic inequalities persisted. The state's enforcement of laws, such as the Regulation of Gatherings Act, which holds organizers liable for damages during public gatherings (South African Transport and Allied Workers Union and Another v Garvas and Others, 2012), can be perceived as a form of structural violence. These legal frameworks, though ostensibly neutral, disproportionately affect marginalized workers, deterring them from engaging in collective advocacy due to fear of legal repercussions.

Broader Implications for Labour Representation, Policy Reform, and Grassroots Mobilization

The study's findings highlight the necessity for a reimagined approach to labour representation. Traditional union models may not fully address the needs of a workforce fragmented by varying employment statuses and survival strategies. There is a pressing need for inclusive representation that acknowledges the diverse experiences of all workers, particularly those in precarious employment.

Policy reforms should aim to dismantle the structural barriers that perpetuate economic inequalities. Strengthening labour laws to protect vulnerable workers, ensuring equitable access to quality employment, and promoting social safety nets are crucial steps towards mitigating the effects of structural violence. Additionally, reforms should address the legal deterrents to collective action, such as revisiting laws that impose disproportionate liabilities on organizers of public gatherings.

Grassroots mobilization remains a vital force for change. Community-based organizing allows workers to collectively address grievances, share resources, and build solidarity. However, in

a context of violent democracy, where state responses to protests can be severe, grassroots movements must strategize to navigate potential legal and physical risks. Building alliances with civil society organizations, engaging in digital activism, and pursuing international solidarity can amplify their efforts while mitigating risks.

Advancing Understanding of Violent Democracy as Both a Challenge and an Impetus for Alternative Worker Advocacy

The recommendations emerging from this study align with broader proposals in the literature on labour reform and grassroots mobilization. Scholars have emphasized that addressing precarity requires both policy interventions—such as closing loopholes in labour legislation and revisiting restrictive protest laws—and the strengthening of grassroots capacities for collective action (Duncan, 2016; Kane-Berman, 2017). Recent studies also point to the growing importance of digital activism and transnational solidarity networks as tools that enable precarious workers to amplify their voices and build alliances beyond their immediate workplaces (Hlatshwayo, 2020; Friedman, 2012). By situating these strategies within the South African labour context, this study underscores the urgent need for reforms that address structural and symbolic violence while also supporting grassroots innovations in resistance.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined how worker motivations, grassroots resistance, and structural inequalities intersect within the framework of violent democracy and structural violence in South Africa. The findings indicate that precarious workers seek support from the CWAO due to economic insecurity, workplace exploitation, and the failure of state institutions and trade unions to adequately protect their rights. The study has also shown that the legal and bureaucratic hurdles faced by workers reinforce a system where access to justice is uneven, prolonging their vulnerability. Moreover, the fragmentation of worker solidarity post-legal battles and the shift towards individual security over collective struggle illustrate how structural violence conditions workers to prioritize personal stability over sustained activism.

The persistence of precarious work and the inadequacy of formal labour protections highlight the urgent need for alternative worker advocacy. While grassroots organizations like the CWAO play a crucial role in bridging institutional gaps, their work also underscores the broader systemic failures that leave workers without reliable support. The interplay between structural violence and violent democracy not only shapes individual labour experiences but also dictates the possibilities and limitations of collective resistance. In navigating these challenges, workers

and grassroots movements must continue developing innovative strategies to assert their rights while challenging the deep-rooted inequalities that sustain labour precarity.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This study investigates the pervasive issue of structural violence within South Africa's labour market, focusing on its impact on precarious workers and the role of the CWAO in addressing these challenges. The term *violent democracy* is employed to describe the paradoxical coexistence of democratic institutions and persistent violence, where systemic inequalities and intra-elite conflicts perpetuate a highly unstable social order. This concept is significant as it frames the context in which labour exploitation occurs, highlighting the limitations of democratic institutions in regulating violence and protecting vulnerable populations. The primary objectives of this study were to examine how systemic inequalities manifest in the labour sector and to assess the effectiveness of grassroots organizations like CWAO in mitigating these adversities. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with precarious workers who have engaged with CWAO, as well as with key personnel within the organization. This approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of workers and the strategies employed by CWAO to support them.

The findings reveal that structural violence in the labour market manifests through low wages, job insecurity, and inadequate legal protections, conditions exacerbated by state inaction and ineffective union representation. In response, CWAO has emerged as a critical site of resistance and empowerment, offering legal support, worker education, and practical assistance, such as transport support, to those most vulnerable. However, the limitations of the legal system and the protracted pace of justice often result in partial outcomes for workers, with the burden of struggle continuing to weigh heavily on their personal lives.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

6.2.1. Restatement of Research Questions

1. What pushes precarious workers to seek external support?
2. How do precarious workers perceive the role of grassroots organizations within South Africa's labour context?
3. What broader insights do these motivations and experiences provide about the relationship between precarious work and violent democracy in South Africa?

6.2.2. Motivations for Seeking External Support

Objective 1: To identify and analyse the key obstacles and forms of exploitation experienced by

precarious workers, providing insight into the socio-economic and workplace conditions that compel them to pursue external support.

The research findings respond directly to Objective 1 by identifying economic hardship, legal exclusion, and systemic inequalities as the key obstacles driving precarious workers to seek external support. Participants reported low wages, unsafe working conditions, and a lack of employment benefits due to labour brokering and short-term contracts, which intensified their vulnerability (Bezuidenhout & Tshoaedi, 2017; Webster, 2021). Many workers found themselves excluded from formal labour protections, leaving them exposed to exploitation.

Further, the state's failure to enforce labour rights and the ineffectiveness of unions contributed to workers' sense of abandonment. Participants expressed frustration that unions were often inaccessible or ineffective in representing precarious workers' specific grievances (Buhlungu & Tshoaedi, 2012). This aligns with Von Holdt's (2013) concept of violent democracy, where despite formal rights, workers experience structural violence through exclusion from real protection and justice. As such, this study shows that precarious workers seek alternative support due to these systemic failures, fully answering Objective 1.

6.2.3. Perceptions of Grassroots Organizations

Objective 2: To evaluate CWAO's interventions, including legal advice, organizing strategies, and advocacy, assessing their role in alleviating workers' grievances and offering an alternative form of support where traditional protections fall short.

The research fulfils Objective 2 by evaluating the role of the CWAO in supporting precarious workers where unions and the state fall short. Participants described CWAO's legal support, such as assisting in unfair dismissal cases and advocating for permanent contracts, as critical to navigating hostile workplaces (Theron, 2014).

The study further found that CWAO plays an essential role in empowering workers through education and organizing, equipping them with knowledge of their rights and mobilizing them for collective action (Kenny & Webster, 2020). Workers saw this as an important alternative to unions, particularly because CWAO provided access to legal processes otherwise closed off to them.

However, participants also highlighted the limitations of legal recourse, noting that long and delayed labour court cases often left them in prolonged economic hardship (Paret, 2018). Despite this, CWAO was perceived as a necessary ally in a system where workers felt abandoned. This evaluation of CWAO's interventions directly addresses Objective 2, showing that while grassroots organizations offer meaningful support, they are constrained by broader systemic

issues.

6.2.4. *Precarious Work and Violent Democracy*

Objective 3: To contextualize the motivations of precarious workers within the concept of violent democracy, exploring how experiences of marginalization and inequality shape their relationships with grassroots organizations like CWAOW.

The research meets Objective 3 by situating precarious workers' motivations within the framework of violent democracy (Von Holdt, 2013). It shows that workers' experiences of economic marginalization, legal exclusion, and union failure are forms of structural violence, leaving them exposed to exploitative work environments despite the formal existence of rights. The findings emphasize that class-based violence and entrenched inequalities keep low-wage workers trapped in precarious conditions (Alexander, 2013), while state complicity in labour precarity—through weak enforcement of laws and neoliberal reforms—reinforces this violence (Friedman, 2012).

Grassroots organizations like CWAOW emerged as spaces of resistance within this violent system, providing workers with alternative avenues for redress and collective action (Scully, 2016). However, the research also highlights that grassroots efforts alone cannot overcome violent democracy without systemic change (Webster & Omar, 2020). By linking workers' motivations to the broader context of violent democracy, this study answers Objective 3, showing how structural conditions shape precarious workers' turn to organizations like CWAOW as both a survival strategy and a form of resistance.

6.3. Integration with Existing Literature

6.3.1. *Structural Violence and Labour Precarity*

This study corroborates Von Holdt's (2013) violent democracy framework, which describes the coexistence of democratic institutions with systemic violence and inequality. The findings reaffirm that precarious employment conditions are institutionalized forms of economic violence, facilitated by weak labour protections (Kenny & Webster, 2020). Furthermore, Barchiesi (2011) argues that precarious workers are not merely victims but active agents seeking to challenge their exploitation. This aligns with findings on CWAOW's role in empowering workers but also extends the literature by highlighting how structural barriers undermine worker victories.

6.3.2. The Role and Limits of Grassroots Organizations

Webster and Omar (2020) emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilization in labour struggles. This study supports their argument by demonstrating how CWAOW fills the representation gap left by weakened unions. However, it also extends their findings by illustrating that legal victories for workers are often short-lived due to employer resistance and state indifference (Paret, 2018). Additionally, comparative studies in the Global South show similar trends, where worker-led movements rely on grassroots organizations to challenge labour precarity (Schroeder, 2021). In Tunisia, for example, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) played a pivotal role in advocating for workers' rights, like CWAOW's work in South Africa (Bendana, 2020).

6.3.3. Towards Systemic Change

This study highlights that while grassroots initiatives play a critical role, they are insufficient on their own. Sustained change requires:

1. Stronger state enforcement of labour protections to prevent employer non-compliance (Bezuidenhout & Tshoaedi, 2017).
2. Reformed legal processes to ensure that precarious workers' cases are resolved efficiently and justly (Theron, 2014).
3. A revitalization of trade unions to complement the work of grassroots organizations (Buhlungu & Tshoaedi, 2012).

While CWAOW offers critical support to precarious workers, the broader system remains skewed in favour of employers. Without comprehensive policy and legal reforms, the structural violence embedded in South Africa's labour market will persist.

6.4. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical applications for stakeholders aiming to address structural violence in South Africa's labour market:

1. **Policy Makers:** The study underscores the need for comprehensive labour law reforms to better protect precarious workers. This includes stricter enforcement of existing regulations and the development of new policies that address the unique challenges faced by casual and contract workers. Additionally, streamlining legal processes can expedite justice for workers, reducing the economic and personal hardships caused by prolonged disputes.
2. **Employers:** The research highlights the importance of ethical labour practices. Employers are encouraged to move beyond minimum legal requirements by offering fair

wages, job security, and safe working conditions. Implementing transparent grievance mechanisms can also help address worker concerns promptly, fostering a more equitable workplace environment.

3. **Labour Unions and Worker Organizations:** The study reveals the limitations of traditional unions in representing precarious workers, suggesting a need for these entities to adapt their strategies. Collaborating with grassroots organizations like the CWAO can enhance outreach and support for vulnerable workers. Unions might also consider developing programs specifically tailored to the needs of casual and contract workers.
4. **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Organizations focused on labour rights can draw inspiration from CWAO's model, which combines legal assistance with practical support such as transportation and educational workshops. Expanding such services can empower workers to understand and assert their rights more effectively.
5. **Community Leaders and Advocates:** The findings emphasize the power of grassroots mobilization. Community leaders can facilitate forums where workers share experiences and develop collective strategies to address labour issues. Raising awareness through campaigns, including the use of media and pamphlets, can also inform workers of their rights and available support systems.

By implementing these insights, stakeholders can work collaboratively to dismantle structural violence in the labour market, leading to improved conditions and protections for precarious workers in South Africa.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Building upon the current study, several areas of future research are recommended:

1. **Union Engagement Pathways:** Future studies should explore whether and how precarious workers engage with unions before turning to grassroots organizations like CWAO. Understanding these trajectories would shed light on the transitional relationship between unions and alternative worker-support institutions.
2. **Critical Interrogation of CWAO:** While this study focused on CWAO's ability to fill the representational gap left by unions, future research should critically interrogate the organisation itself. This could include examining its internal practices, resource constraints, and limitations to provide a more comprehensive picture of its role in labour struggles.
3. **Processes of Worker Education:** Research should investigate in detail how CWAO helps precarious workers understand labour law and their rights. Ethnographic studies of

advice sessions, workshops, or casework could reveal the mechanisms and effectiveness of these educational processes.

4. **Sector-Specific Analysis:** Although this study included participants from retail and manufacturing, future research could draw more directly on the extensive literature in these sectors. Doing so would allow for deeper engagement with sectoral dynamics and a more nuanced analysis of precarity.
5. **Counter-Violence and Moral Orders:** Future studies should consider whether and how precarious workers engage in forms of counter-violence or construct alternative moral and political orders in response to systemic exclusion. This would add an important dimension to the analysis of violent democracy.
6. **Social Reproduction and Psychological Dimensions:** While this study noted the impact of precarity on workers' households and mental health, future research should explicitly engage with social reproduction theory and literature on the psychological toll of precarity. This would capture the broader consequences of precarious work beyond the workplace.

By pursuing these avenues, future research can extend the insights of this study, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of precarity, grassroots mobilisation, and labour resistance in South Africa.

6.6. Limitations of the Study

In reflecting on the scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge several limitations:

1. **Union engagement:** While the study highlighted workers' frustrations with traditional unions, it did not explore in detail whether or how workers had engaged with unions prior to approaching CWAO.
2. **Focus on CWAO:** The study did not critically interrogate the internal practices or limitations of CWAO itself. Instead, it focused specifically on the organisation's ability to fill the representational and advocacy gap left by the traditional union movement.
3. **CWAO's educational role:** Although findings indicate that CWAO helps precarious workers understand labour law and their rights, the study did not examine in depth the specific mechanisms through which this knowledge transfer occurs.
4. **Sectoral literature:** While the study included workers in the retail and manufacturing sectors, it did not fully engage with the rich body of literature that exists in both areas.
5. **Counter-violence and moral orders:** The analysis primarily focused on violence emanating from the state, laws, and economic structures (including symbolic violence).

The possibility that precarious workers might engage in counter-violence or generate alternative moral orders was not explored.

6. **Social reproduction and psychological toll:** While the findings touched on the social reproduction of workers and the psychological toll of precarity, the study did not incorporate the extensive literature on these themes.

6.7. Concluding Remarks

This study has significantly contributed to the understanding of precarious workers' motivations within the context of South Africa's labour relations, specifically in relation to the CWAO. By exploring the subjective experiences of workers seeking support from grassroots organizations, the research highlights the nuanced ways in which precarious employment intersects with the broader socio-political landscape of violent democracy.

The key findings emphasize that precarious workers are not passive victims of exploitation but active agents who seek support from CWAO based on their need for justice, empowerment, and access to legal recourse. These motivations are deeply embedded in the violent democracy that characterizes South Africa's post-apartheid labour market. Workers' agency in navigating these challenges through grassroots organizations underscores the importance of such organizations in providing a sense of solidarity and advocating for systemic change.

At the same time, this study is not without boundaries. As outlined in Section 6.6, it did not examine workers' prior engagement with unions in depth, interrogate CWAO's internal practices, or explore in detail how the organisation educates workers. Nor did it fully utilise sector-specific literature, investigate counter-violence or alternative moral orders, or integrate scholarship on social reproduction and psychological wellbeing. These acknowledged gaps highlight the need for further research to complement and extend the insights presented here.

The significance of this study nonetheless extends beyond its immediate scope. It challenges mainstream portrayals of precarious workers as passive victims, instead presenting them as individuals striving for dignity, justice, and agency. Moreover, it points to the need for more inclusive legal and policy frameworks that address structural violence and recognise the role of grassroots organisations in supporting vulnerable workers.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader conversation on violent democracy in South Africa, offering critical insights into how grassroots activism can function both as a coping mechanism and a transformative force. By combining a recognition of workers' agency with a clear acknowledgement of the study's limitations, the report lays the groundwork for future

inquiry and policy development aimed at building a more just and equitable labour system.

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Appendices



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Appendix A:



Appendix%20B%20-
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Appendix B:



Appendix%20C%20-
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Appendix C:



Appendix D -
2722132 Pitso Lerato

Appendix
D: