

Gender Relations in the Home and the Workplace in Lesotho

Institute of Southern African Studies

Kate Dyer

**GENDER RELATIONS IN THE HOME AND
THE WORKPLACE:**

**A Case Study of the Gender Implications of Lesotho's
Current Economic Development Strategy for the
Clothing Industry**

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*The Institute of Southern African Studies
National University of Lesotho
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FOREWORD

Interest in gender research has increased in the latter part of the last century as a strategy for understanding and analysis of theory and policy. Gender studies has emerged in the latter part of the last century within the context of the global women's movement, and the international and national commitments to social justice and change towards the human-centered development paradigm. The development process which has occurred in Southern Africa during the last three decades since the political independence, and within the context of the recent democratization process sweeping the region, has affected the lives and living conditions of women and men differently. The situation manifests itself among others at the household level and relation to issues of labour, for example in manufacturing employment sector/industry.

The Institute of Southern African Studies has since the beginning of the nineties undertaken to consider gender as necessary in scholarly inquiries through the establishment of a Gender and Development Research (GDR) programme. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the programme supports and encourages basic and action research on gender and related issues; it generates and analyses empirical data; and it brings about an understanding of theoretical grounding, the gender concept and gender relations in order to influence (development) policy and planning activities, and laws with an objective to achieve equity and equality between the sexes. The structure of the GDR programme emphasizes collaboration and consultation among and between academics and activists to break/reduce any dichotomy. Ideally the aim is to build research capacity to achieve strong sustainable human resources in this area. Included in the research activities of the programme is a research project involving eight local researchers working individually and/or collectively on different sub-topics investigating issues of law and human rights, reproductive health, institution of chieftainship, biographies of great Basotho women, and labor.

In this publication Kate Dyer, an ISAS research associate presents her research findings on the study of the textile, clothing and leatherwear manufacturing industry in Lesotho, focusing primarily on the implications for gender relations in Lesotho. According to past studies, this sector accounted

for about 38% of the national Gross Domestic Product, and it is female dominated. For example women constituted 63% of the workers in 1986; and 12.3% females versus 2.6% males employed in the sector according to the 1996 census results. The high female representation of the workforce is attributed mostly to the textile factories operation in the towns where rural migrants are the majority, also the women's increasing movement into the labor market. They are employed in the industry as semi-skilled workers performing traditionally female tasks, which are lowly paid for daily, weekly and/or monthly contracts as a result of inter alia rising unemployment. This is not peculiar to Lesotho as has been also observed by international studies on issues of Free Trade Zone (FTZ's) that women constitute most of the manual labor used by trans-nationals because females labor has historically been cheaper than that of men.

Based on qualitative and quantitative primary data Dyer's research findings generally conform to the findings of these international studies and those on Lesotho (trends) in a number of aspects; however it brings out other important issues. Dyer's work successfully reveals the female workers' experiences and documents the open and implicit changes in gender and gender relations at both household and work levels resultant from the high female participation in this industry. Majority of these are married women with dependent children. The findings indicate that the current national economic policy of seeking foreign investment in garment making enterprises, without consideration of textile workers she argues, has gender implications. In this regard the study reveals workers roles and expectations in the home and factory affect each other. On the domestic front, for example women's employment provides them with the latitude to go out to earn income to be able to meet their household practical needs, albeit with limited support and unsatisfactory work conditions. Women are overburdened by performing domestic chores without assistance from their male household counterparts. Their factory work pattern is an extension of their household traditional division of responsibilities. They experience stressful and exhaustive working conditions. Their wages are so low that they generally find it difficult to cope with household and formal work demands because it is ultimately the gender of the worker which explains and determines the pattern of a segmented labor market, supported by the discriminatory gender relations of women in all spheres. They acquiesce to the employers' rules and discipline, manipulation

of gender dynamics, etc. Despite these negative experiences the study reveals some positive gains towards new gender relations through the increased women's freedom of earning an income; and their exposure to unions which has somewhat empowered and brought awareness about women's situation and action upon it thereby meeting their strategic needs.

She concludes that the policy needs to consider demands being made upon it in terms of individual well being and social stability. Policy support is needed to ensure that the workforce and their families can further adapt to the period of social and economic change, and share in the gains to be made from the increased availability of paid employment for women.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that these study findings will go a long way to provide the much needed information by gender advocates, labor practitioners, and policymakers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the effect on gender relations of the increased amount of employment for women in the garment-making factories of Lesotho. Women have long contributed to the workforce in both the informal and formal sectors in Lesotho. However, the large numbers now involved in this factory work and their experiences as women workers, particularly in the context of declining opportunities for male employment, create the potential for a significant shift in former gender norms. It is this shift that is the focus here.

The specific objectives of the study are three-fold. One aim is to provide a Lesotho case study to contribute to the international debate on the effects on gender relations of the growth of women's employment outside the home. A second concern is to establish and document the changes in gender relations, which are happening in the workplace and the home. Underlying this is a concern with the ability of the families/households of garment workers to adapt to the increase in female employment. If families/households fail to adjust, they risk not meeting the primary material and non-material purposes for which they exist, which is inimical both to personal wellbeing and ultimately to social stability. The key question is thus the extent to which a re-negotiation of traditional gender roles constitutes part of this adaptation. The third aim is to explore the policy implications for the changes documented here: the aim of policy makers must be to support forces which facilitate adaptation to such change, to try to ensure that goals of individual and societal well-being are met.

Following the introduction, the second part of the paper contextualises Lesotho's growth in textile/garment manufacture in the worldwide picture. It also provides background for the Lesotho case study by looking at changes in gender relations that have been observed in other parts of the world where there has been a rapid growth in garment making employment. The third part clarifies the methodologies adopted in the study: The findings constitute the fourth major section, documenting changes, which are taking place in gender relations in the home and the factory, by examining the perceptions of those working in the factories. A short summary, and policy recommendations constitute the final section of the paper.

2. THE GLOBALISATION OF TEXTILE/GARMENT MANUFACTURING?

2.1 Contextualising The Lesotho Experience At Macro-Economic Level

The 1970s saw the beginning of a worldwide trend of relocating textile, but more especially garment, manufacture to the developing world to take advantage of lower wage levels. Particularly strong growth in production volumes occurred in Asia, especially in South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, India and Malaysia, in Latin America notably in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, and in the Mediterranean especially in Cyprus and Israel. Clothing production also expanded in Eastern Europe (Dicken, 1992:241). The early trend was for trans-national corporations to invest in joint ventures with local entrepreneurs in third world countries. Production was concentrated in the burgeoning cities and, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s, in Export Processing Zones (EPZ). These EPZs operated as enclaves within the host country producing, as their name suggests, for overseas rather than domestic markets. Entrance to EPZs was in some cases guarded by armed personnel, and inside, special conditions operated with regard to, for example, labour regulations and corporate taxation. Young women with limited experience of waged employment worked mainly in garment making and electronics industries (see for example Rosa, K. in Mitter and Rowbotham, 1994:73ff).

In the 1980s the trend was less towards direct trans-national corporation investment in developing countries than in the search for local contractors, who tended to be smaller, and who had to respond to the rapidly changing demands of the international garment trade. Since the early 1980s, Lesotho has been part of this picture.

Lesotho's strategy of seeking potential investors from the Far East has been operationalised through the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC), and potential investors in garment making and footwear have been particularly targeted. Lesotho is marketed as offering a cheap, relatively, well educated labour force, and production in Lesotho offers the benefits of privileged access to United States of America (US) and

European Union (EU) markets. Incentives to relocate include the provision of factory sites and buildings, utilities at preferential rates and tax incentives. Investors have arrived from the Far East, as well as South Africa, putting Lesotho on the global map in terms of garment production.

There are currently three industrial sites in Lesotho: Maputsoe set up in 1981, Maseru West, and a 'near EPZ', Thetsane Industrial Area, near Maseru. Employment in textiles/garment making has grown from 887 in 1982 to 3,293 in 1985 (Baylies and Wright, 1993), and currently about 17,000 are employed (personal communication, Tsolo Thokwane, LNDC, July 1996). Such employment constitutes 61.9% of industrial sector employment, in enterprises with over 50 staff (Government of Lesotho, Bureau of Statistics, 1991). The vast majority of employees, probably about 92% (Baylies and Wright, 1993) are women.

2.1.1 Contextualising the Lesotho Experience of Changing Gender Relations

This globalisation of international textiles' production has stimulated a range of academic studies of female employment in both the developed and the developing world (for example Robert (1983), Elson and Pearson (1989), Stichter and Parpart (1990), Mitter and Rowbotham (1994)). One point of departure is the argument, which goes back to Engels, that industrial capitalism created a sexual division of labour which relegated women to a subordinate reproductive role in the home, and hence that access to paid employment outside the home would tackle the source of their subordination. Research, such as that cited earlier in this paragraph, soon provided documentation that the issue was not so simple. Employers were seeking a cheap and docile workforce, and young women, often recent/temporary migrants to urban areas, met the supply with little experience of waged labour. Their interest in the factories was short term; women worked to remit money to their families and then left to get married after a few years. This may also have coincided with a decline in their usefulness as employees for health and productivity reasons.

A number of studies have argued that the desirable traits attributed to women (including higher levels of skill, performance and resistance to unionization) can be seen as the product of gender ideologies. These develop

out of the circumstances of the market and the position of women within the domestic sphere (see for example, Elson, 1983; Joekes, 1987). Hence, it is suggested that links between the workplace and the home are interactive, with for example, the observed docility of female workers being a product of patriarchal controls extending from the home to the workplace (Fuentes and Ehrenreich, 1983). This subordination, far from being challenged by the opportunity to earn an income, is arguably reinforced by low pay, poor working conditions and apparent lack of redress experienced by women in the factories, particularly where unions are not allowed to operate freely. Such interaction generates a feedback effect connecting the demand for a cheap docile labour force on the one hand and a supply of workers prepared to accept low wages and damaging working conditions (Bundsggaard, 1995; Green, 1995) on the other.

Humphrey's work on segmented labour markets amongst manual workers in Brazil (Humphrey in Afshar, 1985), provides insight of particular relevance to the issue of low wages in the garment industry in Lesotho. He argues that the general presupposition is that there is not a single labour market, but rather a primary and a secondary one. The former is characterised by jobs in the higher paying sectors, which offer opportunities for advancement and stability of employment; the latter by low wages, unstable and dead end jobs. He argues that far from operating in a non-gendered way, power relations between the sexes permeate all social institutions, so that 'labour markets operate not only to exclude women from skilled jobs, but also to down grade jobs when they are performed by women' (Humphrey, 1985:217). He suggests that management's appear systematically 'to create a segregation and differentiation of functions by gender' (Humphrey, 1985:222), which not only makes it harder to make direct comparisons of the value of work done by men and women, but facilitates paying women lower wages.

Joekes furthers this argument looking at textile workers in Morocco, and makes the case that it is not the level of skill that is important. If employers can pay women less then they will give them jobs with a low skill rating compared to men. It is not the skill level that is important in determining pay; it is the grade that attaches to the job. This has implications for the impact of employment on the home, since if women are earning little, in low status jobs, the fact of their employment does little to alter the norm of gender relations in the home (Joekes in Afshar, 1985).

Such studies have been drawn upon to inform the Lesotho-based research. However, Lesotho is particularly interesting in that the economy is currently undergoing a period of structural change, which involves the largely unrelated dynamic of reduced opportunities for mine employment for men. The availability of mine work has greatly conditioned gender relations for over a century, and inspired a whole literature in the 1970s and 1980s about the 'women left behind', (see for example, Gordon, 1978; Gay, 1982). It is now, however, being drastically curtailed. In the past, families and households had to adapt to the absence of men. A further period of adaptation is now apparent, characterised by the return of some ex-miners to Lesotho, with concomitant effects on gender relations (see for example Sweetman, 1993; Matlosa, 1996). An increase in internal migration (Wright, 1994), also supports and is supported by increased employment opportunities for women. The picture is complex, but the literature summarised here from elsewhere in the world, points to trying to understand interactive relationships between home and workplace, rather than unidirectional forces for change.

3. METHODOLOGY

The choice of methodology sought to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. No attempt was made to quantify observed changes in gender relations made; resource considerations precluded it, even had the glimpses of important issues in individual lives and personal histories been susceptible to counting. What this research offers is a small window into a huge area of gender concerns in Lesotho, perhaps others with more resources will look through the window and fill out the inevitably incomplete picture offered by preliminary qualitative work of this sort.

Preliminary interviews were held with key informants who included personnel officers and managers in four different Maseru factories, as well as Labour Department, LNDC and trade union officials and workers. Resource considerations precluded the inclusion of factories in Mafutsae in this work, because of the cost involved in travelling to and from Maseru. Nevertheless, insight was gained into the organisation of the production process and the deployment of labour in it. This gave a picture of labour market segmentation, and also preliminary responses to the research concerns.

The question of job segmentation and segregation has important implications for gender relations. It was examined by trying to establish the extent of sex segregation within the factories, and whether there is evidence of men having better access to promotion and higher paying jobs. CGM in Thetsane were very helpful in allowing access to personnel files, enabling some quantitative data to be produced. CGM produces jeans, which poses a small methodological concern. I was on several occasions told by workers that CGM has slightly younger workforce than over the industry as a whole, as working with heavy denim fabric is physically more demanding than making, for example T-shirts. Nevertheless, the advantage of having access to files rather than administering a complete 'factory gate' questionnaire outweighed the small potential distortion of results that focusing on a jeans factory might produce. Personnel managers in other factories (Super Knitting, Lesotho Hawk, Hinebo, and Crayon Garments) were able to confirm that any distortion was slight. The personnel files covered the worker's job, department, age, marital status, number of dependants, and the

date when they were taken on, enabling a rough profile of the workforce to be produced. Unfortunately the files do not answer questions about workers level of education or employment history. At the time of the fieldwork, CGM had about 1565 workers on their full pay roll, and details were taken from 333 files, chosen randomly.

Using the profile derived from this quantitative material, purposive sampling was undertaken so that the qualitative work proceeded with a cross section of the labour force. Group discussions were held with workers categorized according to their sex and marital status: married women, married men, separated, divorced or widowed women, separated, divorced or widowed men, and never married women and men. The focus on marital status was because this is where the change from former gender norms of married women and men providing jointly for their children according to traditional gender roles and relations and often in the context of the extended family are most obvious. Single sex groupings were chosen to facilitate the free flow of discussion.

The qualitative research took place under difficult conditions forcing compromises with conventional 'scientific' approaches. Most factory managers are suspicious of outsiders coming to interview their workforce. It is impossible to establish an atmosphere for people to talk freely with the interviewer standing one side of wire netting surrounding the factory and the respondent the other. A 'neutral' venue for group interviews was difficult to find, and in the end union offices, or classrooms where education workshops, were taking place were used. These constituted convenient and familiar spaces away from the factories, where discussion could take place uninterrupted. Largely a union activist set up the discussions, and those interviewed tended to be at least interested in union concerns. This does potentially affect the results, but life histories of women factory workers were also taken to provide some balance. Most of them lived in Seapoint, near the factories in Maseru West, and many were non-union members. A former factory worker, who also served as an interpreter where necessary, located these respondents.

The intention of the group discussions was to generate an exchange of opinions and attitudes amongst the workers, in a way which would validate their own experiences, as a step towards the women empowering themselves, and towards ascertaining what policies workers themselves feel would assist

them. Underlying this is an appreciation of the concept of agency. As Swasti Mitter puts it, forms of analysis which deny agency reduce human beings 'to an unknowing passivity which implicitly privileges the theorist. (Mitter in Mitter and Rowbotham, 1994:5). Women workers in the textile and clothing industry are not simply victims of forces they do not generate or control, and the comments quoted below show a 'wealth of knowing' (Mitter in Mitter and Rowbotham, 1994:5) is embedded with in their understanding of daily life. This knowing is a potential asset for planners and policy makers in designing interventions to support adjustment to the structural changes in social and economic life, which Lesotho is undergoing.

4. CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS: FINDINGS IN THE GARMENT FACTORIES AND IN THE HOME

A complex feedback operates between the demand for labour in the factories, the workers' experiences there and supply of labour from the household. It provides a complicated and confusing picture, in that on the one hand workers are gaining increased freedom by working outside the home and having a disposable income, but on the other are constrained by their actual experiences as workers and the responses their families make to the new situation. The nature of the relationship between the factory and the home is currently still in such a state of flux and contestation, that picking out overall trends from the idiosyncrasies of particular family and individual circumstances is hazardous. Women workers can be located in different places within a matrix of different survival strategies defined by a number of factors, including age, marital status, importance of kinship networks, their own and in some cases their husband/partner's employment. Since, as aforesaid, this is preliminary qualitative work, I have not attempted to quantify the importance of the different variables, but I would offer the following as a general picture of the matrix and the changing gender roles and relations within it.

4.1 Increased Freedom for Women

Women do gain increased freedom from working in the factories. Some of this is arguably more a function of urban living than of working in the factories. It is closely tied to the absence of restrictions, which existed in rural areas. Some, especially younger women, comment favorably on being able to go out with friends or go to discos, without asking for permission.

For others, increased freedom can be seen in newly emerging family forms, with their concomitant differences in gender roles and relations. A 36 year old divorced woman with two children commented 'I don't want to be under him', which she would have been had she been dependant on her former husband's money. She was not claiming maintenance from him for their children, and did not want to. A 28-year-old widow said that life was easier for her as a widow than it had been when she was married, as she now knows

what her income is and can plan accordingly. When her husband was working at the mines, and she was not in paid employment, she described herself as 'always waiting for what never came'. Another was a 20-year old school-leaver, living at home with a widowed mother and four younger siblings, for whom she was the main breadwinner. She claimed she could earn M467.00 a month, with overtime, at Crayon Garments. She gives all of this to her mother, except for M150, which she is saving in a bank, to enable her to return and complete her schooling in two year's time. Although she does not like factory work, she feels that as a new entrant onto the job market, it is the only reliable way of saving the money she needs. Several younger women workers expressed hostility to the idea of marriage, seeing it as causing more problems than their single status.

Single men interviewed also agree that there is greater freedom for working women. One said, 'in traditional culture men had the final word, and now they don't. Some regard this as a negative trend. They blame the increase in women headed households on women's non acceptance of discipline: 'If they are being disciplined, they shout and go out of the house, and then the man beats her and she won't stand for it and she leaves.' Alternatively, another man claimed that since women are working, they are making the decisions. The man does not like this, so he leaves. One group member felt that as women are earning they feel that they can do without men, so that for example if the husband loses his job, the woman is 'no longer interested in him' and says she can cope better alone. All these scenarios were interpreted by men in terms of women having 'too much freedom', and were related very strongly to the availability of work for women.

Changes can also be seen amongst households of married couples. Other studies have indicated that in many households, the husband does not disclose his precise income to his wife and that this ignorance of the husband's earnings remains one of the obstacles to women getting fair maintenance settlements from the courts. (Women and Law in Southern Africa, 1991:122). However, both married men and women textile workers interviewed appear to know what their spouses earn, as this is freely volunteered on payday. Admittedly, the women in the women's group were not married to the men in the men's group, but both groups independently expressed a concern for the 'improvement of the family'. Younger men in particular felt that to achieve this it was necessary for the wife to be

contributing an income. They claimed that it helps the unity of the family if the woman is working, as they are then 'all pulling together', and that the family can only hold together if everyone is co-operating in this way. They agree that families falling to co-operate, and subsequently falling apart, is a very common phenomenon.

In families where such cooperation exists, information about earnings is voluntarily shared, and joint decisions are made about how the money should be spent. However, in almost every case, the actual spending of it is the woman's responsibility. This would appear to be an improvement for women on the traditional pattern of a woman deferring to her husband, and only taking on managerial, as opposed to decision-making responsibility, if, for example, her husband is a migrant worker. (Gay, 1980). However, the current position is arguably also an added burden on her, since it suggests that in addition to full time paid work, she is still running the household, as would a woman with no paid employment outside the home. It would seem that the burdens of the reproductive role are not being as equally shared as the decision making.

4.2 Limits to this Freedom

The freedom mentioned above is often contested. It would seem that, in so far as it exists, it derives only from earning an income outside the home, not out of the experiences at the workplace. These are characterised by high levels of stress, and a traditional gender division of labour, and very limited access to supervisory positions and better paid jobs. Inviting women to talk about their experiences at the factories was like opening the floodgates; their anger and frustration poured out, ranging over petty annoyances and personality problems with supervisors, astonishment and embarrassment over a male factory manager going into the women's toilet and seeing the mess of pads and towels (though women cleaning men's toilets does not seem to be a cause for concern), anger at the health and safety conditions of the workplace, and frustration at the perceived inability of the unions, Labour Department or government in general to deal with it. This anger and frustration is not left at work when workers clock off. For many women, the demands of the double day, plus families who do not understand their workplace problems leave them mentally and physically exhausted.

4.2.1 In the Workplace: A Traditional Gender Division of Labour

If gender roles are being challenged by the fact of women working outside the home, the type of work available to them in the factories reflects a traditional gender division of labour. Cutting the fabric is generally a male job, for example, whilst operating a sewing machine is a female one. This is usually justified on the grounds that cutting involves the use of heavy machinery, which by implication women would not be capable of. Where men are on the production lines they are operating machines such as buttonholing or bartack (which sews the loops on jeans) which again are heavier than the ordinary industrial sewing machines. In Hinebo, a factory in Maseru West, all the mechanics are male, whilst the 280 strong production section is all female. Even at CGM, which has a reputation amongst some workers for having a different work culture, (Personal communication, former shop steward, July 1996) and includes nearly 10 percent men amongst those working on production. There are only men in the stores department and as washing machine operators, ostensibly because the work involves heavy lifting. On the other hand, all the cleaning staff is female, and the quality control section has one man amongst 76 women under one-woman supervisor.

The gender division of labour would seem to be rooted in the gender ideologies of both employers and Basotho workers. Importing gender ideologies from the country of origin seems to be a common amongst the expatriate staff in the factories. One Taiwanese manager, who was concerned not to be quoted by name, said he did not know why women cleaners could clean men's toilets and that men could not be taken on as cleaners, but they definitely could not, though men could be taken on as gardeners. Finally he suggested that his approach be based on usual practice in China or Taiwan. Gender ideologies also affect access to supervisory jobs within the factories as will be described below (page 13-14).

Employers' gender ideologies tailor conveniently with the ideas of most Basotho that sewing is women's work. Sewing in the factories can be seen as comparable to the beer brewers who have turned that traditional practice of brewing as part of customary hospitality into a remunerative activity. Sewing, a traditional skill associated with women's reproductive role, can adapt to productive work either in commercially precarious small scale handicraft operations, or in factory labour.

These gender ideologies contribute to a segmentation of the labour market, which ensures low pay for women workers, adds to the stress of their lives and has further implications for gender relations. Such segmentation has existed for generations in excluding women from employment in South Africa (see for example, Wright, 1994:117-120), with the effect of leaving a pool of women in Lesotho in need of the means to support their families. It also operates at a micro-level within the factories, with implications for production costs, which are of benefit to the employers. Humphrey's work (1985) on the segmentation of the labour markets and the idea that level of skill is less important than the job grading and the pay it receives has already been considered. The Minimum Wage Gazette (Wages (Amendment) Order 1996 facilitates paying sewing machinists less than other skilled workers. Sewing machinists in training should get paid M355.33 per month, the same as *unskilled* labourers doing light physical work, and can be paid this for six months. The rate for a Skilled Sewing Machine Operator is M372.62, less than a Machine Attendant at M419.52 and less than a Machine Operator at M487.05. There are machine attendants in the jeans' factories staffing the washing machines. This work is exclusively male at CGM, justified on the grounds of the weight involved in lifting wet clothes in and out of machines, and also because it sometimes involves night work. There is no training period on lower pay for them. The Gazette thus facilitates men getting paid a premium for their strength in lifting, whereas women's sewing skills and dexterity are being denigrated, even in a case where they do need training to perform their jobs.

The training rate for sewing machinists can be paid for six months, even though one personnel manager readily admitted that the work required can be learned in a week by a worker with any aptitude. There is no provision for a lower training rate for washing machine attendants, and it seems unlikely that their training would take as long as a week anyway. Moreover, it is well-known practice amongst employers either to sack a worker as she comes up to her six month probation, and replace her with an untrained and cheaper someone, or take a trained from another factory, but put them on the training wage rate for the first six months. (Personal Communication, Billy Machaefa, General Secretary Lesotho Clothing and Allied Workers Union (LECAWU)). In this sense, the provision of an already unnecessarily long six-month training period can be seen as another way of keeping down the wages of the

workforce. The affected are almost exclusively female.

It would seem that this is a clear case of segmentation of the labour market and the downgrading of jobs performed by women. The government sanctioned provision to pay machinists less reduces labour costs and is clearly of benefit to employers. The Labour Department Industrial Relations Unit argues that the wage rates for machinists were brought in, in the early 1990s, to protect the most vulnerable workers, and to prevent the necessity of going to court to establish the rate at which machinists should be paid. Nevertheless, the rate which was chosen was lower than that which already prevailed amongst some more progressive employers, who were treating the machinists as ungraded artisans, currently paid at M407.77. The go-ahead was given for relatively low labour costs in a segment of the labour market, which effected women far more than men.

Gender issues can also be observed in the distribution of men and women to supervisory positions. Garment making is very labour intensive production, and there is little scope for promotion, for the majority anyway (personal communication, S. Pillay, personnel manager CGM). At CGM men are disproportionately represented in supervisory positions. Overall, whilst women constitute 90.1% of those working on the production lines, they constitute just less than 60% of supervisors. In the dispatch department, for example, the figures are 82.9% and 58.3%. It has been remarked earlier that CGM was unusual in having men working on the sewing production lines, and it is clear from this that men are benefiting disproportionately in terms of access to better paid supervisory positions. CGM is far from unique; at Hines, for example, the 'Chief Leader' in overall charge of all the sewing lines is a former mechanic, male, who supervises the 11 women supervisors in charge of the 280 women on the lines.

A common hypothesis is that if women gain promotion to supervisory or decision-making positions, they gain also a sense of their own authority which might transfer into, for example, gender relations in the home or the community. It has been hard to establish whether this in fact occurs, even for the few women that do gain the promotion. It would appear that workers are promoted to supervisory positions on the basis of being able to do the production line work well and then on the basis of favoritism or friendship with other supervisors or management. Such jobs are never advertised or applied for and very little training is given. Production line workers

frequently complain that supervisors do not perform well, exercise favoritism, or bring issues and conflicts from outside the factory into the workplace. Partly because of these problems, supervisors' authority is never very secure, so the idea of their growing in self-esteem and this carrying over to the home does not seem to arise.

Access to the better-paid supervisory positions is also related to the gender ideologies. In one Maseru West factory, a personnel manager had a dispute with a production manager, when the latter promoted a relatively inexperienced man to be a cutting supervisor, apparently because the production manager felt he had the makings of a leader because he was taller and physically stronger than most. The same two managers disagreed about the taking on of a man to work on the production lines using the heavier machines, such as buttonholing. The production manager felt that the man would have problems working for a woman supervisor, though as has been shown CGM has experimented successfully with men on the production lines, under women supervisors.

4.2.2 In the Home

The low wage rates mentioned above have implications for gender relations in the home. Joekes (1987) suggests in Morocco that if women are earning little and their jobs carry little status, it is unlikely to alter gender norms in the home. In Lesotho, the low wages earned, and the very demanding work environment, creates stress that can have negative implications for family relations.

The stress does not end when workers 'clock off' at the end of the day. Respondents in interviews volunteered this time and again. The burden of the expectation that women will provide a meal at the end of the day on wages that are too low is further demand. (see also Leboela, 1996:4). One woman described a feeling of always fighting at work, and then carrying that feeling home. She says she just tells her family to keep away from her when she comes home; she prepares food in silence on her own, for fear of shouting at them. Other women expressed the feeling that their families do not acknowledge the problems that the women face at work and do not take them seriously. One woman said that her husband's response to her ongoing complaints about factory work was that she should give up work. This was

despite the fact that he was unemployed and doing almost nothing to contribute to the upkeep of the family. Another worker, separated from her husband, was very clear that workplace problems had contributed to their separation, but paradoxically, the very fact that she had employment was one of the factors that enabled her to set up an independent household.

Workers under the kind of stress that has been described are not likely to be able to rationally negotiate a change in gender roles in the home. Domestic violence is the most extreme form of men contesting the 'freedom' of women workers. It can result from a situation in which the man feels unable to cope with the change in gender roles which women working, earning an income and making decisions on its disposal implies (Leboela, 1996:3-4).

This contestation over women's 'freedom' can make curious allies too, with the forces pushing for women's greater independence joining up with traditional family ties. The woman, mentioned above, whose husband just said that she should give up her job was unwilling to do so as their eldest child was about to start Form D, and she was providing the only income for the family. She resorted to getting permission from her in-laws to work, and at the time of the interview was concerned about how much longer she would be able to, as the in-laws had both since died, and her husband remained hostile to her working.

In short, the picture of women gaining increased freedom from work outside the home, whilst accurate for some women, for some of the time, is hemmed in by many constraints and stresses. These operate at the workplace and at the home, and sometimes so damagingly to women, as to make it necessary to ascertain why so many women are apparently willing to submit to the situation.

4.2.3 Why Do Women Accept these Conditions?

Why is there such a ready supply of workers to accept the low pay and stressful working conditions? Most factories have a handful of women sitting outside in all weathers in hope of being taken on. There are reports of bribes being paid to get employment.

The simple explanation for this is that the women are desperate and they have no alternative. Labour force participation by men and women is partly

conditioned by gender relations at household level. Joeke (1985) argues:

The pressures on women to take work at any given wage depend on the circumstances of the household and their position in it. Variation in household type makes the female population far more heterogeneous than the male one in its relation to the labour market. Women from some types of household seek wage employment irrespective of wage rate, (my emphasis), while others would not be induced to take wage employment regardless of their household circumstances. By contrast, men's expectation is to take wage employment regardless of household circumstances, although the type of work and training possibilities may have to take the household situation into account.' (Joeke in Afshar, 1985:204)

In connection with the clothing industry in Morocco she argues that women who are heads of household are disproportionately highly represented in the labour force, and that with no other means of support they will work for whatever wage is offered. A not dissimilar position would seem to exist in Lesotho.

4.2.4 Labour Force Participation and Women's Reproductive Roles

From the personnel files examined at CGM it is not possible to establish the type of household from which a worker comes or whether an employee is the head of a household, but the following data emerges from the sample, to show the high representation of women with dependants.

A number of reservations have to be made about the conclusions which can be drawn from this, in relation to trying to establish who is bearing financial responsibility for a household. A single person, with or without dependants, may still be living in the parental home, and hence may or may not be a head of household. A woman who is nominally married may in fact be separated, and receiving no financial support from her husband. One group interview participant was a married woman working at CGM. Her husband is in employment but she *de facto* supports the whole household from her wages, since after he has settled his drinking debts at the end of the month, there is usually little or nothing at all to contribute to housekeeping.

A job applicant may not admit to being separated, or commonly to 'staying together'. The personnel manager at Crayon Garments cast doubt on whether applicants actually tell the truth when asked about marital status. She suggested that women might say they are married to give the impression of greater stability than just saying they are 'staying together', or a married woman might claim to be single for fear that a potential employer would reject her on the grounds that she might be likely to take too much time off because of family obligations.

Table 1: Marital Status and Presence of Dependants Amongst CGM Workforce

	Women		Men	
	No.	%	No.	%
Single: With Dependants	30	11.8	1	1.3
Without Dependants	69	27.1	38	50.7
Married: With Dependants	137	53.2	29	38.7
Without Dependants	12	4.7	7	9.3
Divorced: With Dependants	5	2.0	0	0
Without Dependants	0	0	0	0
Staying Together: With Dependants	2	0.7	0	0
Without Dependants	0	0	0	0

Nevertheless, it is very clear that a majority of the women working at CGM do have dependants to support. The highest proportion of women working are married and with dependants, but single women (either never married or divorced), with dependants, are also a significant proportion. The disparity between the number of single men and single women who claim dependants is also very noticeable. It would seem from this sample that the costs of single parenthood are being born disproportionately highly by women, a situation which can leave the women with no alternative to low wage employment. One twenty year old woman at Crayon Garments said 'women have to work more than men to support their children'. The picture which

emerges is hence one of women's paid employment being first and foremost a means of fulfilling basic reproductive responsibilities, to feed, clothe and house their families. Gender roles seem to remain largely unchanged from the male perspective, but with an added burden being placed on women since they have to take on a more vital productive role.

It seems likely that such family responsibilities could also be a factor in keeping the workforce docile, a feature which along with cheapness, is of great interest to employers. One personnel manager felt that 'low level trouble', such as answering back to a supervisor, was typically the behaviour of young women, who could not 'see what was coming to them until they were dismissed' whereas older women, by and large with dependants, could, and were more serious about their work. (personal communication, Crayon Garments). The personnel files at CGM provide the following age profile:

Table 2: Age profile of a sample of Lesotho garment workers, expressed as a Percentage

Age (years)	Total	Women	Men
16-20	3.6	3.6	0
21-25	25.3	17.2	8.1
26-30	38.6	28.3	10.2
31-35	15.7	13.0	2.7
36-40	13.3	12.1	1.2
41-45	3.9	3.6	0.3
	*100.3	77.8	22.5

* Caused by rounding errors

A total of 4 workers from the sample were over 46, but when expressed as a percentage, this is negligible

This indicates that the majority of the workers are in their twenties. This is a slightly older profile than is reported in export oriented industries in some countries. Arregui and Baez, however, report that 85% of women working in EPZs in Asia are under 25, though in the Dominican Republic 70% of them are 20-35 years old, with an average age of 26.9 (Arregui and Baez in Wallace and March, (eds) 1991:33). Furthermore, in Lesotho, unlike in many Newly Industrialised Countries, there is *not* a marked pattern of sudden withdrawal from the labour force, which is usually accounted for elsewhere by marriage. Tables 1 and 2 combine to suggest that a high proportion of women, often married and usually with children, remain in the factories into their late thirties. It is likely that factories producing for example t-shirts may even have a slightly older profile, as mentioned above.

This profile of workers' age, marital status and dependants, would suggest a connection between women's reproductive role and their labour force participation. One woman working at CGM said she planned to stay there until her children finished school, unless she was fired, in which case she would return to the village. Women remain with prime concern for family well-being and when they perceive that the men are unwilling or unable to do their traditional share, they take on a productive role in addition to their conventional reproductive one. Workers without family responsibilities can greater afford to take the risk of losing their jobs which is involved in making official complaints. (Personal communication, Industrial Relations Unit, Labour department). Workers with no alternatives are more likely to be docile, which interestingly is also a characteristic stereotypically and traditionally associated with women.

4.3 A Docile Workforce?

Robert (1983:28-30) notes a widespread perception amongst textile and garment employers in newly industrialising countries that out of economic weakness and social subordination, women are easier to control than men and less likely to join trade unions. Nevertheless, the idea of worker docility should not be taken at face value. The very existence of management strategies for dealing with the workforce suggests *prima facie* that they are not as docile as employers would wish.

4.3.1 Management Strategies

One way in which managers attempt to secure a docile workforce is through very close supervision of the production process. Humphrey (1985:225) notes in connection with manual workers in Brazil that high levels of productivity in routine assembly work require close supervision of workers, which sometimes amounts to bullying and intimidation. He suggests that men are more resistant to this kind of management practice than women, not least in that they might reply in kind, interpreting such close supervision as an attack on their masculinity. Almost all workers interviewed in connection with this current research and my earlier work on violence in the workforce had experienced or observed this. (See also Green, 1995.) Interviews connected with other research work on violence in the workplace showed that persons certainly were likely to respond with force if a supervisor tried to physically intimidate them.

Some factories also have regulations against talking and singing. These are the types of activity which, along with go slows when production targets are raised, can be interpreted as covert forms of resistance to factory discipline. (Rosa in Mitter and Rowbotham, (eds) 1994:84-86). Many factories also have a problem with petty theft. (personal communication, Peter Mokheseng, Manager, Lesotho Hawk.) Some managements have introduced workers' committees, which can be interpreted as a means of undermining trade union organisation. One factory does not recognise any outside union because they say a union's work is done by the worker's committee. Another will only let workers of longstanding in the factory (at least a year or two) be involved in the workers' committee, which might well stop it being infiltrated by outside union organisation. Most of the work of these committees is solving inter-personal disputes between workers, or in explaining management decisions to the workforce, such as when the format of the pay envelopes and procedure for querying pay and deductions was being changed at CGM. Such committees do not take the initiative to address concerns such as health and safety. However though the manager of one factory who preferred a worker's committee to trade union recognition, readily admitted to having health and safety problems in the workplace (personal communication), and that such problems do exist has been itemised in great detail in an ILO study. (Bundsgaard, 1995).

Manipulation of gender dynamics is also involved in the management of the workforce. At CGM they have experimented with using men on production lines and found them to be 'more serious' in their work than women. This is judged in terms of less talking and faster work towards production targets, (Personal communication, S. Pillay, Personnel Manager). But one woman commented 'I may look over and see he is on the fifth bundle when I am only on the third, but I know his will come back from quality control'. Joekes notes a similar strategy in the Moroccan garment industry when men are used as pace setters in a largely female labour force, as it is appreciated that for cultural reasons women could not approach a man and ask him to work slower. It would appear that management at CGM is taking advantage of gender relations in a similar way, but the very need to do so suggests that the female workforce is not behaving in a stereotypically easily managed way.

Sexual harassment, whilst not strictly a management technique, can also have the effect of reinforcing the docility of the workforce. It is rarely discussed in the public sphere, but according to women workers interviewed for this study sexual harassment is widespread. It takes various forms, and insensitive management practices such as having men search women for stolen articles on leaving the factory, or men going into women's toilets to summon a worker who has been off the production line too long, have strong sexual connotations. (Stanko, 1985, cited in Sutherland, 1991.)

Some workers do not really understand the issue. They claim the women being singled out for particular personal attention by a supervisor or manager like the attention they receive, in which case, the phenomenon cannot be called harassment. However, the jealousy of other women fearing that a workmate may be being singled out for more favourable treatment, could also be seen as a strategy of divide and rule.

Other workers, with a clearer understanding of sexual harassment, recognise some of the attention as unwelcome, and say that especially younger women workers tolerate it because they do not know how to say no, or feel they have no right to, or fear that they might lose their jobs if they do. Because of this, male management are able to reinforce the docility of particularly young women workers, by merging two different types of power. Women, simply by virtue of working outside the home, are removed from traditional shelter and constraints, and some men exercise power over them

in this new environment through sexual harassment reinforcing their docility.

4.3.2 The Workers' Response: The Emergence of New Gender Relations?

More graphic illustration of the fact that women are not necessarily either docile or easily managed is made by the spontaneous outbreaks of violence which occurred in the factories, especially in the early years of this decade. In 6 July 1992 workers locked in to do forced overtime at Lesotho Apparel beat their supervisors with metre rulers. The incident escalated and stones were thrown, hitting some workers, as well as management. In April 1993, at Crayon Garments, Maseru, petty grievances had developed over a long period of time, resulting in a supervisor being beaten, a lock-out being instituted and a crowd of workers setting fire to a car belonging to factory management. In February 1994, four women in a textile factory in Thetsane were involved in beating a supervisor who had reportedly annoyed them on a sustained basis by boasting that she was richer and better educated than they were. In recent months the incidence of 'wild-cat' strikes and major incidents such as these seem to have fallen off (Personal Communication, Billy Machaefa, General Secretary LECAWU), but there is evidence that some companies chose to relocate out of Lesotho precisely because of labour unrest (Tangri, 1993:232) which does not fit the picture of an easily managed labour force.

Women's involvement in violence and management efforts to control the workforce certainly suggest a lack of docility. Whether or not this constitutes a change in gender roles and attitudes, or even the potential for this has still to be established. The last section of the paper considers trade unions in the industry and the paradoxical picture which they present.

On the one hand, union activity levels also belie the idea of the docility and traditional gender roles, though levels of such activity are hard to measure. In the early 1990s Lesotho Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (LACTWU) were the largest and most active of the unions in the industry, with a membership of about 6,000 in 1993. This union organised the first legal strike under the 1992 Labour Code, in Maputsoe in 1993. Internal divisions in the leadership have since led to the effective collapse of LACTWU. Lesotho Clothing and Allied Workers Union

(LECAWU) are struggling with a nominal membership of 2000, with only about 10% currently paying monthly dues of M5 (Personal Communication, Billy Machaefa, General Secretary LECAWU). Because of the absence of systematic record keeping, there is no way of telling whether women are disproportionately active in comparison to their level of involvement in the industry, but it would certainly appear that they are not accepting without question the pay and conditions offered by employers. (See also the case of Pulane Leketa, in Green, 1995.)

In terms of gender roles, on the other hand, a more traditional picture emerges. In both LACTWU and LECAWU, the vast majority of the membership was/is female, and yet the full time officers were/are male. Women's issues such as maternity leave, breast-feeding time, and sexual harassment are not widely addressed (see for example ILO, 1994:59-60). A detailed study of LACTWU conducted in 1993/4 by the author of this paper identified the lack of potential for women to articulate their interests through that union. It was argued that workers of both sexes saw themselves as too weak to challenge the perceived unfairness of their workplace situation, partly because of their low levels of formal education, a fear of police victimisation and the high unemployment levels which meant that a more compliant worker could always be found if they made complaints. Women faced major additional constraints in terms of their low self esteem and lack of confidence about being active in the public domain. They much preferred to report grievances to a (male) full-time union official rather than attempt to deal with the issue in the workplace themselves.

The then leadership of LACTWU responded to this attitude on the part of the membership with conservative and paternalistic attitudes, particularly towards women and traditional culture. On the one hand the leadership talked about the problems of traditional culture making it hard for women to speak out, but their very jobs also depended on women not speaking out on their own behalf. The leaders did use their undoubted skills and genuine concern to fight the injustices which women faced on a daily basis in the workplace, but there were ways in which they did not understand the problems and motivations of women in their productive role. Sexual harassment was a case in point. It was rarely brought up as a union issue as firstly, women do not like to speak to men about it, so the matter is not often brought to the attention of union leaders, and secondly there are certain

words which are taboo in Sesotho for women to speak. It is impossible therefore, for them to give the necessary graphic evidence in court, should the matter come to trial.

Hence the potential for women to learn new gender roles through the workplace and the union was weak. Thus women's low self-perception combined with traditional culture and the nature of the then leadership to maintain traditional gender ideology and gender roles even in this modern sector of the economy.

This negative picture is not the whole story. Education classes were organised by the union, and the author of this paper. Participants included some very articulate women who, given the training, have the potential to be effective shop-stewards. They were angry about their situation and about the financial irregularities, which ultimately were involved in the effective collapse of the union, but without further education, lacked a real strategy to deal with it. It remains to be seen whether LECAWU, a relatively new union, which prides itself on a woman President who is still a factory worker, can do more to empower women.

The signs so far are encouraging. One young woman described feeling good about being a shop-steward; the LECAWU education classes had taught her about discrimination and now she wanted to work to put an end to it. Another one cautiously described the fact that she represented some men at her workplace, and that they had brought her problems, and she thought they trusted her. Young male workers interviewed said they found no problem in being supervised or organised by women, as long as they did their job well and fairly, and that some women did. These examples imply an adaptation to new gender roles and relations in the workplace and the public domain.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary

This paper has concerned itself with how gender relations are changing as a result of the increased availability of employment for women in the garment factories. It is one aspect of major social and economic change which Lesotho is undergoing at the moment; other features include the loss of mine employment in South Africa, increased urbanisation, and the growth of female headed households. Teasing out the various dimensions of this matrix is complicated, as the significance of the different variables differs from household to household: for example, one woman opts to live as a woman headed household because she can (just) afford to support herself and her children on factory employment. The possibility of factory work draws another to maseru, another is forced to work in order to maintain her family when her husband is retrenched. This study has not attempted to quantify the relative importance of the different variables.

Rather, the focus has been on the changing gender relations involved in women's employment. This paper argues that women do get increased freedom from having an income, although their experiences of factory work are very stressful. Furthermore, the gender division of labour within factories remains strong, limiting the range of work open to them and the possibilities of promotion to supervisory positions. Gender ideologies of both Basotho and the expatriate employers underlay this and they combine to ensure low pay for the women workers. Given this situation, who is prepared to accept such conditions? The short answer is, those without alternatives, and that is, mainly women with dependants to support. Employers benefit from the willingness of such women to accept low wages, and the docility that the lack of options imposes on many of them. However, it has also been shown that the range of techniques mustered to manage the workforce, some of which manipulate gender relations, suggests that working women are not stereotypically docile. Levels of union activity and workplace violence indicate this also. Whilst caution has been expressed about the possibility of learning new gender roles in union set-ups which, however committed, are essentially paternalistic, union education seems to have the possibility of

empowering women to understand their situation and act upon it.

Some households and individuals are adapting more effectively than others to the fact of women working in the factories, in terms of individual well-being and family stability. Those who are adapting include men who take work in the factories, even on the production lines and under women supervisors, young single workers who plan for themselves a short period of factory work, prior to going on to self- or other employment, couples who pool their incomes and share decision-making, and households where the woman can manage her affairs from her waged employment. Many such women are opting for households without men. All of these adaptations imply a move away from traditional gender relations and gender roles.

The study also brought contact with situations where people are coping inadequately. These include where the household cannot cope on the wage of one breadwinner in a garment factory, or where the husband is not working or is objecting to the wife working, or not supporting the family despite the fact that he is in work. Other households or families do not appreciate the stress under which the woman is working. The list is not exhaustive, but in many such situations some individuals are living with outdated stereotypes of gender roles and responsibilities. Some men are reluctant to accept women's greater freedom and competence to make and carry out decisions. Others, unable to sustain their traditional role as breadwinner, retreat into drinking and/or become violent to maintain their authority. In such circumstances, marital breakdown, or the continuance of a marriage which is inimical to societal and personal well-being, is not uncommon amongst those interviewed.

Support is needed for those who are coping with the new social, economic and industrial conditions, and to facilitate the adaptation of those who are not. Firstly, garment workers must be enabled to earn a living wage. This is not currently the case. After M5.60 per day transport costs, M40 for rent and M40 for water per month has been taken out of a wage of M372.62, very little is left for nutritious food, let alone adequate footwear and clothing or school fees for children, yet as has been shown, the majority of workers in the factories are women with dependant children. Secondly, many workers remain on the even lower trainee wages for much longer than six months. Trade testing to ensure that women who have served their probationary period in one factory can transfer to another would prevent this abuse.

Thirdly, careful examination of the Minimum Wage Gazette is needed to ensure that a segmentation of the market does not create a situation where it is primarily women in the lower paying jobs. Employers will protest that they cannot cope with any increase in wages, but they need to look at other ways of increasing productivity, some of which would cost little or nothing (Bundsgaard, 1995), and also reduce the stress and tension which figures so highly in the lives of many garment workers.

Open public debate and education about gender issues would also help the process of adaptation, and the government's proposed gender policy would, if implemented, facilitate this. Particular attention needs to be paid to men who are not coping with the fact of women in paid employment, and its concomitant, albeit limited, freedom and decision making power. It is perceived by some of them as an affront to their masculinity. When they resort to 'disciplining' their wives to re-establish their power, it is inadequate to justify violence as an aspect of traditional culture. Serious consideration needs to be given to identifying and supporting alternative means of asserting masculine identity, which do not rely on gender roles and relations which are no longer workable, and indeed which infringe women's basic human dignity.

In terms of supporting working women, it has been argued that women with dependants are undertaking factory work, basically to meet the obligations of their reproductive role. These women are living with the 'double day' (factory work all day, followed by another day's work in the care for the household when they get home) every day and know its physical and mental demands well. Yet the researcher's experience of doing education work shows that they do not have a term to describe it, or a means to ask their husbands for the support they require, or even the feeling that they are entitled to any such support. Some workers interviewed describe a home situation where there is, in effect, a breakdown of communication between husband and wife. Education through the wide range of formal and non-formal media available, needs to be mobilised to sensitise both men and women to the changes that are taking place in the economy and society and to the changes in gender roles that are necessary if households are to adapt to them.

In short, there are clear gender implications in the current economic policy of seeking investment in Lesotho from garment making enterprises in the Far East. At present, however, they are barely being considered at policy level.

Lesotho is marketed as having cheap, relatively well educated female labour in plentiful supply. Whilst this is largely true, ensuring that the labour force can adapt to the demands being made upon it, in terms of individual well-being and social stability, has yet to be established. Policy support is needed to ensure that the workforce and their families can further adapt to the period of social and economic change, and share in the gains to be made from the increased availability of paid employment for women.

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