

Women in the Global Clothing and Textile Industry

by

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Introduction

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, humans have basic biological and physiological motivations that are essential to daily life.¹ These include food, water and sleep, but also shelter and clothing. We often forget that clothing, although associated with indulgence, is in fact a basic human need. To some, clothing is closely linked with individuality and personal style, but to others it is merely used for warmth and protection. Regardless, we are all implicated in the consumption of clothing in some way. However, we do not often think about the origin of this necessity; how or where it is made, and by whom. The purpose of this thesis is to explore where our clothing comes from, and more specifically the lives of the people who make our clothing.

The best way to get a sense of the lives of clothing and textile workers is to enter the factory itself. I was able to do this in the summer of 2014, working at the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union (SACTWU). As a SACTWU intern, I collected the oral histories of union members, which would then be gathered into a book and distributed internally to mark the union's 25th anniversary. The purpose of the publication was to unify union members by bringing their stories together; allowing them to see how their stories intersected with each other's and the union's history. As I collected the oral histories, I became interested in the individuals' overlapping narratives. Many discussed increasing pressure from factories to remain competitive despite growing foreign imports, fighting for higher wages and the influence of the union on their lives. As I visited the factories, I

¹ McLeod, Saul. "Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs" *Simply Psychology*. Accessed 5 March 2016. <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

noticed that the overwhelming majority of the workers were women, watched over by male factory managers. I sat at their workstations, envisioning how difficult it would be to repeat the same motion each day for hours. I took in the cramped environment, the rows of stations and the overwhelming noise. I participated in a worker training session, learning to use the sewing machine and experiencing the meticulous, detailed work for myself. These experiences made me think about the individuals who had made my many Zara t-shirts, which bore “Made in Bangladesh” tags. I wondered if they had been made in factories similar to the South African ones I was becoming familiar with. This sparked my desire to learn more about women working in the South African clothing and textile industry, and the women working in the industry in other parts of the world.

Why South Africa?

South Africa is an ideal location from which to base my research for various reasons. First, the number of women in the country’s garment industry labor force is similar to worldwide figures, with a predominantly female workforce. Indeed, data compiled by CTFL SETA shows that 66.7 percent of workers in the industry are women, which is much higher than the proportion for workers in the South African economy as a whole.² For the clothing sector alone (as opposed to clothing and textile), this figure is as high as 82 percent women.³ An estimated 94 percent of these women are women of color.⁴ These figures are similar to worldwide numbers as women comprise close to 75 percent of the workforce worldwide, dominating as the primary manufacturers of clothing

² Vlok, Etienne. “The Textile and Clothing Industry in South Africa” *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (2006)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

in South Africa, but also in the rest of the world.⁵ This allows for comparisons between the South African industry and the industry as a whole. Second, the legacy of apartheid still plays a role in present day race relations, impacting dynamics within the clothing and textile industry. The legal racial structures that were put in place during apartheid affect how workforces are distributed and treated. This makes South Africa an ideal point of comparison to other countries with strong racial and class issues at play. Third, the country's clothing and textile industry has an interesting history. Its long-established garment industry was severely damaged in the 1990s when the free market policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO) opened South Africa's economy to an influx of imported goods and competition from other countries.⁶ Today, the country is currently increasing its presence in the global market, with local yarn manufacturer *Sans Fibres* supplying 80 percent of the sewing thread used in the world's apparel sewing operations.⁷ However, local clothing and textile companies are now having to deal with the increasing threat of global competition. This means that the South African clothing and textile industry is a prime example of an industry that has been heavily impacted by globalization. Finally, the industry is heavily unionized, with more than 80 percent of the clothing and textile industry's workforce belonging to SACTWU⁸. As mentioned earlier, I spent a summer within the research division of the union, which allowed me to gain valuable

⁵ Stotz, Lina and Kane, Gillian. "Facts on the Global Garment Industry" *Clean Clothes Campaign*. (2015) Accessed 7 March 2015. <https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>

⁶ Hoskins, Tansy. "Ethical fashion: Saving South Africa's Clothing Industry" *The Guardian*. (2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/sustainable-fashion-blog/2015/feb/02/ethical-fashion-rebuild-south-africa-garment-industry> Web.

⁷ SouthAfrica.info reporter, incorporating material from the Department of Trade and Industry. "South Africa's Textile Industry" *Southafrica.info* (2009) <http://www.southafrica.info/business/economy/sectors/textiles-overview.htm> Web.

⁸ "About SACTWU" <http://www.sactwu.org.za/union> Web.

access and insight into the South African industry in ways that would not have been possible in other countries. The oral histories, many of which were of union leaders, that I collected allowed me to bring to light the characteristics of the industry that are echoed in other parts of the world. My research partner, Justin Bryant, aided me in the collection and transcription. The strong union participation in the country also means that workers are in a good position to negotiate for better conditions⁹. This process sets the industry apart from other countries and allows for a distinctive look into an industry that is in flux between empowered workers (whom we can learn most from) and difficult conditions similar to ones in countries known for their exploitative practices.

Unionization in South Africa

South Africa has a history of unionization because political mobilization in the workplace was essential during the struggle for freedom during Apartheid. This legacy of workplace unification has continued as South African unions are some of the most active worldwide, especially in the clothing and textile industry. In fact, SACTWU holds the world title of largest union in the industry, with over 100,000 members.¹⁰ According to Philip Hirschsohn, “labor’s emergence as a powerful political opponent to Apartheid led to the argument that a new type of unionism was emerging.”¹¹ Both “the labor movement and civil society transformed the political and syndical opportunity structure to further the

⁹ Hoskins, Tansy. “Ethical Fashion: Saving South Africa’s Clothing Industry” *The Guardian* (2015) Accessed 7 March 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/sustainable-fashion-blog/2015/feb/02/ethical-fashion-rebuild-south-africa-garment-industry> Web.

¹⁰ IndustriALL, “Feature: A Turnaround for South Africa’s Textile Industry?” *Industriall-union.org* (2015) Accessed 7 March 2015. <http://www.industriall-union.org/a-turnaround-for-south-africas-textile-industry> Web.

¹¹ Hirschsohn, Philip. “Union Democracy and Shopfloor Mobilization: Social Movement Unionism in South African Auto and Clothing Plants.” *Economic and Industrial Democracy* Vol. 28 No. 1 pp. 6-48 (2007)

democratic cause, linking workplace and community struggles.”¹² He argues that social movement unionism combines “conventional institutionalized collective bargaining activities and organization with the modes of collective action typically associated with social movements.”¹³ This specific unionization type “links factory-based production politics *and* community and state power issues,” leading to a wider sphere of influence on workers, factories and even the state.¹⁴ This highlights the distinct social movement origin of South African unions, which continues to influence their widespread impact throughout the country.

Before SACWTU, South African clothing and textile workers were “members of conservative bureaucratic unions with poorly developed shopfloor structures.”¹⁵ In the late 1980s, as workplace mobilization was in full swing, the Garment and Allied Workers’ Union (GAWU) was formed, later becoming SACTWU. This marked a shift from “formal control from [union] officials to members who participated directly in industry negotiations.”¹⁶ The shop stewards, or union leaders, were elected within factories. These stewards are the backbone of the organization as they are workers themselves that are elected by their peers to represent their interests in union meetings but also in national negotiations. They are natural leaders that have often been in the industry for decades, and are passionate about fighting for a just workplace. Therefore, their experiences make them ideal candidates to learn from as their stories illustrate the state of the industry and the reality of the employment conditions they are working in.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Shop Stewards

The shop stewards were all very enthusiastic about participating in the oral history collection. Justin and I came up with a set of questions, but were told that most of the time stories flow out naturally, which was indeed what happened. The shop stewards we interviewed were both male and female. Their names are Thembani, Mavo, Simangaliso, Ankita, Thembela, Menzi and Sisipho¹⁷. They work in various clothing and textile factories throughout South Africa. We were able to visit some of them in the factories they worked for, getting to witness interactions with management firsthand. Although there was one case where management seemed to be relatively open to the idea of an interview, most managers were skeptical of the idea. In Menzi's case, for instance, our interview was cut short by his manager who requested him to return to work, even though the interview had been scheduled for weeks.

Our sessions lasted approximately one hour each, as the shop stewards described their childhood backgrounds, adolescent years and current employment. They recounted previous leadership experiences, at school, in church or at home, that prepared them for their roles as shop stewards. Many of them discussed the responsibilities of having multiple siblings and having to care for them. Simangaliso was thrust into parenthood early on in his life as both his parents died when he was 16, leaving him to care for his two sisters. Ankita discussed helping take care of her handicapped sibling. Thembela and Sisipho, single mothers, described the difficulties of having to care for children and perform in the workplace at the same time. They all described the struggle for freedom during Apartheid, and the majority are very involved politically, which they see as closely

¹⁷ Names have been changed to protect their identities.

tioned to their union roots. This political involvement, most notably with the ANC, is a legacy of the origin of union mobilization in South Africa and the linked fight for both racial and labor justice during the liberation movement in the 1990s. Unions were a hub for social mobilization, and their structure and influence was transformed as the country fought Apartheid.

After collecting and transcribing seven oral histories with Justin, I began to get a sense of the major themes that seemed to come up often. First, there was the issue of gender, as many of the shop stewards themselves were male, but represented female-dominated factories. Many of the wage and factory condition issues were directly related to gender, with mostly male managers and female workers. The females were machinists, or sewing machine operators, and the men often had slightly more important roles such as receiving clerks or stock assistants. Second, there was the impact of global trade, which has had considerable effects on South African factories. Pressure from global competition has directly affected their wages and working conditions. Factories are scrambling to be able to deliver product cheaply and on time to brands and retailers. Finally, there was the impact of the union and the influence it has had in their lives. They all highlighted how important the union is to them and how gratifying it was to be a shop steward. In this way, my analysis is grounded in South African narratives, but commonalities definitely exist with other areas. The issues that were underlined by the shop stewards are not confined to South Africa but rather play out in varying degrees in other places as well. This thesis will use the South African narratives as a springboard to highlight occurrences that are echoed in other places around the world.

Literature Review

Arguably two of the first scholars to address the issue of gendering in the factory were Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich with “Women in the Global Factory” (1983). They highlighted the phenomenon of “young Third World women [becoming] the new ‘factory girls,’ [...] a giant reserve army of labor at the disposal of globetrotting corporations.”¹⁸ They gave an overview of the movement towards outsourcing production, and highlighted the reasons why women were being increasingly singled out as “the preferred workforce.”¹⁹ These reasons included manual dexterity, natural patience and compliance. Fuentes and Ehrenreich also recognized that this movement towards female labor did not mean liberation, but rather that “the factory system relies upon and reinforces the power of men in the traditional patriarchal family to control women.”²⁰ This was particularly unique at a time where women’s work was being equated with emancipation from men.

Others, such as Kathryn Ward and her work collecting essays on “Women Workers and Global Restructuring,” (1990) also recognized the increasing number of women in the global workforce, but believed that “it is not clear whether the work enhances or marginalizes their socioeconomic position.”²¹ Ward and her colleagues recognized the importance of Fuentes and Ehrenreich’s work, but added on important nuances that are necessary to bring into consideration. The contributors elaborate on “the redefinition of work, juggling formal and informal labor and housework, the costs and benefits of

¹⁸ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Women in the Global Factory” *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ward, Kathryn. “Introduction and Overview” *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* (1990)

transnational corporation employment [...] and the existing intersectionality between race, gender and class.”²²

Recently, as demand increases and the amount of clothing and textile workers is rapidly growing, there has been a shift back towards this analysis of gendering in the global factory. As the clothing and textile industry is increasingly in the public eye for its hazardous conditions, women are being seen as particularly vulnerable as they make up the majority of the industry’s workforce. The Clean Clothes Campaign, an activist group that publishes academic work on the subject, has highlighted this specific gendered vulnerability in “Made By Women”: “the challenge remains to communicate the importance of understanding the role that gender plays in shaping conditions in these industries.”²³ The article highlights important issues such as the health and safety concerns specific to women in the industry, the informal sector, migrant labor and unionization. However, the article does not specifically address the unique challenges the industry faces as its structure is being shaped by modern globalization forces.

Similarly, another recent addition to the dialogue about the industry is the documentary film *True Cost*. *True Cost* gives an overview of the impact of globalization on the industry, and how consumers are implicated in the process. It brings together industry leader and factory worker interviews, and highlights the increasing pressure that is put on factories to produce at a faster pace. However, it does not touch upon gender as a driving force behind the conditions that workers in the industry are forced to face. Additionally, because it is not intended for an academic audience, it does not go into the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

specifics of how exactly globalization affects the supply chain, which is where Gary Gereffi comes in.

Gary Gereffi's global value chain (GVC) analysis highlights the "international expansion and geographical fragmentation of contemporary supply chains."²⁴ He takes apart the outsourcing phenomenon and explains how it works and why it is relevant, providing a "holistic view of global industries."²⁵ Gereffi was the first to deconstruct global trade in this way, providing an analytical structure that is instrumental in the exploration of increasing flows across borders and regions. However, Gereffi's analysis is universal in that it explains the phenomenon on a global scale, without really looking at the individual actors and how it affects them. This means that key linkages between commodity chains and actors such as gender and race were overlooked.

Although Gereffi's analysis is neutral in that it does not take a stance on the GVC as positive or negative, many see his type of research as contributing to the "utopian" vision of globalization. Indeed, the disconnection between worker and clothing article is an example of the "ironies and resistances"²⁶ Appadurai calls attention to in his analysis of our emerging global cultural system. Anna Tsing similarly discusses her view of the system when she highlights the faultiness in seeing "the flow of goods, ideas, money and people ... [as] pervasive and unimpeded."²⁷ To address this challenge, the author discusses a different method of seeing our globalized world system as a "productive

²⁴ Gereffi, Gary. "International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain." *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Appadurai, Arjun. "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization" *Public Worlds*, Vol. 1 pp 27-47

²⁷ Tsing, Anna. "Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection" *Princeton University Press*. (2005)

friction of global connections.”²⁸ Both authors are calling into question the idea of globalization as a positive, unifying force. They are highlighting the “utopian” rhetoric that often surrounds the concept of globalization, demonstrating that this new global system is not a network of seamless, borderless flows, but rather a complex system made up of an equal amount of clashes and resistances.

Inspired by Gary Gereffi’s work, Stephanie Barrientos highlighted the impact of gendering on the global value chain and the way gender and globalization intersect. She recognizes the “friction” of globalization and the unfavorable impact it can have on women. Barrientos explores “how a gender dimension to the analysis of global value chains could be developed at a conceptual level [...] drawing on existing empirical work to examine the role that flexible employment, much of it female, plays in the functioning of value chains.”²⁹ However, she surprisingly does not apply her analysis to the clothing and textile industry, which is an ideal example of a gendered global industry.

Additionally, Barrientos also emphasized the way in which the gendered analysis of the chain helps to “reveal the subtleties and contradictions of the interaction between global processes of production and more traditional gendered social relations that may vary from country to country.”³⁰ Indeed, women’s experiences entering the manufacturing labor force are not the same everywhere in the world. Barrientos recognizes that “although global value chains themselves generate homogenous products, the way they interact at local levels can vary according to specific socio-economic and commercial

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Barrientos, Stephanie. “Gender, Flexibility and Global Value Chains” *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2001)

³⁰ Ibid.

circumstances.”³¹ Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, editor of “Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,” highlights the “urgency and necessity to rethink feminist praxis and theory within a cross-cultural, international framework.”³² She warns against the “essentialist notions of third-world feminist struggles” and underlines the need to “address histories of colonialism, capitalism, race and gender as inextricably interrelated.”³³ Talpade Mohanty is describing the concept of intersectionality, which is the recognition of overlapping systems of oppression, and the way they interact to create a unique oppression of their own. “Women” are not one all-encompassing category, but rather a collection of narratives that are subject to intersecting systems of oppression. Within the clothing and textile industry, the main system of oppression is gender, which is the focus of my research. However, this system interacts with others such as race and social class. This highlights the importance of looking more closely at specific examples and experiences, and bringing together common narratives within the industry.

Also inspired by Gereffi’s work, Wilma Dunaway brings to light the importance of gender in the commodity chain analysis. Like Barrientos, she is not blind to the “friction” that Appadurai and Tsing highlighted in their work on globalization, and discusses the “labor exploitation, sexism [and] surplus drain” being overlooked by the current commodity chain analyses. She “explores intellectual sexism as the cause for [these] gender biases in commodity chain analyses” and “examines the false analytical divides

³¹ Ibid.

³² Talpade Mohanty, Chandra. “Cartographies of Struggle” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana University Press (1991)

³³ Ibid.

that underpin [the] gender-blind commodity chain.”³⁴ However, unlike Barrientos, her work is more general, examining gender bias in large concepts, without pointing to occurrences within specific industries.

As evidenced above, the topic of female workers in factories has been covered by many individuals. Fuentes and Ehrenreich paved the way in the early 80s with their recognition of gendering in global factories. More recent literature, such as the Clean Clothes Campaign’s “Made by Women,” also highlights the effects of gender in factory relations, but specifically targets the clothing and textile industry today. Similarly, the documentary film *True Cost* addresses the current industry’s struggle to keep up with globalizing trends, but does not address gender. Using Gary Gereffi’s modern global value chain model, Stephanie Barrientos underlined the impact of gender on global trade. She brought together gender and globalization theory, calling attention to the way they intersect. In this paper, I have attempted to emulate this strategy and apply it directly to the present-day clothing and textile industry, an ideal example of a uniquely gendered global industry. The current industry is a particularly interesting angle from which to look at the intersection between globalization and gender because of its recently recognized consumer-driven value chain. My analysis of this intersection has also informed my proposed improvements to the industry, as solutions will fail if we do not look closely at the connection between gender and globalization.

³⁴ Dunaway, Wilma. “Bringing Commodity Chain Analysis Back to its World-Systems Roots: Rediscovering Women’s Work and Households.” *American Sociological Association*. Vol. 20 No.1 pp. 64-81 (2014)

My Argument

I am arguing that the current exploitative environment in the clothing and textile industry is directly related to gender and globalization. Both gender discrimination and globalization pressure impact the wages, job terms and employment conditions of workers in the industry. This combination of gender discrimination and globalization pressure are what make the conditions in clothing and textile factories particularly abusive. Additionally, I am arguing that the unique consumer-driven structure of the industry is especially impactful on the workers at the other end of the value chain. Although there is no clear-cut solution to the issues that I have underlined above, unionization, along with public legislation and private regulation, are key in the movement towards a more just industry.

In my first chapter, I will be underlining the influence of gender bias on the clothing and textile workplace. Gender is used as a way to legitimize the exploitative practices in the industry, as perceptions of “natural characteristics” make them ideal clothing and textile workers. Gendering directly affects wages, job terms (lack of a contract, maternity leave, right to organize, pensions) and working conditions. In my second chapter, I will be addressing the effect of globalization on the industry, and the ways in which global trade intersects with gender to produce a uniquely exploitative working environment. Because they are so closely intertwined, I have decided to use the same subsections and will be highlighting the ways in which globalization acts on wages, job terms and working conditions. Finally, in my third chapter, I will be discussing the unique structure and characteristics of the industry that make workers susceptible to exploitation, most notably

the influence of the fast fashion consumer. I will then end on the potential impact that unionization, coupled with public and private regulation, can have on the industry.

1. Gendering and the Clothing and Textile Industry

One of the many reasons women choose to enter the textile and clothing industry is because it is viewed as a culturally appropriate form of employment. Indeed, entering the industry is acceptable because it is accepted by both employers and workers as an extension of women's natural home-making abilities. Because sewing and mending are perceived as inherently feminine activities by many cultures, jobs doing similar tasks are accepted as feminine as well. In fact, women often become the preferred workforce because they are perceived as "docile, easily manipulated and willing to do boring, repetitive assembly work."³⁵ Employers claim that their "natural patience" and "manual dexterity" makes them ideal workers.³⁶ These skills are often not perceived by employers as acquired through cultural traditions or worker training, but rather intrinsically present within all women.

This effect is largely due to gender socialization, or the way in which women are brought up to conform to a certain female position and role within society. From a young age, children learn to imitate and develop patterns of behavior based on positive reinforcement and cognitive development. According to Sandra Bem, sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of the same culture. Gender-associated information is predominantly transferred to society by way of gender schema, or complex networks of information that are then sorted by the recipient.³⁷ This

³⁵ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Women in the Global Factory" *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bem, Sandra. "Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing." *Psychological Review*, 88, 354–364 (1981)

view emphasizes the difference in transmitted information networks based on culture. Not all women are typed in the same way, and their typing therefore manifests itself in different ways. Regardless of how they are typed, and the effects of this particular cultured typing, most women are categorized as secondary in status and naturally inclined to be better at home-making or caregiving. This gender socialization influences hirers in clothing and textile factories, but also the women who see themselves as better suited for this type of gendered labor. Therefore, because men and women are “located” differently within our societies, everything from policies to practices affects them differently. Overlooking gender means being practically blind to the complete reality of a worker’s situation.³⁸

The Marxist feminist explanation for gender inequality is that “by demeaning women’s abilities and keeping them from learning valuable technological skills, bosses preserve them as a cheap and exploitable reserve army of labor.”³⁹ Indeed, the gendering of jobs and people has lucrative effects for those who are able to treat women poorly. As a structure, gender not only divides work in the home but also in economic production, “legitimizing those in authority and justifying exploitation.”⁴⁰ Organizations in the clothing and textile industry operate within a gendered structure that depends on this exploitation. This cycle means that even if corporations and leaders don’t intentionally look to exploit women, it is increasingly difficult to escape the pressure of the industry to do so. In other words, the organizations are victim to these self-fulfilling cycles because women are such

³⁸ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

³⁹ Lorber, Judith. “The Social Construction of Gender” *Paradoxes of Gender*, Yale University Press. (1994) pp. 13-15, 32-36

⁴⁰ Connell, Robert. “Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics”. Stanford University Press (1987)

a profitable workforce. The feminized global workplace places women workers in low-income jobs that threaten basic worker rights of living wages, stable employment, safe conditions and fundamental human rights.⁴¹

Today, there are 60 to 75 million garment workers in the world, more than 75 percent of which are women.⁴² According to the producer of the documentary film *The True Cost*, “this is not an accident.”⁴³ Women are therefore central to any argument about garment and textile worker’s rights. It is necessary to highlight the gendered nature of the processes that characterize the garment industry to be able to make valid arguments about the current situation it is in. Gender influences labor practices in many ways – from the level of payment and how quickly a worker is paid, to the terms of the job (lack of a contract, maternity leave, right to organize, pensions), to the conditions the worker is subject to.⁴⁴ This vast array of effects is informed by gender-based norms of what is socially acceptable, and varies based on location and situation. However, there are striking commonalities between many different parts of the world.

1.1 The South African Case

According to Anna Tsing, “the specificity of global connections is an ever-present reminder that universal claims do not actually make everything everywhere the same.”⁴⁵ She sees occurrences in the “global south” as grouped together and compared under a

⁴¹ Hesse-Biber. “Models of Women and Work.” *Working Women in America* (2005)

⁴² Stotz, Lina and Kane, Gillian. “Facts on the Global Garment Industry” *Clean Clothes Campaign*. (2015) Accessed 7 March 2015. <https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>

⁴³ E-mail exchange Michael Ross, Executive Producer of *The True Cost* Film 10/21/2015

⁴⁴ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁴⁵ Tsing, Anna. “Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection” *Princeton University Press*. (2005)

“distancing imperial gaze” which keeps us from incorporating the nuances of individual cultures and cultural outcomes. Instead, she suggests that some occasions exist in which universals “work out in particular times and particular places” caused by “the productive friction of global connections.”⁴⁶ This approach is key to my research concerning the clothing and textile industry. The way in which the industry is gendered, and how this gendering affects the women who work within it, varies based on location and situation. Tsing’s argument about friction giving purchase to the universal that works out in certain situations is applicable to the clothing and textile industry, where narratives in different countries continually overlap.

Tsing’s argument about the importance of incorporating the nuances of individual cultures when studying a universal claim, about gender in the clothing and textile industry for example, is related to the older argument about the intersectionality of gender and other systems of oppression. According to Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, “gender differentiation and oppression [is] not a universal experience which creates a common ‘women’s oppression.’”⁴⁷ Rather, race-ethnicity, gender, and class are interconnected, interdetermining historical processes rather than separate systems. A person does not experience these different processes of domination and subordination independently of one another.⁴⁸ Tsing adds to this argument by critiquing the overarching nature of universal claims, but at the same time showing how they can be strategically embraced by the disempowered in order to effect change. Although Amott and Matthaei’s work was published 15 years prior to Tsing, their argument is similar in that it highlights the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Amott, Teresa and Matthaei. “Race, Class, Gender, and Women’s Works: A Conceptual Framework.” South End Press (1991)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

limitations of gender as an overarching lens through which to view all women's economic lives.

These three authors' arguments have informed my approach to highlighting the gendering issues within the global clothing and textile industry. My research stems from a unique location, South Africa, but applies to other regions around the world. My analysis is grounded in South African narratives, but commonalities exist with other areas; the issues that arise are not confined to one physical space but rather play out in varying degrees in other places as well.

South Africa is an good site from which to begin research on women in the clothing and textile industry for various reasons. As mentioned previously, the industry is heavily unionized, with more than 80 percent of the workforce belonging to SACTWU. With women making up about two thirds of this number, the union was a particularly strong place to start learning about the ways in which women were uniquely effected by the industry. Strong union participation also means that South African women are more empowered to highlight issues within the industry. Knowing they have a strong union behind them allows for women to speak up against the conditions they are facing, and allows researchers like myself to learn more as well.

In addition, family structure in South Africa also makes the country a particularly interesting location from which to stem research on women in the clothing and textile industry. This is because of the abundance of single-mother households that is directly related to the legacy of apartheid. Indeed, "South Africa has a number of unique

circumstances that affect the structure and situation of families.”⁴⁹ The most important of these circumstances is the migrant labor system that was established by the apartheid government. “Migrant labor provided abundant cheap African labor for white-owned mines and farms (and later factories) and, at the same time, enforced racial segregation of land. Male migrants employed by white-owned businesses were prohibited from living permanently in cities and towns designated for whites only. Hundreds of thousands of African men lived in crowded single-sex hostels near their jobs and were not allowed to bring their wives and children. [...] Women, too, became migrant workers, chiefly doing domestic work for white families.”⁵⁰ Women would return to their children after work if they lived near enough or would leave them with elders and relatives. Men, on the other hand, were apart from their families for extended periods of time as they worked in mines and factories. The legacy of this economic structure is still in effect today as townships and urban areas remain somewhat segregated (with the exception of some cities such as Johannesburg). Work is still associated with migration, especially for men. Because men are expected to work away from their homes, it is difficult for them to remain present in their families’ lives, and many leave them behind. Women and children are often left to fend for themselves. South African women are thus particularly susceptible to and affected by gendering in factories as they are often single-handedly responsible for themselves and their children. This makes them good candidates to learn more from as their situation is especially amplified by the influence of gender in the workplace. The

⁴⁹ Holborn, Lucy and Eddy, Gail. “First Steps to Healing the South African Family.” *South African Institute on Race Relations* (2011)

⁵⁰ “Migrant Labor: Summary” *South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid Building Democracy*, <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/multimedia.php?id=65-259-5> .

clothing and textile industry has therefore been shaped by significant historic and economic forces that continue to exert an influence on its structure today.

In this way, South Africa is an ideal model of the way in which gender influences labor practices against which we can compare and add the narratives of other regions. These gender influences on labor practices include effects on wage, job terms (lack of a contract, maternity leave, right to organize, pensions) and working conditions.

1.2 Gender and Wages

The first tangible element of women's labor in the global garment industry that is influenced by gender is wage. Extremely low wages plague the clothing and textile industry, which is one of the lowest-paying industries in the world. One of these low-paying countries is the Philippines, which has one of the lowest average compensation rates for its clothing and textile workers with wages at fewer than 88 cents per hour.⁵¹ According to Edward Page, an officer of the Merchants' Association of New York "customary or habitual rate of wages which prevails in the group to which the workingman belongs and which is usual in the industry under consideration... is by far the most important factor in the determination of wages."⁵² These factors are meant to be interpreted as gender and race-neutral, but since they embody deeply rooted aspects of gender and race expectations, the wage reflects and perpetuates both gendered and racialized behavior.⁵³ Therefore, when it comes to women, custom plays a significant part

⁵¹ BusinessVibes. "30 Shocking Figures and Facts in Global Textile and Apparel Industry" Business 2 Community. (2015) <http://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-figures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057#boGYfe37wMJgE5kx.97>.

⁵² Kessler-Harris, Alice. "The Wage Conceived: Value and Need as Measures of a Woman's Worth." *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (1990)

⁵³ Ibid.

in the determination of the wage.⁵⁴ Because in many cultures women are seen as intrinsically performing less-skilled work or needing less money (as opposed to men who are viewed as family supporters), it is acceptable to pay them less. This phenomenon is then often coupled with racial stereotypes that impact women of races seen as “secondary.” These stereotypes similarly categorize individuals as performing “less-skilled work” or not deserving of the same amount of compensation as the majority or “superior” race. Even in industries where many women are supporting a family on their own, like in South Africa, wages are still low because of this perception of lower-skilled work due to feminization and racialization. In Thailand, for instance, Burmese textile workers are preferred over Thai workers because they are seen as lower in status.⁵⁵ Indeed, many argue that “[whenever] a task is done by women it is considered easy, and [when] it is done by men it is considered hard.”⁵⁶ According to Alice Kessler-Harris, the “‘woman’s wage’ decisively relegates females to a plateau of citizenship that cannot be equated to that of men.” This inferior plateau of citizenship is true for both women and individuals of a minority or oppressed race, which is then used to give grounds for a lower wage. Because women occupy most of the jobs in the garment industry, this justification for low wages affects the industry as a whole because managers look to hire women of a certain race that can be paid less, but also can more easily be controlled.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁵⁶ Mencher, Joan. “Women’s Work and Poverty: Women’s Contribution to House-Hold Maintenance in South India” (1988)

Furthermore, both the wage itself and the way it is distributed are products of intersecting gendered and racialized processes. The figures show that women in the clothing and textile industry are paid some of the lowest wages in the world. This is directly related to inferior perceptions of both gender and race. When men do enter the industry, there are often attempts to promote them faster or have them doing a unique task that allows them to be distinguished from the rest of the employees.⁵⁷ Women, on the other hand, are often “initially placed in ‘training’ for longer periods than required,”⁵⁸ which allows factories to pay them a much lower minimum wage than a non-trainee worker. Another way to allow for men to maintain a superior status within the factory is to distribute wages differently. The distribution of wages then becomes a gendered process in that women are frequently paid weekly or monthly, whereas men are paid by the piece.⁵⁹ This allows for men to have more agency or control over their paychecks, when women are forced to produce imposed quotas with no added compensation for performance. According to Carolyn Baylies and Caroline Wright, “it is arguable that a gender-hierarchy of crafts is in operation,” as “male [...] workers tend to be classified as ungraded artisans, ranked several strata above weavers.”⁶⁰

Women in the clothing and textile industry are not only subject to the influence of gender and race on their wage, but also have to battle with the constraints of living and working in a developing economy. Many multi-national firms from the United States and

⁵⁷ Interview with Mary Hovsepian, Professor of Sociology at Duke University. 09/29/2015

⁵⁸ Baylies, Carolyn and Wright, Caroline. “Female Labour in the Textile and Clothing Industry of Lesotho” *African Affairs* pp. 577 (1993)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Baylies, Carolyn and Wright, Caroline. “Female Labour in the Textile and Clothing Industry of Lesotho” *African Affairs* pp. 577 (1993)

Europe have come to see countries such as South Africa, Bangladesh, India, the Philippines and Mexico as sources of cheap female labor. The first scholars to discuss this gendered outsourcing phenomenon were Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich. Although their research was published in 1983, many of the concepts they highlighted are still relevant today. They identified young women as the new ‘factory girls,’ providing a vast pool of cheap labor for globetrotting corporations. Behind labels such as “Made in Taiwan” or “Assembled in Haiti” is “one of the most strategic blocs of womanpower.”⁶¹ These multinational corporations have come to rely on women around the world to keep labor costs down and profits up. Women have become the “unseen assemblers” of garments from designer jeans to hospital uniforms.⁶² This “unseen” aspect of Fuentes and Ehrenreich’s argument stems directly from Karl Marx’s vision of the exploited worker. He saw workers as alienated or estranged from their labor because they were not making products they would ever buy or see again. He also saw consumers as alienated from their purchases as they are unaware of the origin of the product. The process itself is invisible, allowing for industry pressure for lower costs to squeeze wages.⁶³

Fuentes and Ehrenreich see the extreme difference in wages as the main reason companies are moving to these countries. Indeed, women in the Philippines can be paid around \$7 per day, whereas in the United States minimum wage is often set at 9 times

⁶¹ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Women in the Global Factory” *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Tucker, Robert. “The Marx-Engels Reader” *W.W. Norton & Company*. (1998)

that amount.⁶⁴ They underline that “corporate executives, with their eyes glued to the bottom line, wonder why they should pay someone in [their country of origin] on an hourly basis what someone in the Philippines could earn in about a day. And, for that matter, why they should pay a male worker to do what a female worker can be hired to do for 40 to 60 percent less.”⁶⁵ As factories face the threat of corporations moving their production to cheaper locations, wages are increasingly squeezed. Sisipho, a SACTWU shop steward, highlighted this change in wages:

“From 1985 to 2008, [the conditions] improved after the factory became a closed shop⁶⁶. But from 2008, when we were reemployed, the conditions have dropped. We were retrenched and reemployed, so the agreement was dropped and a new one was drafted. Now we have the bare minimum, when before we had an agreement that was more favorable than the law. Before, we had shifts. Two shifts were working and the third was off, but you would still get paid. Before we got that money. We never get paid when we’re off anymore. People were paid more.”

Sisipho’s experience showcases the different methods factories are able to use to lower wages, even after a union contract is made. These decisions are rationalized in terms of growing international competition, justifying providing a meager salary to be able to achieve high profit margins.

Another scholar that has influenced the discussion about women in global factories is Leslie Salzinger. She believes that authors such as Fuentes and Ehrenreich interpreted femininity as biological, naturalizing it without considering that it could be fluid and malleable over time and within different contexts. Salzinger argues that work itself shapes

⁶⁴ BusinessVibes. “30 Shocking Figures and Facts in Global Textile and Apparel Industry” Business 2 Community. (2015) <http://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-figures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057#boGYfe37wMJgE5kx.97>. Web.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Closed shop: there is only one union that represents all workers in the factory

the worker's self; gender identification becomes a site of management within the workplace to produce at what is considered highest efficiency.⁶⁷ In other words, the female workers are managed to produce more for less. Contrary to popular belief, she maintains that they are not hired for their essential characteristics is but in fact are molded into effective workers through the management of gender identity and subjectification, resulting in an internalization of these subjectivities emerging through work. Women are not hired for their innate sewing and mending abilities, but rather are shaped into ideal workers through factory culture and inferior social status that is created in the workplace. Therefore, global economic systems depend on employee formation created at work. Under capitalism, "transnational managers are located in positions from which their accumulated managerial decisions operate as external forces that shape our global economy."⁶⁸ According to Salzinger's argument, lower wages are not justified by "natural" attributes that women are perceived as having, but rather contribute to the manager's molding of gender identity that is internalized and accepted by both workers and the industry. Lower wages are a site of manipulation through which factory management can mold effective female workers. Women's gender identity is strategically built through the decisions of the management, such as low wages or absence of stable contracts.

These two arguments both contribute to the conversation surrounding gender and wage in different ways. Fuentes and Ehrenreich argue that employers make active decisions to hire and exploit women in order to achieve higher profit margins. This view

⁶⁷ Salzinger, Leslie. "Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories" *University of California Press* (2003)

⁶⁸ Ibid.

is limiting in that it does not allow us to see the effects of more complex systems within which the organizations making the hiring decisions are operating. Salzinger complicates this view in that she believes that women are not hired for their “natural” characteristics, but are managed into effective feminine workers once they have been hired through processes such as lower wages. Salzinger’s argument takes into account the external forces of context in that she sees that women can be molded in different ways based on location and situation. She also sees multinational managers’ actions as having similar effects as these external forces; their decisions have the power to affect the larger system. In other words, Salzinger’s argument is focused on the difference between nature, or innate characteristics, and culture, acquired characteristics. She contends that feminized workers are not hired for their natural skills, but rather are molded by the local factory culture to be effective.

Another scholar that contributes to the conversation is Paul Farmer, who coined the term structural violence to describe the ways in which historically given and economically driven mechanisms constrain the actions of both individuals and firms, acting upon the disempowered with particular force.⁶⁹ These three seemingly distinct, but in fact overlapping, arguments highlight the difficulty in pinpointing the logic of the employer and the system within which they operate. Farmer argues that capitalist systems operate in a way that does not rely on individual agency and choice; instead, agency is constrained. He specifically mentioned the disempowered, most notably women or individuals of color living in poverty, as particularly vulnerable to this

⁶⁹ Farmer, Paul. “On Suffering and Structural Violence” *Daedalus* Vol. 125, No. 1 pp. 261-283 (1996)

constrained agency. Furthermore, Farmer's argument can be extended to include corporations as constrained by the global system within which they operate. Although this argument is more than what he actually claims, the extrapolation highlights the larger forces at play. This would mean that multinational corporations' agency is constrained by processes that are not in their control, meaning the pressure of the system does not allow them to be able to provide a living wage. Women are faced with employers who themselves deal with the pressures of the structurally violent system, but are still aware of their ability to manage workers into "effective" workers thanks to their inferior status. This management occurs through low wages, but also through unstable job terms that further constrain their agency and contribute to their malleability.

1.3 Gender and Job Terms

Another key characteristic of the global garment industry that is influenced by gender is job terms, which includes both job security and benefits. Job insecurity is a key characteristic of the global garment industry, and this is mostly due to unstable waves of demand from multinational corporations, but also the perception by factory management that workers can be treated as temporary employees. This perception is influenced by gender because management utilizes women's secondary status to justify layoffs during slow periods.⁷⁰ Oftentimes, when demand is low, women will be forced to take shorter work weeks (and smaller paychecks), while men are kept on as full-time employees. Employers are qualifying women's employment and careers as not as vital or important

⁷⁰ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Women in the Global Factory" *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

as men's. Thembela, a SACTWU shop steward, discussed the implications of the short-time work:

"I am saddened when there is not enough work in the factory. When I hear employers talking about a short time, I become very worried, because I know where the workers are coming from. I represent workers in many different departments who come from very different homes, and some come from very poor backgrounds. Some are the only ones able to work and support their households. That's why I'm so worried about the workers. If I see a worker cry, it is difficult to me. They are the same as my family."⁷¹

Forced short-time work keeps workers from being able to provide for their children. As mentioned earlier, this is especially true for many of the single mothers who are their family's sole breadwinner, often supporting multiple children. Because an important number of SACTWU workers are single mothers, forced short-time and layoffs impact members greatly, making the issue a priority for the union.

Similarly, stable employment is often not granted to individuals seen as coming from a secondary social class or racial group. These individuals are not seen as needing a stable career path in the same way as their peers in higher social classes or dominating racial groups are. They are perceived as unworthy of this luxury, and so are not awarded the same job security. In this vein, women (and especially women of lower social classes or oppressed racial groups) are not seen as worthy or deserving of contracts like their male counterparts are. Because of their secondary status, they are cycled in and out based on demand, which leaves them without a stable income. Their low status within the factory is also permanent, with few options to move up. Men, however, can become shop-floor managers or leaders. Even in countries such as South Africa where advances are

⁷¹ Interview with Thembela, machinist and SACTWU shop steward. June 2014

being made thanks to unionization, many of the shop stewards (or union representatives) are still men. Women are encouraged to speak up and become leaders, but men are often the ones that end up representing the women and their interests. Especially because they are working in a feminized occupation, both peers and factory management recognize men as best suited for the leadership roles. This highlights how gendering in factories has gone on to affect gendering in union representation, perpetuating a disregard for gendering issues in the workplace. Unions themselves are caught in a gendered cycle or self-fulfilling prophecy of perceived inferior leadership skills in female workers becoming reality. Because women are not often elected, they lack experience and thus men are re-elected. Even though these men experience similar disadvantages related to race and social class, they do not fully understand the added pressure of gender inequality. This lack of female shop stewards underscores the perpetuation of gender inequality in factories, even within unions, one of the most important actors for workers' rights. Helen Safa notes that the limited "occupational mobility offered to women in [developing nations] could simply amount to a new form of [...] subordination."⁷² Their gender, race and social class intersect to inform the way they are employed because they are seen as inferior.

In addition, benefits such as maternity or medical leaves and pensions are scarce. Pregnancy and illness are seen as impeding corporate profit, making for ineffective workers that can be replaced. Because of the unstable nature of employment within the industry, women can be circled in and out if they are pregnant, sick, or getting too old. In

⁷² Hadjicostandi, Joanna. "Facon': Women's Formal and Informal Work in the Garment Industry in Kavala, Greece" *Women Workers and Global Restructuring*. (1990)

fact, according to Fuentes and Ehrenreich, “multinationals prefer single women with no children and no plans to have any. Pregnancy tests are routinely given to potential employees to avoid the issue of maternity benefits.”⁷³ In some factories, female workers must “show soiled pads or cloths every month to prove they are not pregnant.”⁷⁴ This demoralizing practice underlines how the women are completely controlled in the workplace, extending to the most intimate personal spaces. Indeed, in many places, women are forced to make the choice to send their children away or not have any at all to get and keep jobs. These practices not only violate women’s rights to equal employment but also keep them from being able to make their own decisions about pregnancy. They also have serious consequences for the health of both the workers themselves and their children. Women who become pregnant may “try to hide their condition as long as possible, resulting in lack of adequate nutrition, poor pre-natal care, and potential exposure to work hazards that can cause birth defects, premature birth, low-weight babies and other health problems.”⁷⁵

Women are therefore particularly vulnerable because of their biological characteristics. The burdens associated with productive labor and reproductive labor are intertwined. Marxist feminists underlined that women carry both responsibilities, and thus are doubly burdened. In fact, Filipino trade unions report that “pregnant workers were forced to work overtime, including at night, in the free trade zone of Cavite, while a woman

⁷³ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Women in the Global Factory” *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

⁷⁴ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

worker in another garment factory had a miscarriage inside a company comfort room after being forbidden to take leave.”⁷⁶ A similar story was reported by Thembani, a SACTWU shop steward:

“There was one incident where a female worker by the name of Noki gave birth to twins in the factory. She was working the night shift and was locked inside. Workers found out something was wrong and called the ambulance, which was not able to get inside because it was locked.”⁷⁷

Noki’s situation shows how women are not only monitored to ensure they are not pregnant, but are also subject to abuse if they do become pregnant. She was denied basic human rights, locked in the factory and unable to access proper medical care. This violent act demonstrates the extent to which agency is constrained within and by the factory. Women no longer have control over their own physical bodies, thus their limited agency is manifested physically by their inability to leave. In this way, management control over women’s sexuality has become a condition of employment.

Because gender, race and social class inform the precarious nature of women’s employment in the clothing and textile industry, they are not granted the job benefits most find in a stable job. Not only is maternity leave not granted, but women are routinely fired for being pregnant. Sick leave is also not granted, as many factories do not feel a responsibility to their workers and will not keep a position open for a returning ill individual. Even when injuries are incurred on the job, many women report being laid off for other reasons because they are not able to produce as much as before.⁷⁸ Some workers report

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Interview with Thembani, receiving clerk and SACTWU shop steward. June 2014

⁷⁸ Interview with Menzi, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014

being fired for taking time off to recover from an injury or illness.⁷⁹ Worker's secondary status inhibits them from being seen as worthy of being tracked into a stable job. This lack of stability also translates to a lack of pension or retirement plan. Workers are repeatedly denied this right because of their secondary status. They are compensated by the piece or by the hour, and their work is not respected or regarded as a career. The gendered and often racialized structure of the global garment industry does not account for pensions or other benefits that are granted to workers in other industries that are not typed in the same way.

Finally, women working in the garment business are often denied the right to organize. The female worker's opinion is often not recognized or respected. Unionization is considered threatening to factory productivity. Although some women are able to join unions, many feel that they are at risk of losing their jobs if they do. Thembani highlighted that when some factory owners "find that people are joining unions, they leave the area and go to an area where people don't have as much knowledge in terms of unions." In some cases, the workers are not aware that their jobs are at risk: "Employers don't give notification. You find yourself in a situation where it's Friday, you're coming back to report to duty, and it's too late. The employer is gone. They don't give notice; they just pack up their stuff and leave."⁸⁰

This hostility towards unionization is especially true in factories that have a uniquely female workforce. Women feel that they do not have the power to be able to face

⁷⁹ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. "Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers' Rights" *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁸⁰ Interview with Thembani, receiving clerk and SACTWU shop steward. June 2014

the management. In the documentary film *True Cost*, by director and writer Andrew Morgan, one of the main interviewees is a 24 year-old textile worker from Bangladesh named Shima Akhter.⁸¹ Shima was able to organize a union within her factory, of which she was elected president. She then attempted to submit a set of demands to the managers, who locked the doors of the factory and proceeded to beat the women who had formed the union. A female SACTWU shop steward, Sisipho, also reported a similar story:

“We were told to strike at the stadium. It lasted one month, but we never got what we wanted. Many of us were dismissed when we got back and there was a lot of violence. The security [hired] by the company was beating the workers for striking.”⁸²

These cases underline how women are targeted by management if they take up leadership positions within the union. It is striking to see the similarity in both Shima and Sisipho’s stories, even though they live in two very different parts of the world. Like the previously mentioned women who were locked inside their factory, structural violence and physical violence are intertwined in both cases. The structural violence is manifesting itself physically. Mavo, a retired union organizer for SACTWU, discussed a case in which similar targeting occurred, but there was no physical violence:

“One day, the union had requested that her company allow the shop steward to attend a training session at the SACTWU headquarters. The company was supposed to respond to the request; they never did. However, her supervisor did ask the shop steward what time the meeting started. She said 9:00. She was told that since the union office was right across the road, she had to report to work at 7:00, work until 9:00, and then she could leave. She instead went straight to the SACTWU office to attend the meeting. When she returned to work, a disciplinary case was filed against her, and she was fired.”⁸³

⁸¹ Morgan, Andrew. “True Cost Movie” (2015)

⁸² Interview with Sisipho, machinist and SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

⁸³ Interview with Mavo, retired SACTWU organizer. June 2014.

This underlines the constrained agency of the women within the factory in the face of an oppressive management. Gender influences job insecurity and lack of benefits, two facets of employment that work to limit women's power over their employment and their lives.

1.4 Gender and Employment Conditions

Although conditions in clothing and textile factories are notoriously harsh for all workers, women often face greater health and safety risks due to their inferior status as women. There is a lack of institutionalized support for their specific health needs because they are regarded as the inferior gender.⁸⁴ This is greatly amplified by the perception of women as “docile” and “easily manipulated”⁸⁵ which makes it more difficult for them to speak up. A manager in a factory in South Africa commented that “women are more reliable than men, they are more serious, they work harder and they don't drink,”⁸⁶ highlighting the manageability factory owners see as a main asset in women. Michael Ross, the executive producer of the documentary film *True Cost*, highlighted that during filmmaking he “met several factory owners who implied that women were submissive, which made them the best workers because they would not raise their voice.”⁸⁷ They have been conditioned to stay silent because it could lead to negative consequences. Ankita, a leader within SACTWU and a machinist from Durban, highlighted her limitations in supervisor negotiations: “Just as a worker, with someone above you, that is always a

⁸⁴ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers' Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁸⁵ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Women in the Global Factory” *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

⁸⁶ Baylies, Carolyn and Wright, Caroline. “Female Labour in the Textile and Clothing Industry of Lesotho” *African Affairs* pp. 577 (1993)

⁸⁷ E-mail communication with Michael Ross, Executive Producer of *True Cost* film 10/21/2015

problem, because that person will always have the upper hand.”⁸⁸ Even if they try to speak up, their position not only as factory workers, but also as females facing male supervisors, makes it difficult for them to assert their demands.

Women are subject to long hours and pressure to meet certain quotas, leading to eyestrain, fatigue and machinery injuries that are often overlooked by management. They are forced to repeat the same task countless times, often at a workstation that consists of a basic stool and a sewing machine. Working in the garment industry also involves large amounts of thick dust, which gets into workers’ lungs and causes respiratory problems.⁸⁹ Simangaliso highlighted that when he arrived at the factory he works for today conditions were much worse:

“There was no air conditioning—not even a fan in the factory. People used to sweat until they fainted, and they were not even provided with water. To get water, you had to go downstairs, and a lot of the time, you were not allowed. They would tell you, ‘It’s working hours, you are here to work, so we expect you to do so. If you wanted water, you should have provided yourself with water before you came in.’ The workers were not given proper clothing to protect them from the fabric dust. People used to get a lot of headaches from the heat, and from inhaling the chemicals in the fabric dust. Workers experienced back and shoulder problems from the chairs that were used at that time. When it was cold, they would leave the large rolling door open, and the wind would come in. Several workers also became sick from this.”⁹⁰

Simangaliso’s experience highlights the way workers are dehumanized in the factory.

They are treated as a replaceable workforce, and denied water and safety equipment.

Basic hygiene in many factories is also overlooked, with lack of toilets or soap and water.

There have been accounts of factories that cut costs by replacing toilet paper with a rag

⁸⁸ Interview with Ankita, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

⁸⁹ Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁹⁰ Interview with Simangaliso, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

meant to be used by all staff members, easily spreading disease and illness.⁹¹ Indonesian workers reported having to wear dark clothing while menstruating because they knew that “during the long working hours and with limited access to toilets, blood would leak through their clothes.”⁹² Thembani emphasized that “people are working in hazard... to the extent that if they are working the night shift they are locked inside from the time they work until the next morning”⁹³ This illustrates the constrained agency of the workers, who are forced to work and physically kept from leaving.

Violence and sexual harassment are also two problems women face in the workplace that men are able to avoid. Indeed, violence is often used as a method of maintaining order in factories that mostly consist of female workers. As discussed previously, physical violence is a manifestation of the structural violence affecting the factories themselves but also the system within which the industry operates. This physical violence is used to further constrain the agency of the women in the factories, ensuring factory control and worker effectiveness. As with the case of Shima Akhtar, if women even try to speak up they are met with either the threat of violence or violence itself. Female textile workers are also subject to intrusive searches to ensure that they are not stealing the production that they are making. There is an assumption that women cannot be trusted which stems from their position as the weaker gender. Race is also often at play in these situations, as many White managers feel entitled to be able to perform these searches because of workers’ position within an “inferior” race. These searches entail

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ascoly, Nina and Finney, Chatal. “Made by Women : Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers’ Rights” *Clean Clothes Campaign* (2005)

⁹³ Interview with Thembani, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

stripping down and even sometimes removing articles of underwear to ensure that nothing has been stolen.⁹⁴ This degrading act highlights the dehumanization of female workers, exposing them to maintain vulnerability and thus control. It also showcases how women's bodies are uniquely susceptible to the incursions of power, as their objectification allows for physical and sexual abuse by the dominant gender.

As unions such as SACTWU become more widespread, shop stewards have made some advances in improving working conditions. Sisipho commented on one case where she was particularly successful:

“Sometimes management attitude is wrong. They don't recognize the shop stewards. Sometimes even shop stewards are afraid. In another department once I had to intervene. Before the management never allowed workers to take a bath during the normal hours, only after 6pm. I told two people to go and take a shower. The management gave them a notification of hearing. Everyone said they would be dismissed. I just kept quiet. We went to the hearing with the accused. I quoted two lines from the agreement and the managers closed their books and said the hearing was over. The workers outside thought it was over, that they were dismissed. Even the two who took the shower were shocked. From that day the workers can take a bath when they need. They see it as a victory; they are no longer working as slaves. You sweat the whole day, but you are not allowed to go to bathe. If you bathe at six, then all the taxis will be gone. So now, everything is free in that department.”

This case represents a hopeful example of worker mobilization. Sisipho recognized that workers' rights were being compromised, and acted upon it to spur change. She used a previously drafted agreement between the union and the factory to defend her stance, demonstrating a successful policy application. Unionization allows for workers to come together to improve their working conditions, but many corporations are trying to avoid unionization by moving their production to areas where unions are not present, and workers are more easily taken advantage of.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, different axes of oppression, including gender, race and socio-economic status, work together to constrain agency and create vulnerability for female clothing and textile workers around the world. This concept of agency comes from Paul Farmer's argument about the impact of structural violence, which is the "historically given, and often economically driven, processes and forces that conspire to constrain agency."⁹⁵ Farmer argues that we need to revise our idea of what violence is and expand its definition, which can take on many different forms. In this way, the international economic forces that constrain women in the industry are ideal examples of structural violence, which leave women forced into the low-wage, precarious jobs in harsh conditions underlined above. In fact, the global garment system has become dependent on the constrained agency of its female workers to make a profit, especially as prices are being driven down to remain competitive. Even though their agency is not completely constrained, and unionization is a growing example of this, large corporations are still relying on women's limitations. The global trend of increasingly lower prices is therefore directly affecting the women making the clothing because this translates to increasingly lower wages, precarious job terms and poor conditions.

Furthermore, the organizations themselves are also subject to structural violence, because they have been formatted to work efficiently thanks to women's inferior status as workers. To many, being able to compete in the clothing and textile market is dependent on the low wages and working standards that come with outsourcing

⁹⁵ Farmer, Paul. "On Suffering and Structural Violence" *Daedalus* Vol. 125, No. 1 pp. 261-283 (1996)

production to countries where women's inferior status can be used as a justification for second-class treatment. Multi-national fashion houses are operating within an increasingly global system that depends on exploitative structures already put in place. Gendering and the processes of globalization interact in a unique way to affect the women working in the clothing and textile industry.

2. Globalization and the Clothing and Textile Industry

In February 2007, Levi Strauss & Co. was forced to resign from the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), an alliance of companies committed to workers' rights, following the company's "suspension from the multi-stakeholder organization for refusing to sign up to the 'living wage' provision of the ETI's base code."⁹⁶ The company stated that it could not implement this standard among its suppliers. This trending reluctance to implement code provisions is echoed in other trade groups around the world, particularly in the United States.⁹⁷ Indeed, the living wage is proving to be "a crucial test of the ability of multi-nationals [...] to effect improvements in international supply chain working conditions."⁹⁸

However, many companies are finding a way around having to deal with employment conditions. Having worked for the Global Manufacturing and Sourcing Division of a household-name designer brand, I was able to gain valuable insight into the industry. Like many other similar brands, the company outsourced the production of its garments to countries like China and Cambodia. I was exposed to costing documents that revealed the large profit margins the company was making based on low production costs in these countries. I quickly realized that these production costs were able to be kept low thanks to a system that relied on third-party "vendors," or middle-men, that allowed for the company to maintain a safe distance from direct factory relations. The costing team was able to deal exclusively with these vendors, each responsible for five

⁹⁶ Miller, Doug and Williams, Peter. "What Price a Living Wage? Implementation Issues in the Quest for Decent Wages in the Global Apparel Sector." *Global Social Policy* (2009)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

to ten factories, and give them the price they wanted to pay. The vendors would then find the factory that was willing to pay for it, or the company would find another vendor that would agree to produce the garment at that price. This system allowed for the company to be detached from the responsibility of dealing with wage negotiations and working condition issues. The use of vendors allowed the company to be removed from living wage discussions and voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives because the responsibility was shifted to its vendors. This method is one of many that multi-national corporations are using today to circumnavigate the pressures of the global supply chain within which the industry operates.

Globalization has modified the competitive dynamics of nations, firms and industries.⁹⁹ According to Arjun Appadurai, “the complexities of current global flows that are governed by increasingly disjunctured processes have become central to the politics of global culture.”¹⁰⁰ This process is most clearly reflected in the changing patterns of international trade, “where the explosive growth of imports in developed countries indicates that the center of gravity for the production and export of many manufacturers has moved to an ever expanding array of newly-industrialized economies.”¹⁰¹ Among the first to globalize its production process was the textile and clothing industry, with low-cost textiles from South-East Asia flooding the market as early as the 1960s,¹⁰² yet it took

⁹⁹ Gereffi, Gary. “International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain.” *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

¹⁰⁰ Appadurai, Arjun. “Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization” *Public Worlds*, Vol. 1 pp 27-47

¹⁰¹ Gereffi, Gary. “International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain.” *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

¹⁰² Kasvio, Antti. “The Internationalization of Production and the Changing Position of Women Workers in the Textile, Clothing and Electronics Industries.” *Acta Sociologica*. Vol. 28 No. 3 (1985)

another twenty years to begin recognizing the negative impact these new global trade partnerships were having on the industry's workers. As outsourcing has become the norm, the way clothing and textiles are manufactured has changed. Because women dominate the manufacturing stage of the industry, they have become most susceptible to the changes inflicted by this increase in global flows.

The global value chain (GVC) concept has gained popularity as a way to highlight and analyze the "international expansion and geographical fragmentation of contemporary supply chains."¹⁰³ Companies are "slicing up their supply chains in search of low-cost and capable suppliers offshore."¹⁰⁴ The rise of a new era of international competition has reshaped global production and trade, thereby altering the organization of entire industries, such as the clothing and textile industry.¹⁰⁵ This is especially true because of the perceived "low-skill" nature of clothing and textile manufacturing, requiring minimal training - usually because workers possess the skills already. This "low-skill" perception of the manufacturing jobs in the industry is directly linked to gender, as skills required for traditionally female occupations are seen as innate rather than acquired or honed. Because clothing production is not perceived as requiring high levels of expertise, the industry has become one of the most fragmented in the world, with the largest clothing corporations deciding to manufacture their products in countries where lower production costs are maintained. These lower production costs are created thanks to lower salaries, unstable job terms, difficult working conditions and, as mentioned in the previous chapter,

¹⁰³ Gereffi, Gary and Lee, Joonkoo. "Why the World Suddenly Cares About Global Supply Chains." *Journal of Supply Chain Management*. Vol. 48 No. 3 (2012)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

actual physical violence. In fact, 98 percent of the clothes purchased in the United States in 2011 were manufactured overseas.¹⁰⁶

However, multinational corporations and the factories they outsource to are not single-handedly responsible for the conditions workers are forced to endure. They operate within an economic system that spurs such exploitative behavior. The current neoliberal structure, regulated by global economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), operates under the assumption that free and open trade is key to economic growth.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the trade liberalization that occurred in the mid-1990s coincided with the end of the Cold War, marking a decline of workers' rights as socialism and socialist thought disappeared as a viable global alternative to unfettered capitalism.

Gary Gereffi, the scholar who gave the "global value chain" concept its name, argues that "the GVC approach provides a holistic view of global industries from two contrasting vantage points: top down and bottom up."¹⁰⁸ The top down view is characterized by the "governance" of global value chains or the organization of global industries, with a particular emphasis on the impact of international economic institutions, whereas the bottom up view focuses on strategies used by countries, regions and economic stakeholders such as factories to improve their positions in the global

¹⁰⁶ Blackburn, Bradley "Clothing 'Made in America': Should the US Manufacture More Clothes?" *ABC News*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/MadeInAmerica/made-america-clothes-clothing-made-usa/story?id=13108258>

¹⁰⁷ Chornyy , Oleksandr "Influence of the Bretton Woods Institutions on Economic Growth: Literature Survey for Transitional Economic Systems" *Economics and Sociology* Vol. 4 No. 2 (2011) pp. 32-41

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

economy.¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, I will cover both the top down and the bottom up perspectives, as large institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, as well as multinational corporations and the organizations they choose to export production to, play uniquely important roles in the global clothing and textile industry. Globalization phenomena occurring from the top down and the bottom up contribute to the wage pressure, unstable job terms and poor conditions present in the clothing and textile industry. South Africa, for example, is an ideal example of a country whose clothing and textile industry is experiencing such ramifications from globalization.

2.1 Globalization and South Africa

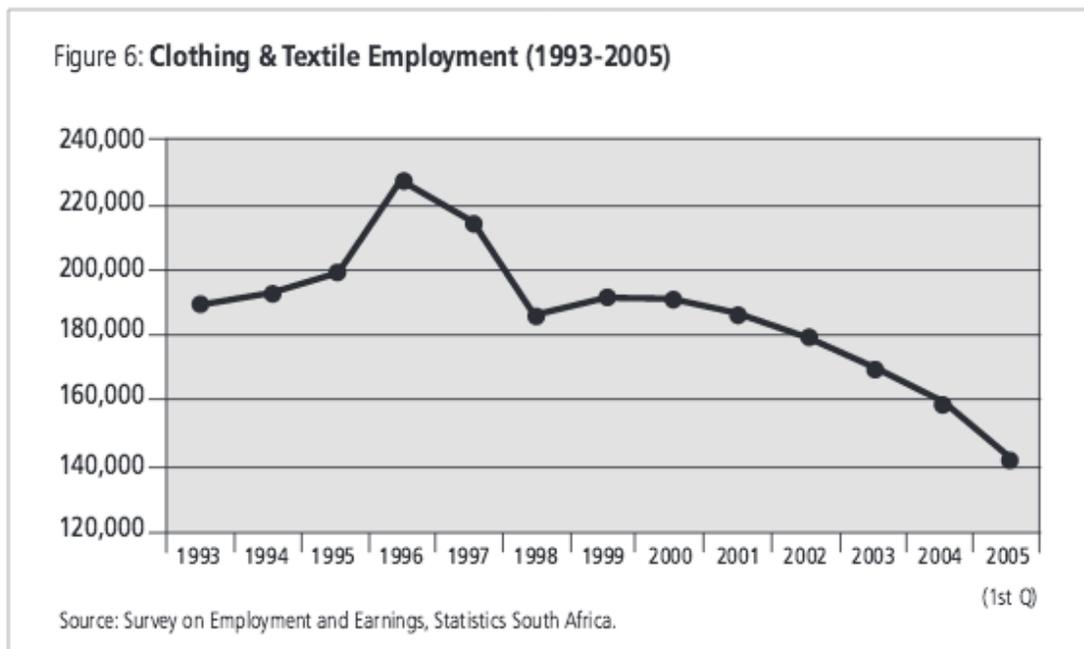
South Africa's clothing and textile industry has experienced three distinct phases of development based on levels of protection from and competition with international trade.¹¹⁰ Before democratization in 1994, South Africa was highly protected and focused on the domestic market. Export capacity was not prioritized as the economy was not open to trade with other regions of the world. After the end of apartheid, the country joined the WTO, marking the beginning of international trade relations. During the late 1990s and early 2000s the Rand, the country's official currency, depreciated steadily, leading to an undervaluation. This allowed the clothing and textile industry to increase exports while remaining competitive against imports, even as the country was liberalizing its economic policies.¹¹¹ This could be characterized as a "bubble period," where the country was not yet experiencing the repercussions of its newly globalized policies. Since 2002, the value

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Vlok, Etienne. "The Textile and Clothing Industry in South Africa" *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (2006)

¹¹¹ Ibid.

of the local currency has appreciated substantially to a more accurate valuation, leading to the destruction of the industry's export performance.¹¹² Both the appreciation of the Rand and the increasing liberalization of trade over the decade since WTO accession have lead to a very sudden and sustained surge in imports.¹¹³ These imports come from countries that have been able to maintain low production costs, and therefore prices, allowing for imported clothing to be significantly cheaper than exported clothing. According to Mavo, a retired SACTWU organizer, "the industry is suffering from competition from the Far East."¹¹⁴ As a result, an unprecedented crisis in the industry is taking place, characterized by large-scale loss of employment (see graph).¹¹⁵



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¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mavo, retired SACTWU organizer. June 2014.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

According to the Telegraph, Nelson Mandela, the country's first democratic president, chose to "embrace business [over] redistribution."¹¹⁷ Tim Stanley, the author of the article, sees "capitalism as the ascendant"¹¹⁸ of the country's now booming economy. In the South Africa context, social and economic justice were never seen as mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. However, this economic opening has had negative effects on industries that were previously protected in the country's closed economy, such as the clothing and textile industry. South Africa is forced to adhere to policies imposed by these larger economic institutions, which often put the interests of wealthier countries before dependent ones. Opening the country up to global organizations such as the WTO has weakened industries that are already struggling to keep their costs low to subject themselves to further cuts. These cuts are an effort to remain competitive with countries that are able to pay their workers increasingly low salaries. This has spurred downward wage pressure, precarious employment terms and unsafe conditions, characteristics of the clothing and textile industry that are echoed in other countries that have a similar open economy. Women in particular are affected because they constitute the large majority of the clothing and textile production workforce, and their social status makes them particularly exploitable.

2.2 Globalization and Wages

One of the most significant impacts of globalization on the clothing and textile industry is the pressure to keep costs down, and thus wages down as a direct result.

¹¹⁷ Stanley, Tim. "Nelson Mandela's Legacy: How Life Got Better After Apartheid" *The Telegraph*. (2013) Web. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/timstanley/100249909/nelson-mandelas-legacy-how-life-got-better-after-apartheid/>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Multi-national corporations and their manufacturers face “the issue of rising cost against a backdrop of falling retail prices, and consumer expectations of the same.”¹¹⁹ The most important tool to keep costs down is to reduce wages, which has a direct effect on workers in the industry. To be able to ensure low production prices, companies are learning to seek out factories in areas with low minimum wages. As soon as wages and production costs increase, they find a factory in another location where this is not the case. This phenomenon has led to a downward pressure in wages directly linked to globalized competition. Sisipho, a SACTWU shop steward, highlights the downward wage pressure increasingly prevalent in the industry:

“Now we have the bare minimum, when before we had an agreement that was more favourable than the law. Before, we had shifts. Two shifts were working and the third was off, but you would still get paid. Before we got that money. We never get paid when we’re off anymore. People were paid more.”¹²⁰

Wage elasticity is driving a ‘race to the bottom’ in the sector because suppliers are anxious to secure the best deals to remain competitive.¹²¹ As production costs are being pushed down, “the all too familiar scenario prevails [...] in a Honduran maquila manufacturing sweatshirts for the US market, machinists are earning less than 1 percent of the retail price of the branded item.”¹²²

This situation is further amplified by governments in manufacturing countries that are reluctant to increase minimum wages in order to spur economic investment from large multi-national corporations. National governments fear that raising the minimum wage will

¹¹⁹ Miller, Doug and Williams, Peter. “What Price a Living Wage? Implementation Issues in the Quest for Decent Wages in the Global Apparel Sector.” *Global Social Policy* (2009)

¹²⁰ Interview with Sisipho, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

have negative impacts on trade and the economy.¹²³ Industry-wide bargaining will generally lay down minimum wage fixing in these countries, but pressure from both employers and governments is difficult to ignore as they take into account the prevailing wage rates in competitor companies. During the 2006 national wage negotiations in Cambodia, workers demanded at least \$55 per month. The government, probably aware of wage levels in neighboring Vietnam and its integration into the WTO, intervened and set the minimum wage at \$50. This number was significantly lower than the \$82 per month living wage target the unions had set.¹²⁴ Even after agreements are made at a national level, governments will not enforce them because they are afraid the brands and retailer will be scared off. Mavo, a retired union organizer, highlighted these issues: “I think noncompliance is SACTWU’s biggest challenge. Companies not complying with the law, bargaining council agreements, or gazette agreements pose a large threat to the industry.”¹²⁵ Simangaliso had a similar issue when his factory tried to get out of a gazetted wage agreement: “The company was challenging the dispute, claiming they weren’t making a lot of money, and that it would be very difficult for them to pay what the government wanted them to pay. They were under the impression that because they were a family company, they had complete freedom to decide when and how much to pay their workers.”¹²⁶ Therefore, supplier countries are in competition against one another to offer prices that are attractive to investment from multinational corporations, intensifying downward pressure on wages.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mavo, retired SACTWU organizer. June 2014.

¹²⁶ Interview with Simangaliso, SACTWU shopsteward. June 2014.

As wages are pushed down because of international competition, manufacturers look to hire workforces that accept such low payment. This directly affects women because they constitute the large majority of the industry's workforce. Women are seen as a solution to this downward cost pressure as they accept lower wages than men. Feminized employment, like clothing production, involves level of skill that is "grossly underestimated," yet the work continues to be positioned at the bottom of the global apparel value chain.¹²⁷ This is directly linked to a tendency to devalue work done by women because of their inferior status. In a 1997 survey of the South African clothing and textile industry, results showed that men were in better, higher paid jobs, earning on average more than 50 rand more per week than women.¹²⁸ According to Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research, Pakistani women in the same job will receive roughly 60 percent of what a man would receive, and men are barely receiving minimum wage.¹²⁹ Women are being treated as 'secondary' labor power in that not only is their pay packet smaller than men's, but they also have to experience subordination related to their gender.¹³⁰ In this way, the globalized clothing and textile industry is characterized by a downward cost pressure, further amplified by feminized wage perceptions that allow for these remunerations to be accepted.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

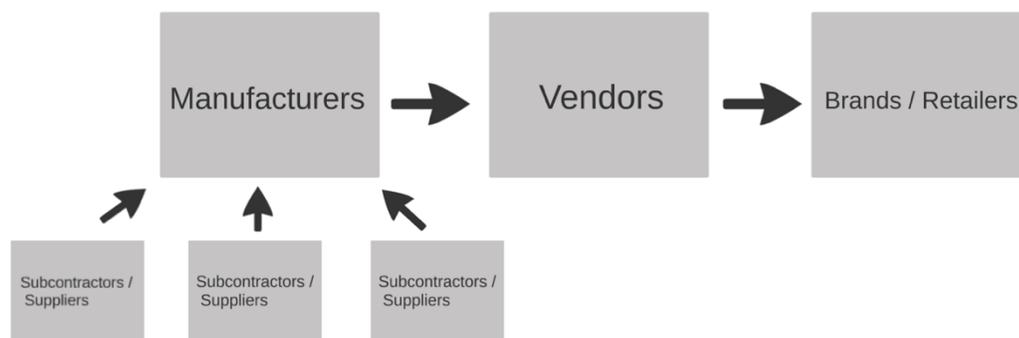
¹²⁸ Jarvis, David. "Textile, Clothing and Footwear Workers: Poorly Paid and on Short-Time" *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No.35 (1997) pp. 18-23

¹²⁹ Interview with Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research 11/10/2015

¹³⁰ Kasvio, Antti. "The Internationalization of Production and the Changing Position of Women Workers in the Textile, Clothing and Electronics Industries." *Acta Sociologica*. Vol. 28 No. 3 (1985)

2.3 Globalization and Job Terms

Precarious job terms are also a direct effect of globalization on the clothing and textile industry. Global trade has impacted workers' ability to receive stable contracts, benefits and rights to organize. As discussed previously, the clothing and textile industry is characterized by disconnected production processes and "tiered networks of contractors [...] making finished goods to the specifications of foreign buyers."¹³¹ A given brand can be producing its garments in dozens, even hundreds, of factories at a time. Firms will "supply intermediate inputs (cut fabric, thread, buttons, and other trim) to extensive networks of offshore suppliers, typically located in countries with reciprocal trade agreements."¹³² Additionally, brands often go through a third-party distributor or vendor that is in charge of multiple factories (as pictured below).



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The way the industry is organized allows the multinational corporations (brands and retailers) to directly control the flow of demand to factories, meaning they can decide

¹³¹ Gereffi, Gary. "International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain." *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Adapted from Gereffi, Gary. "International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain." *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

which vendor to use or factories to produce their garments in based on the cost of manufacturing. This disjunctured process means that factories are subject to unstable waves of demand. The unpredictable demand translates to precarious employment terms for employees, who are not granted unlimited stable contracts. Instead, they are forced to accept short-time schedules or undergo temporary lay-offs. These temporary lay-offs will often turn into permanent situations if factories are not receiving enough orders: “There were over 1000 workers in the factory when I started working. Now, there are less than 500.”¹³⁴ Menzi discussed the difficulty of these lay offs or retrenchments, and how

shop stewards work to improve the situation:

“There have been major retrenchments, and those are very hard times. On one hand, you have workers losing their jobs, and their families are going to suffer. You try by all means to minimize the numbers, and get volunteers for retrenchment so you can save some younger employees. We insist that when situations improve for the company that retrenched workers receive first preference when vacancies arise.”¹³⁵

Menzi’s experience highlights how shop stewards are able to make suggestions at the managerial level, looking out for the workers in unique ways that might not have been thought of before. Simangaliso also described a retrenchment case in 2013 that was especially tough because of the number of people the company was looking to dismiss. After investigating the situation by looking at the company’s financial statements, the shop stewards found that many of these dismissals could have been avoided:

“We discovered that the company’s managers and administrators had benefits that the normal workers did not have, such as car allowances, housing allowances— the company even pays school fees for their children! If they were to just reduce these benefits by a small percentage, these workers could keep their jobs and the company would have money to spare.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Interview with Thembela, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹³⁵ Interview with Menzi, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹³⁶ Interview with Simangaliso, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

Simangaliso is highlighting that it is not solely global competition pressure that is influencing dismissals here, but rather inequality. Large forces come together in this way to further disadvantage those who are already most vulnerable.

Additionally, some factories use labor brokers to hire temporary employees that have short predetermined contracts. Menzi described the temporary employee situation in his workplace:

“The problem is that the company is using labour brokers, and a lot of the employees being hired these days are on contracts. Contract employees are injured quite often because they’re under the most pressure to save their jobs. We recruit these contract workers to join the union. We try and fight to make contract workers permanent if they’ve been at the factory for a long time. Some people have been on contracts for up to ten years.”¹³⁷

This allows the factory to hire based on demand and avoid being responsible for benefits. Workers, on the other hand, are left with precarious positions and a dependency on demand.

To remain competitive and attract demand in the volatile industry, factories lower costs and therefore the amount of salaries they are willing to pay. However, in many factories, there is still pressure to produce large quantities. Menzi stated that “there is great pressure to work very quickly so that we can supply on time.”¹³⁸ In a 1997 South Africa survey, a “significant number of the full-time women workers from the three main industries in the sector had been put on short-time in the past two years: 53 percent of

¹³⁷ Interview with Menzi, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

clothing workers, 41 percent of footwear workers and 36 percent of textile workers.”¹³⁹

Since then, many more workers have been put on short-time as the country’s industry has continued to see a demand decrease due to global competition.

Industry structure affects the instability of employment as globalization has spurred a reorganization of production. This reorganization is greatly encouraged by large economic institutions such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, which attempt to support international trade by aiding with foreign investment, often providing loans to countries in need in exchange for open trade. However, on the ground, these policies often have negative consequences:

“The problems are in the [foreign]-owned factories. They are here as a result of the Newcastle municipality as foreign investors. They come and go. Many don’t respect the legislature that has been put in place. The [foreign] owners dominate the former homeland. If they find that the going gets tough in one area, they move to another. That’s their culture; they don’t stay in the same position.”¹⁴⁰

Them bani, a SACTWU shop steward, highlights in the above statement that because foreign investment is encouraged by powerful international economic organizations coupled with the municipality’s government, the corporations and factory owners gain control. These larger economic organizations the power to decide where the clothing is going to be produced.

As with downward wage pressure, foreign demand instability is not well regulated by country governments in an effort to stimulate investments. Some states have “established export-processing zones within their borders in order to attract foreign

¹³⁹ Jarvis, David. “Textile, Clothing and Footwear Workers: Poorly Paid and on Short-Time” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No.35 (1997) pp. 18-23

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Them bani, receiving clerk and SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

investors.”¹⁴¹ These zones are characterized by enticements which include “tax exemptions, inexpensive electricity rates, and the provision of roads and buildings.”¹⁴² Some governments have even “attempted to increase their nation’s comparative advantage by waiving worker-protection legislation” and “enacting policies that stabilize wage rates.”¹⁴³ There is often no legislative framework in place to ensure steady demand once a foreign brand or retailer decides to produce in the country. As stated by Mavo, many of these foreign investors do not comply with working rights laws. Governments want to encourage multinational corporations to produce in their country, making the investors a priority over workers’ rights.

Forced short-time or temporary lay-offs often have devastating consequences on families. Working a fraction of the time also means receiving a fraction of the pay.¹⁴⁴ When wages are irregular, financial situations are uncertain.¹⁴⁵ In South Africa, almost all women working in the clothing and textile industry support children (98.3 percent in a 1997 survey). However, half of these women had unemployed partners or were sole breadwinners.¹⁴⁶ Thembela, a SACTWU shop steward, described a difficult time when her family was faced with financial hardship because her mother passed away and her siblings were unemployed: “I was the only person in the home with a steady job, and I was supporting seven people at the time.”¹⁴⁷ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the

¹⁴¹ Tiano, Susan. “Maquiladora Women: A New Category of Workers?” *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* pp. 194-223 (1990)

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Jarvis, David. “Textile, Clothing and Footwear Workers: Poorly Paid and on Short-Time” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No.35 (1997) pp. 18-23

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Thembela, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

abundance of single-parent households in South Africa is directly related to apartheid and its legacy that continues to impact the country's economic structure. In this way, forced short-time due to unstable demand has a widespread impact as women are forced to support families on a fluctuating salary, often without the financial help of a partner.

Additionally, women are especially susceptible to be affected by the unstable nature of employment in the industry because they are seen as temporary employees. This perception is greatly influenced by gender because women's secondary social status is used by employers to warrant layoffs or forced shorter workweeks.¹⁴⁸ Capitalism is structured hierarchically in that it depends on the labor performed by large quantities of individuals present in low ranks within organizations. The individuals who will accept (or have no choice but to accept) these unstable, often exploitative, positions are those who are already at a social disadvantage. This includes but is not limited to women and individuals of color. Social structure is not only taken advantage of by these international organizations but is also reproduced by them as women are molded by these corporations into effective producers. Clothing production becomes more important than the worker, who is disparaged in order to maintain the hierarchal structure that is beneficial to multinational corporations. As stated in Chapter 1, "gender identification becomes a site of management within the workplace."¹⁴⁹ The use of women has become enmeshed in the fabric of the clothing and textile industry's functioning. The industry was built on a dependence on women's labor and the ability to exploit it. International corporations are

¹⁴⁸ Fuentes, Annette and Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Women in the Global Factory" *Institute for New Communications*. (1983)

¹⁴⁹ Salzinger, Leslie. "Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories" *University of California Press* (2003)

able to select and switch factories as they wish because of this “available” temporary female workforce that can be hired or dismissed based on demand. Their granted flexibility and control is largely based on the unstable job terms women are forced to accept, as well as the power they are granted by governments that encourage foreign presence.

Similarly, as governments want to encourage investments, organization and unionization is limited. In many countries, unions are banned or restricted because these powerful organizations are perceived as a threat to smooth operations by the foreign corporations looking to produce their garments in the country. In Pakistan, sector unions are not allowed, meaning that organization can only happen at the enterprise level, often causing conflict.¹⁵⁰ Menzi described a situation where individuals were being laid off for joining: “The company started to terminate our services as we signed up for the union. They told me and three other workers that we were being retrenched because of a shortage of orders. We were only given 24 hours notice.”¹⁵¹ Simangaliso described a similar aversion to unionization:

“My employer never liked the union, and did not want them coming into his company from the beginning. He said he didn’t want these people telling him how to run his business. He tried to get rid of me for bringing “enemies” to his company. He chased the union out of his office the first two times they came to submit the stop order form.”¹⁵²

Striking is limited by employers, but also often by governments wanting to encourage foreign investment. According to Karamat Ali, the absence of a law that allows

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research 11/10/2015

¹⁵¹ Interview with Menzi, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹⁵² Interview with Simangaliso, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

for the unconditional right to strike highlights how certain freedoms are taken away from citizens to encourage “national growth”.¹⁵³ These laws limit workers’ ability to come together and make positive changes in the industry. Michael Ross highlighted that “in places like Cambodia [the crew of *True Cost*] met some of the most powerful and independent women who are saying enough is enough.”¹⁵⁴ He sees these strikes as “causing a huge culture clash as the establishment in these countries has to face the fact that these women are becoming increasingly aware of their place in the world and will not continue to be exploited.”¹⁵⁵ Striking empowers individuals to fight for change, and has the potential to create tangible improvements in workers’ daily lives. However, it is also seen as a threat to governments and multinational companies. Laws and company policies are put in place to avoid this organization and remain competitive in the face of open global trade regulations, limiting the scope of impact strikes can have.

This regulation on unionization and organization particularly effects women because they are prone to silencing by employers. Unions are often the only way they are able to come together and voice their opinions, especially because individual complaints to management can often result in unfair dismissal or even violence. Union silencing is therefore particularly impactful for women. Ankita highlights her important role as a SACTWU shop steward:

“Becoming a shop steward, you learn to be a woman with power, to have courage. You become a mentor to another woman, a woman who is discouraged in the world. I encourage her, I tell her she can be like me. I become an inspiration to people that never see the world. You get abused women, who don’t know how to help themselves. I was

¹⁵³ Interview with Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research 11/10/2015

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Michael Ross, executive producer of the documentary film *True Cost*. 10/21/2015

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

like them. With SACTWU, we receive lots of training. That motivates us and makes us who we are.”¹⁵⁶

Ankita underlines the cascading positive impact unionization has on the female workers. This newfound strength, granted by unionization, is precisely what many factories try to avoid. Without unions, women are able to be more easily controlled and manipulated by their employers, contributing to the reproduction of inferior status that allows employers to maintain their higher positions. In this sense, economic justice feeds back into social justice as empowered women challenge their secondary status both outside the workplace as well as in.

As employers look for ways to lower production costs and encourage foreign investment in response to international economic pressures, many employee benefits are cut. Pension plans, healthcare, severances packages and other “excess” expenses are deemed as unnecessary. Factories’ owners and employee unions often have to make difficult decisions between laying employees off or reducing benefit packages for all employees. Menzi described a particularly difficult time early on in his career when he was laid off without assistance:

“My retrenchment occurred the week after my first daughter was born, and there was no severance package for workers. Being retrenched was very tough [...] management [today] seems to become more difficult with time. They’re gradually trying to take away some of the goals we have achieved, by doing things like reducing severance packages and paid leave. It is more important now than ever before that we stay united and vigilant for our cause.”¹⁵⁷

Menzi did not receive a severance package or any other form of aid, which was especially difficult considering he was dealing with the added financial responsibility of caring for a

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Ankita, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Menzi, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

newborn child. Indeed, as each type of organizational player in the apparel commodity chain has become more actively involved in offshore sourcing, the competition between manufacturers has intensified.¹⁵⁸ This means that they are finding as many ways to cut corners as possible, often at the expense of the worker who is left with a lower wage, unstable position (coupled with the inability to organize against it), fewer benefits and worsening conditions.

2.4 Globalization and Employment Conditions

As global trade has reshaped the clothing and textile industry, manufacturers are having to find new ways to stay competitive. Multinational brands push for low costs to be able to drive prices down (to spur sales) while maintaining a significant profit margin. This has led to downward wage pressure and unstable demand, meaning that factories are having to cut as many corners as possible to be able to attract retailers and brands looking for lower production costs. According to Andrew Morgan, the director of the documentary film *True Cost* about the industry, “cutting corners and disregarding safety has become an accepted, almost required business model.”¹⁵⁹ These corners come in the form of lower salaries, short-time schedules or temporary lay-offs, and finally, disregard for working conditions and factory infrastructure.

As the competition between factories has intensified, businesses are unable to make enough profit to maintain proper working conditions. This expense becomes less of a priority, as keeping costs as low as possible translate to the amount of orders they

¹⁵⁸ Gereffi, Gary. “International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in the Apparel Commodity Chain.” *Journal of International Economics* (1999)

¹⁵⁹ True Cost Documentary Film (2015)

will receive. Lucy Siegle, a journalist featured in the *True Cost* film, highlighted that “the problem with the global supply chain, particularly ‘fast fashion’, is that risk is being carried by those that are most vulnerable.”¹⁶⁰ Workers are often forced to work extremely long shifts at old work stations. Sometimes, the workers are performing extremely dangerous tasks:

“Recently, a man was also cleaning a machine, and opened the restricted cover that shouldn’t be opened until the whole machine has stopped. These rollers move so fast that even when you press the stop button, it takes a while for the whole machine to come to a complete stop. The rollers were still running when he put his hand in the machine to clean it. It was terrible; he was caught in the machine for almost five hours before he was released. They had to get outside experts to come and disassemble the machine from around him. The operator of the machine was dismissed for that accident because the company found him to be negligent. He took a shortcut, and did not follow the correct procedures. Now, because he is incapacitated, it is harder for him to find a job. He is still sitting at home today.”

Not only was the worker held responsible for the incident, but he was also dismissed for negligence, meaning that he is incapable of returning to work because of his injury and is receiving no assistance from his prior employer. This disregard for employee rights underlines how workers are viewed as replaceable by their employers, who operate their businesses within a global system that spurs such behaviour. In other words, the situation Menzi witnessed in his factory presents itself as a metaphor for the current state of worker status: trapped and disabled by the “machine” that is the global capitalist economic model.

Menzi’s coworker’s case also highlights the physical vulnerability of individuals working in the clothing and textile industry. The profession is associated with tactility, but not always with actual physical danger, although it is often present. Both work activities themselves as well as the surrounding workplace environment are equal threats to safety.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Bathrooms are not maintained and protective measures are overlooked. Thembani highlighted that “The toilet facilities are not up to standard. Some have no privacy at all. No door.”¹⁶¹ Factory infrastructure is not inspected, leading to collapses like the Rana Plaza clothing factory disaster of 2013 (below). The industry has become known as dangerous to workers, but this does not seem to effect employers. Rana Plaza’s year following the disaster was it most profitable year until then.¹⁶²

CLOTHING FACTORY DEATH TOLL – BANGLADESH (2013)¹⁶³

ALI ENTERPRISES	289
TAZREEN FASHION	112
RANA PLAZA	1,129
TOTAL	1,530

¹⁶¹ Interview with Thembani, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

¹⁶² True Cost Documentary Film (2015)

¹⁶³ True Cost Documentary Film (2015)



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Rana Plaza clothing factory disaster in Bangladesh, responsible for over 1,100 deaths.

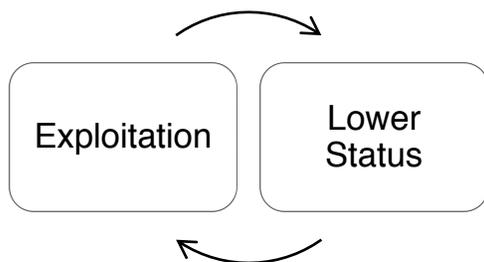
Worsening conditions due to international competition directly affects women because they are viewed as a “solution” to lowering cost pressure. Women are not only forced to accept lower salaries, but are also less likely to protest against difficult conditions because they have no other choice. In *True Cost*, Andrew Morgan highlighted that “Low wages and horrible conditions are excused because they are seen as an option for people with no other alternatives.”¹⁶⁵ Antti Kasvio echoed this difficult position when he stated “Do women workers employed in the new industrial centers of developing countries have any other alternative than to accept an ever tighter pace of work in appalling working conditions and with ridiculous pay?”¹⁶⁶ Ideas prevailing in society impact the way women

¹⁶⁴ Image: dawn.com

¹⁶⁵ True Cost Documentary Film (2015)

¹⁶⁶ Kasvio, Antti. “The Internationalization of Production and the Changing Position of Women Workers in the Textile, Clothing and Electronics Industries.” *Acta Sociologica*. Vol. 28 No. 3 (1985)

are treated at work.¹⁶⁷ In Pakistan, overall violent discrimination against women has increased in the country, “legitimizing mistreatment in the factory.”¹⁶⁸ Women are caught in a self-fulfilling cycle in which they are repeatedly exploited by their employers, leading to a lower status that justifies this exploitation (see below). Both lower status and exploitation are continually coproduced in this form. Lower status not only provides an “out” or excuse that justifies the conditions workers are forced to endure, but this status is itself also perpetuated by these conditions. Dunaway highlights this phenomenon when she states: “no production system operates without a reproductive system.”¹⁶⁹ She specifically points to the value chain “constructively reproducing (or contributing to the structural crisis of) the infrastructure and processes of the capitalist world-system.”¹⁷⁰



2.5 Conclusion

Globalization has dramatically altered the structure of the clothing and textile industry. The resulting flows of globalization are not smooth as most literature suggests, but rather disjunctured and uneven. As previously mentioned, Arjun Appadurai argues

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research 11/10/2015

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Dunaway, Wilma. “Bringing Commodity Chain Analysis Back to its World-Systems Roots: Rediscovering Women’s Work and Households.” *American Sociological Association*. Vol. 20 No.1 pp. 64-81 (2014)

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

this stance when he states that if a global cultural system is emerging, it is “filled with ironies and resistances.”¹⁷¹ Systems are altered and flows become irregular as industries adapt to new models of production. This system alteration and increasing flow irregularity stems from the influence of larger economic processes, most notably trade liberalization encouraged by institutions such as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank. In the clothing and textile industry, as outsourcing becomes the norm, brands and retailers are caught in a competitive cycle to lower production costs in order to remain as profitable as their competitors. This race for lower production costs has resulted in downward wage pressure, unstable demand leading to precarious job terms, and unsafe working conditions. Globalization and the opening up of national economies to international trade has impacted the workers whose rights are increasingly compromised in order to increase profits. However, solutions to the issue of global impact on the industry will fail if we do not look closely at gender. Indeed, according to Appadurai, “both work and leisure have lost none of their gendered qualities in this new global order but have acquired ever subtler fetishized representations.”¹⁷² Women’s social status impedes them from demanding and receiving the same rights as men. The structure of the industry reproduces this status as it continuously puts women at the bottom of the pecking order, using the social hierarchy to increase effectiveness. According to Lucy Siegle, “Without cheap female labor, the industry would not be generating the profits that it is.”¹⁷³ Because men make up a very small portion of clothing and textile manufacturing positions, it is

¹⁷¹ Appadurai, Arjun. “Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization” *Public Worlds*, Vol. 1 pp 27-47

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ True Cost Documentary Film (2015)

difficult to compare conditions based on gender within the industry. When comparing to other industries, it is clear that globalization is increasingly affecting worker rights, but that gender is also largely responsible for many of the infractions present within the industry. This means that we need to keep the difficulties associated with both global expansion as well as gender discrimination in mind when proposing alternatives or improvements to the current clothing and textile industry. We also need to take into account the recent consumer-driven structure of the industry and its influence on both the reorganization of production and working wages, terms and conditions.

3. Industry Structure and Improvements

Adam Smith is widely regarded as the father of political economics, and the individual who provided the base upon which neoclassical economics was built.¹⁷⁴ Contrary to the prevailing mercantilist sentiment of the time, which emphasized the maintenance of a “multitude of laborious poor [as a] source of national wealth,” Smith believed in high wages, which he saw as “essential for the development of an economy.”¹⁷⁵ In *The Wealth of Nations*, he states that:

“What improves the circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as inconveniency to the whole. No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that those who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged.”¹⁷⁶

According to Smith, market forces should be relied upon to raise wages above the levels of subsistence highlighted above. Neoclassical economists see Smith as “their revered free market ideology wellspring,”¹⁷⁷ popularizing the concept of the “invisible hand” of market force that is popular today. In fact, the neoliberal policies that shape our global economy were built on his theories, and he is continuously referred back to as the architect of the open economy.

However, many political economists have “adopted only part of Smith’s legacy and transformed it into something different in the process of abridgement.”¹⁷⁸ According to

¹⁷⁴ Plowman, David H. and Perryer, Chris. “Moral Sentiments and the Minimum Wage” *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 1-22

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Plowman and Perryer, “a full assessment of Smith’s writings would suggest that reducing him to the champion of any system based upon unbridled self-interest is to caricature him.”¹⁷⁹ Smith would probably have been appalled by the way his theories were applied to encourage an open market that is responsible for extreme downward wage pressure, job insecurity and poor working conditions. He himself stated that: “To hurt in any degree the interests of any order of citizens, for no other purpose but to promote that of some other, is evidently contrary to that of justice and equity of treatment.”¹⁸⁰ The clothing and textile industry today is a prime example of the damaging of the interests of one order of citizens, mainly women, to benefit another. Smith metaphorically stated that “it may very justly be said that the people who clothe the whole world are in rags themselves,” and two and a half centuries later this is very much still the case.

We can therefore assume that under the current circumstances of globalization, Smith would have supported a minimum wage law. He believed in “a basic subsistence wage below which workers could not be paid for any long period.”¹⁸¹ The notion that Smith was against government regulation is misplaced, as he was actually an advocate for regulation in many aspects of economic life.¹⁸² According to the International Labor Organization, the “evidence is clear that in the absence of government intervention, the private sector is not likely to concern itself with placing a floor below wage bargaining.”¹⁸³ Thus, in developing economies there is a need for governments to mandate minimum

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Plowman, David H. and Perryer, Chris. “Moral Sentiments and the Minimum Wage” *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 1-22

wages and employment. We should be returning to the origins of Smith's theories and revisiting some of the aspects of our globalized economic system. In other words, the way it is currently put in practice betrays its own roots.

Yet, still today, regularization is continually viewed by governing bodies as impeding free market capitalism and hindering corporate profit. Indeed, Barbara Briggs, the director of the Institute for Labor Rights, highlighted that when they "submitted a bill in Congress a few years ago, the 'Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act,' companies responded no, that it would be an impediment to free trade."¹⁸⁴ The necessity for such regulation is ignored as governments continually prioritize profit over citizens' rights, using arguments that stem from Smith's theories. However, according to the "father of reliance on market mechanisms," this disregard for subsistence wages is not spurring corporate profit, but is actually hindering the "engine of development."¹⁸⁵ Today, wages and conditions continue to drop way below Smith's level of subsistence, based on free market theories that are no longer applicable in the increasingly fractured, globalized clothing and textile industry. Global pressure stemming from neoliberal policies, as well as increasing consumer demand, intensifies this wage "race to the bottom." Government officials and corporate leaders are relying on interpretations of free market theories they see as beneficial to them in the short-term, without taking into consideration what would be beneficial to society in the long-run.

¹⁸⁴ True Cost Film (2015)

¹⁸⁵ Plowman, David H. and Perryer, Chris. "Moral Sentiments and the Minimum Wage" *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 1-22

In this way, Karl Marx, perhaps the man whom we could see as Smith's mortal enemy, has an almost overlapping ideology when it comes to a minimum subsistence wage and the need for a certain standard of living to ensure a "flourishing and happy society."¹⁸⁶ He specifically saw the clothing and textile industry as "murderous and capricious," "employing and dismissing workers at whim, linked to the general 'anarchy' of capitalist production."¹⁸⁷ Esther Leslie discusses Karl Marx's particular view of the clothing and textile industry in her academic blog post on fashion history and Karl Marx. She brings his specific references to the industry together, underlining how often he came back to it as a prime example of capitalist exploitation. In his work, Marx mentions how the "season," with its "sudden placing of large orders that have to be executed in the shortest possible time," is unique to the industry and at the heart of its "breakneck pace."¹⁸⁸ He also highlighted the "whimsicality of industrial capitalist production" that depended on the volatile demands of the upper class. Today, the problem is slightly more complex, as lower clothing prices have become the norm. The consumer driving the previously mentioned "race to the bottom" is not only the fashion-conscious member of the upper class, but also the individual who cannot afford to purchase a t-shirt for more than 5 dollars. These individuals are much less problematic, however, because of the life span of their purchases. Individuals continually seeking to "refresh" their wardrobes with inexpensive fast fashion items are have a much more severe impact. According to Marx,

¹⁸⁶ Plowman, David H. and Perryer, Chris. "Moral Sentiments and the Minimum Wage" *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 1-22

¹⁸⁷ Leslie, Esther. "Karl Marx" *lovetoknow.com*. Web. <http://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/karl-marx>

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the textile industry inaugurated the factory system of exploitation, as fashion has become the “motor, product and metaphor of the capitalist system.”¹⁸⁹ Two centuries later, the issues that Marx identified within the industry are still just as problematic, as wages, unstable job terms and exploitative working conditions resulting from both gender inequality and globalization affect today’s clothing and textile workers. The issues he highlighted over 200 years ago are still at the root of the structural inequalities that characterize the industry.

In her blog post, Esther Leslie also effectively brought together the work of Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin, a German cultural critic. Inspired by Marx, Benjamin similarly observed “a modern drive toward uniformity and mass reproduction.”¹⁹⁰ He argued that “capitalism makes people increasingly thinglike”, and fashion “dramatizes this transformation.”¹⁹¹ Fickle clothing trends dictate what is “in-style,” meaning that what is popular one day can be out of fashion the next. The tendency towards uniformization of clothing has been amplified as globalization has modified the clothing and textile industry. In this way, we are looking at a phenomenon that is characterized by simultaneous uniformization and desire for differentiation. It could be argued in this sense that the felt homogenization of globalization is related to an increased desire to stand out and signify one’s uniqueness, paradoxically reproducing sameness. Not only have borders come down, allowing for similar trends to simultaneously exist in different geographical areas, but seasons have become shorter and more numerous. Large fashion retailers such as

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Leslie, Esther. “Karl Marx” *lovetoknow.com*. Web. <http://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/karl-marx>

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Zara are now producing “mini-seasons” more frequently, with up to 20 of these per year¹⁹², with new clothing being mass-produced and sold in thousands of stores around the world.

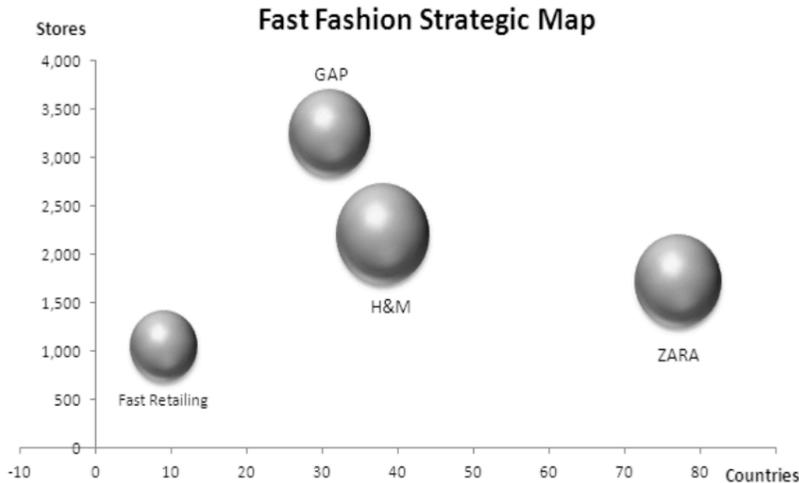
3.1 Fast Fashion

This tendency towards uniformization and amplification of clothing production volume has been dubbed the “fast fashion” trend. Fast fashion is the term used by fashion retailers to express a “business strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak.”¹⁹³ This results in cheaply made and low-priced clothing that is increasingly popular today. Examples of popular “fast fashion” retailers are Gap, Forever 21, H&M, TopShop, Zara and Uniqlo (part of the Fast Retailing Inc. Group¹⁹⁴). These brands are increasing their presence and continuously taking over new urban markets, turning into the new giants of the clothing and textile industry. The strategic map below underlines the scope of their operations.

¹⁹² Barnes, Liz and Lea-Greenwood, Gaynor. Fast Fashioning the Supply Chain: Shaping the Research Agenda” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2006) pp.259-271

¹⁹³ Barnes, Liz and Lea-Greenwood, Gaynor. Fast Fashioning the Supply Chain: Shaping the Research Agenda” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2006) pp.259-271

¹⁹⁴ Cortez, Michael Angelo and Thanh Tu, Nguyen. “Fast Fashion Quadrangle: An Analysis” *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal* Vol. 18 No.1 (2014)



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The amount of clothing that is being purchased per household per year is rising at an alarming rate as prices continue to decrease and fast-changing trends are dictating what is “in-style”. The contemporary fashion industry is highly competitive, with additional pressure for fashion companies to compete not only on price, but also on their ability to deliver new and unique product.¹⁹⁶ Retailers must be flexible enough to respond quickly to changing consumer demands, which means “having the desired product in stores within weeks, sometimes days, before those demands change again, and more importantly, before the competition.”¹⁹⁷

This phenomenon is impacting the industry because it is contributing to lower price pressure as consumers demand cheaper and cheaper clothing. It is also affecting supply chain management as pressure on lead-time reduction is increasingly important to fast fashion retailers gaining market share by getting new product in stores first.¹⁹⁸ Both these

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Barnes, Liz and Lea-Greenwood, Gaynor. Fast Fashioning the Supply Chain: Shaping the Research Agenda” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2006) pp.259-271

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

phenomena have resulted in a transformation of the traditional supply chain model. Fast fashion supply chains have become more flexible and demand-driven “in order to be responsive to unpredictable consumer demand.”¹⁹⁹ The unique fast fashion consumer is exerting a “continuous influence on the entire supply chain.”²⁰⁰ This growing consumption pattern is different because it deals with a segment of the market that craves novelty and is willing to pay for it. This is not the same as the individuals buying cheaper clothing because they cannot afford anything else. The amount they are willing to purchase, and the rate at which they consume, is what distinguishes their behavior from earlier patterns of consumption. These consumers are gaining the power to dictate value chain organization. Suppliers are being pushed to “produce a greater range of product” and carry out additional responsibilities such as quality control, packaging and ticketing.²⁰¹ Retailers want their clothing in stores fast, and want to pay the least amount to get it there.

This “fast fashion” trend, and its modified global value chain, also leads to neglect when it comes to worker’s rights because of the need to produce cheaper clothing in less time. Indeed, “there is increased pressure for suppliers to deliver on time, which in turn places ethical practices at greater risk of being ignored.”²⁰² A retail consultant interviewed for *Fast Fashioning the Supply Chain* highlighted: “The pressure to be able to deliver on time is immense, so what is a factory going to do if it’s running late, they’re going to work all night, of course they are.”²⁰³ As Thembani and Menzi mentioned in previous chapters,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

the workers are the ones who carry the burden of this pressure from retailers. Because retailers are pushing for lower manufacturing costs to be able to drive prices down (and increase sales), factories are looking to cut as many corners as possible to be able to offer them the low prices they are seeking. These corners come in the form of lower wages for those making the clothing, unstable jobs due to wavering demand, and poor working conditions.

3.2 The Gendered Buyer-Driven Global Value Chain

As mentioned earlier, fast fashion has indeed experienced a rearrangement of power as consumer desires are responsible for shifts in clothing and textile value chain organization. This means that changes at the consumption end of the chain have cascading effects throughout it.²⁰⁴ Buyer-driven value chains result from processes of trade liberalization and labor market deregulation, characteristics of the neoliberal economic structure discussed above.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the emergence of large players such as Gap and Zara are “increasingly dominating activity through their governance of the chain and extraction of economic rents [...] over and above other firms.”²⁰⁶ Firms “in the weakest position within this hierarchy, especially upstream firms in developing countries who have the least security as a result of the flexibility of supply agreements, are often those most likely to use flexible female labor to help them meet the volatility of supply.”²⁰⁷ In this way, flexible female labor is often located “in particular nodes of the chain where

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Barrientos, Stephanie. “Gender, Flexibility and Global Value Chains” *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2001)

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

the governance and power of individual firms is weaker, acting as a buffer against insecurity and risk.”²⁰⁸

Our current neoliberal economic structure is at the heart of the flexible, buyer-driven fast fashion value chain. This need for flexibility to respond rapidly to consumer demand has direct implications on female workers who are forced to accept lower wages, unstable job terms and difficult working conditions. Women are the “worker of choice” in this new economic climate as they are seen as more “accepting than men with regard to the poorer employment conditions linked to flexible employment.”²⁰⁹ The main factor in the feminization of labor-intensive employment within a competitive buyer-driven value chain is the trend to use flexible feminine employment as a means to drive down labor costs.²¹⁰ Therefore, “gender relations underlying these activities can have an important influence on the way value chains function [...] and conversely, in localities where they are operating, value chains can have an influence on the gender division of labor.”²¹¹ The analysis of fast fashion value chains needs to incorporate gender as an essential element to be fully understood.

3.3 Consumers

The origin of the modification of the clothing and textile value chain, and its resulting effects on the supply-side of the chain, comes directly from consumer desires. These consumer desires and behaviors are themselves influenced by an increasingly

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

unavoidable consumption environment structure. Consumers want their clothing fast and on-trend, and are willing to spend to achieve this goal. The faster retailers are able to get their new relevant merchandise into the stores, the more they will sell, putting pressure on manufacturing to produce at an increasingly fast pace. Even though these customer buying trends feel removed from the factories, they directly inform decisions made at the manufacturing end of the supply chain.

As trends change at an ever-increasing pace, impulsive buying follows suit. According to Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, because of “easy availability of media and magazines covering fashion news, catwalk styles, and celebrity looks, consumers are increasingly interested in fashion and appearance, desire newness and variety, and shop frequently.”²¹² The internet and ease of information access allows customers to constantly know what is “in style.” Additionally, brands and retailers are able to use technology to track specific customer behavior, allowing them to market effectively to each demographic. I learned about this technology when working at the previously mentioned “household-name designer brand”. Credit card information is stored and linked up to social media accounts, allowing the company to gain a comprehensive picture of each customer. This allows them to offer different promotions, e-mails and services according to the specific buying behavior of the individual. “Cache” technology on web browsers also allows brands to store information about which items of clothing a customer has been viewing online, and market the specific item to them on other websites. These

²¹² Joung, Hyun-Mee. “Fast-fashion Consumers’ Post-Purchase Behaviours” *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. Vol. 42 Issue 8 pp. 688-697 (2014)

individualized marketing practices are making it increasingly difficult to resist the urge to purchase increasing amounts of clothing.

The innovations in information technology highlighted above are examples of the unavoidable consumption environment that spurs the behavior of the fast fashion consumer. The structure within which the industry operates makes it difficult for consumers to avoid purchasing clothing. Individual behaviors operate within the economic structure that is the flashily advertised clothing and textile industry. The industry uses a high concentration of images, relying heavily on striking visual advertising campaigns and marketing materials (like the large logo in Portland below). These ubiquitous visual campaigns have become a part of our daily lives, continually influencing our behavior and decisions.



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Further, clothing is intrinsically linked to the way individuals portray themselves, and many use fashion as a way to get closer to an individual or status they aspire to. Imagery reinforces these desires, as people see themselves in images and want to

²¹³ Leland Consulting Group. Web. <http://lelandconsulting.com/celebrated-fast-fashion-retailer-hm-arrives-in-downtown-portland/> Accessed 26 Feb. 2016

purchase the clothing that allows them to be one step closer to their aspiration. According to Stuart Hall, “culture is saturated by the image in a variety of different forms.”²¹⁴ He sees media as “one of the most powerful and extensive systems for the circulation of meaning.”²¹⁵ As an individual views a clothing advertisement, he or she perceives it in their own way, giving it a meaning that is unique to them. Retailers use this to their advantage as they employ images that evoke this meaningful reaction in their target consumer. The Topshop posters below are an example of such an advertisement. The model is in a bathing suit, mouth open. Her facial features and body type are reflections of what Topshop’s target audience, millennial women, might aspire to. The slogan “Everybody Loves Topshop!” underlines how brands seek to market themselves as relevant and fresh. The colors are poppy and the graphics resemble a feminized version of graffiti, evoking urban relevance and youth. The image is also clearly gendered, attempting to attract the young female customer by incorporating elements that are perceived as appealing to the demographic. Indeed, “combining the results of brain research and biochemistry with social research about gender, generational, communication and cultural differences allows advertisers to tailor their messages specifically for women, segmenting the market even further.”²¹⁶ The advertisement is eye-catching and strategically located in a subway station, which is frequented by the target audience. This makes the advertising campaign difficult to ignore, allowing the image to

²¹⁴ Hall, Stuart. *Representation and the Media*. Media Education Foundation (1997)

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Heitner, Keri L. “Advertising, Aimed at Women” *Encyclopedia of Women in Today’s World, Volume 1*. pp. 30-33 (2011)

become engrained in the consumer's mind and associated with a desire to frequent the store.



The effective advertising demonstrated above is an example of how consumer demand is not created organically, but is shaped by industry norms. According to Mark Granovetter, markets are socially constructed in that “economic actors are embedded in social relations.”²¹⁸ Economic transactions do not occur independently from the influence of social forces. These social forces come in the form of individualized marketing and advertising that tap into consumer desires. A reciprocal relationship therefore exists between the individual's consumption patterns that mold the supply chain, but also the

²¹⁷ Zimbio.com Web.

<http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/PMBMVS0QiW6/TOPSHOP+Comes+To+New+York/OX6in8ZzkPo>.

Accessed 26 Feb 2016

²¹⁸ Granovetter, Mark. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" *American Journal of Sociology* 91:481-510 (1985)

industry itself that molds the consumer's desires. In this way, consumers have the agency to refuse to purchase the clothing, but they are still constrained by a consumption structure that makes this decision increasingly difficult.

According to Gérard Cachon and Robert Swinney, "fast fashion systems can be of significant value, particularly when consumers exhibit strategic behavior."²¹⁹ Consumers are exhibiting this "strategic behavior" that allows fast fashion companies to achieve the success they are experiencing today. They are "buying into" the vortex that is fast fashion, and brands are making sure that it is more and more difficult to avoid. However, many are beginning to realize the effects of the industry trend and are modifying consumption habits as ethical concerns are being highlighted in the media. A new strain of individuals that is encouraged to think and react is emerging, but they are nonetheless still restricted by their ethical "niche" in consumerist society, which opponents see as a contradictory resolving of the problem.

3.4 Ethical Clothing Consumption

In recent years, some fashion consumers have begun to "value ethical factors in their fashion purchase decisions."²²⁰ These new conscious consumers have begun to "question the unethical practices of brands that have enjoyed enormous success."²²¹ Some have even begun to organize and participate in social movements, such as "Fashion Revolution," which encourages participants to wear their clothes inside out in an

²¹⁹ Cachon, Gérard and Swinney, Robert. "The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick Response, Enhanced Design, and Strategic Consumer Behavior" *Management Science* Vol. 57 Issue 4 (2011)

²²⁰ Kim, Hyunsook, Choo, Ho Jung and Yoon, Namhee. "The Motivational Drivers of Fast Fashion Avoidance" *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 17 No.2 pp. 243-260 (2013)

²²¹ Ibid.

effort to get people thinking about where their clothes were made and by whom.²²² The “slow fashion” movement is also an emerging trend, related to “anti-consumption, business ethics, sustainability, pro-environmentalism and valuing local economies and labor.”²²³ This specific initiative is related to the popular “slow food” movement which encourages local, farm-to-table cooking practices over fast food. This similar, parallel movement underlines an overall trend towards ethical consumerism, especially among young millenials.

Ethical fashion, or “fashion with conscience,” is striving to attract young millennials looking for sustainable yet on-trend clothing. Many brands, such as American Apparel, People Tree, Reformation, Edun and Stella McCartney are catering to this young, aware demographic. The principle is to “source fabrics ethically while providing good working standards and conditions to workers” coupled with “a sustainable business model in the clothes’ country of origin.”²²⁴ They are attempting to attract the “ordinary fashion consumer” that might or might not be sensitive about where their clothes come from. This growing number of brands is definitely a step in the right direction, although the true impact of these brands is limited due to their scope and size relative to large multinational fast fashion brands.

Additionally, there is an important gap between consumer behavior and their ethical considerations. This means that while many recognize and are concerned about

²²² <http://fashionrevolution.org> Web. Accessed 24 February 2016.

²²³ Kim, Hyunsook, Choo, Ho Jung and Yoon, Namhee. “The Motivational Drivers of Fast Fashion Avoidance” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 17 No.2 pp. 243-260 (2013)

²²⁴ Joergens, Catrin. “Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2006)

the ethical misconduct of fast fashion companies, it does not always translate into action.²²⁵ Critics argue that ethical consumption is ineffective because it is merely attempting to “use capitalism to solve capitalism.” In fact, the pool of respondents for the study conducted in “The Motivational Drivers of Fast Fashion Avoidance,” stated that the main reasons they decided not to consume fast fashion were poor quality and concern with originality of style.²²⁶ No significant effect was found concerning ethical considerations, meaning that they do not necessarily influence individual purchase behavior for clothing among young consumers.²²⁷ Catrin Joergens highlights in her study that “even though respondents are aware about ethical problems, it seems likely that their knowledge does not significantly affect their purchase decisions.”²²⁸ Many felt that they do not have a choice because such large quantities of their garments are produced in developing countries. Although many stated that they have negative attitudes towards the apparel industry, this awareness is not close to their mind when they go shopping.²²⁹ Aesthetic needs and price come before ethical manufacturing.

Because ethical manufacturing is not a priority to the average consumer, it is difficult to get brands and retailers to understand the importance of putting pressure on their suppliers to modify their production methods. Budgeting is focused on efficiency and profit, with marketing and advertising seen as directly leading to sales. In fact, the

²²⁵ Kim, Hyunsook, Choo, Ho Jung and Yoon, Namhee. “The Motivational Drivers of Fast Fashion Avoidance” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 17 No.2 pp. 243-260 (2013)

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Joergens, Catrin. “Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* Vol. 10 No. 3 (2006)

²²⁹ Ibid.

“background to Marks and Spencer’s decision to reduce the prices paid to its suppliers in 2006 was the need to amass a war chest for the big marketing campaign launched during 2007.”²³⁰ Because of their removed position, the brands and retailers do not feel responsible for the pressure they put on the supply chain. However, according to Miller & Williams, “raising the level of workers’ pay in the direction of existing code standard on a living wage would necessitate only a modest increase in the retail price or could be absorbed in part or fully from critical path savings.”²³¹ Michael Ross, executive producer of *True Cost*, highlighted that “the system might just be skewed in a major way at this point in that most of the profit is going to the top.”²³² Although customers have a limited role in the switch to a more sustainable production model, ethical manufacturing can be a sign of effective supply chain organization and management in our globalized economy.

3.5 Private Regulation

On the other side of the supply chain, many changes have been occurring at the industry level. Private voluntary regulation, otherwise known as company codes of conduct or corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, are becoming increasingly popular. Global brands and retailers “develop standards for working conditions, wages, hours and health and safety, and requires that its suppliers accept those standards.”²³³ Auditing is then used to “assess factories for compliance with those codes of conduct.”²³⁴ This trend towards CSR has been greatly influenced by increased media coverage on

²³⁰ Miller, Doug and Williams, Peter. “What Price a Living Wage? Implementation Issues in the Quest for Decent Wages in the Global Apparel Sector.” *Global Social Policy* (2009)

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Interview with Michael Ross, executive producer of the documentary film *True Cost* 10/21/2015

²³³ Locke, Richard M. “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?” *Boston Review* May/June 2013

²³⁴ Ibid.

human rights infractions in factories. The escalating “flow of information across national and cultural borders has given rise to stories about multinational companies’ irresponsible practices.”²³⁵ Unions, shareholders, employees, business partners, NGOs and governments²³⁶ are also expressing their concern. Firms are “increasingly held accountable by financial analysts and investors for [CSR] performance.”²³⁷ Multinationals are feeling the need to take action, even if there is little to no consumer pressure to do so. They are just now seeing themselves as connected to, even responsible for “labor practices of their global trading partners such as suppliers, third party logistics providers and intermediaries over which they have no ownership.”²³⁸

However, many multinationals are struggling with the issue of code of conduct implementation within the global supply chain. These codes are not being drafted in response to the needs of the employees of the companies they are directed towards.²³⁹ Rather, they are often “presented as public statements of lofty intent and purpose without specific content.”²⁴⁰ Despite efforts to engage in CSR and come up with codes of conduct, there is often a gap between the ethical standards expressed and the actual conditions at the supplier factories.²⁴¹ For instance, in 2012, “just weeks after auditors certified that a factory in Pakistan met [...] working conditions standards created by a respected

²³⁵ Andersen, Mette and Skjoett-Larsen, Tage. “Corporate Social Responsibility in Global Supply Chains” *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* Vol.14 No.2 pp.75-86 (2009)

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Short, Jodi, Toffel, Michael and Hugill, Andrea. “Monitoring Global Supply Chains.” *Strategic Management Journal*. (2015)

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Andersen, Mette and Skjoett-Larsen, Tage. “Corporate Social Responsibility in Global Supply Chains” *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* Vol.14 No.2 pp.75-86 (2009)

nonprofit, a fire killed hundreds of workers, some of whom were trapped by locked emergency exits and barred windows – clear violations of that very standard.”²⁴² Also, many firms have outsourced the monitoring of transactions to private, third-party social auditors.²⁴³ Third-party auditing is problematic because third-party monitors are more lax in enforcing the rules when a stringent approach could undermine their own opportunities for profit.²⁴⁴

Jodi Short, Michael Toffel and Andrea Hugill’s research on the monitoring of global supply chains highlights the specific ways in which CSR auditing is flawed. Supply chain auditors’ reporting of violations in codes of conduct are “shaped not only by financial conflicts of interest, [...] but also by social factors.”²⁴⁵ More specifically, “supplier audits yield fewer violations when conducted by audit teams that include individual auditors who have audited the supplier before, when audit teams have less auditing experience and less in-house audit-skills training, when audit teams consist of only male auditors [...] and when audits are paid for by the supplier as opposed to the buyer.”²⁴⁶ Violations are consistently overlooked based on the subjective nature of the auditing process. Therefore, private regulation has limited impact as repeated incidents of “hazardous working conditions, excessive hours and poor wages continue to plague many workplaces.”²⁴⁷

²⁴² Short, Jodi, Toffel, Michael and Hugill, Andrea. “Monitoring Global Supply Chains.” *Strategic Management Journal*. (2015)

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Short, Jodi, Toffel, Michael and Hugill, Andrea. “Monitoring Global Supply Chains.” *Strategic Management Journal*. (2015)

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Locke, Richard M. “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?” *Boston Review* May/June 2013

As the weaknesses of the strict code of conduct model have become apparent, an alternative approach has emerged around the concept of capacity building.²⁴⁸ Locke underlines in “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?” that “whereas the compliance model sought to deter violations by policing and penalizing factories, capacity building aims to prevent violations by providing skills, technology and organizational skills that enable factories to enforce labor standards on their own.”²⁴⁹ This means that capacity building programs aim to create a “mutually reinforcing cycle in which more efficient plants invest in their workers.”²⁵⁰ Although this is a more effective solution, the model assumes a “win-win” for both the workers and the brands, that would translate into gains for all actors involved.²⁵¹ However, these benefits very rarely are evenly distributed and often accumulate to the most powerful link in a particular supply chain.²⁵² Essentially, the larger problem with corporate social responsibility is that it treats as a technical challenge what is really an issue of distribution and justice.

This inability to implement effective private regulation highlights the responsibility of larger institutions such as governments and labor organizations to act on working conditions in clothing and textile factories. Locke argues that “while [he] continues to think that companies have a large responsibility for ensuring good labor standards, [he also

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

has] a renewed appreciation for the older idea that ensuring fair treatment for workers – including real rights of association – is a public responsibility.”²⁵³

3.6 Government Legislature and Regulation

Governments and international legislating bodies have the power and responsibility to impose minimal wages and working conditions for their citizens. According to Locke, “national governments – even in poor countries with few natural resources – have far more ability to impose their will on foreign investors than was previously believed.”²⁵⁴ He argues that “key challenges to fair labor standards in global supply chains can only be tackled by state bureaucracies operating in and legitimated by their home countries.”²⁵⁵ Locke also uses the example of innovative environmental state-level policies in the United States, “such as lenient penalties in exchange for transparency and self-disclosure,”²⁵⁶ that have motivated private firms to increase compliance. He sees this as one of many possible options for the clothing and textile industry, as governments could implement these self-reporting laws in order to encourage firms to move towards more ethical manufacturing on their own. Locke suggests a “mixed” approach: “not traditional command-and-control government regulation (deterrence) but rather a mix of carrots (government capacity building and technical assistance programs) and sticks (threatening sanctions and closing off ‘low road’ options).”²⁵⁷ Public policy that flexibly

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Locke, Richard M. “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?” *Boston Review* May/June 2013

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

and effectively governs global supply chains and is able to ensure regulation of the legislation is key to ensuring a safer industry.

International legislating bodies, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), also have the power to influence legislation. The ILO's website highlights its mission to "promote a social dialogue between trade unions and employers in formulating, and where appropriate, implementing national policy on social, economic, and many other issues."²⁵⁸ Indeed, in an analysis of the ILO's Better Factories Cambodia (BFC) program, Drusilla Brown and her colleagues found that "BFC assessments increased compliance significantly beyond that achieved by the private efforts of reputation-sensitive buyers." After four assessments, "low-compliance factories caught up with high-compliance factories [...] the threat of public disclosure deterred any retrogression in compliance, even in factories that were not selling to any reputation-sensitive buyer."²⁵⁹

However, in his response to Locke's argument, Aseem Prakash argues that "the world is not Scandinavia" in that "across developing countries, governments tend to grossly underperform in terms of providing public goods, including providing environmental and labor protections [...] corruption is rampant."²⁶⁰ He believes structural conditions suggest that public regulation is not completely reliable.²⁶¹ Indeed, as Mavo has underlined in previous chapters, even if governments pass legislature that protects

²⁵⁸ "How the ILO Works" *International Labour Organization*. Accessed 2 March 2016. <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/lang--en/index.htm>

²⁵⁹ Brown, Drusilla "The Second Sweatshop Century" article part of "Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains" forum. *Boston Review*. May/June 2013

²⁶⁰ Prakash, Aseem "The World Is Not Scandinavia" article part of "Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains" forum. *Boston Review*. May/June 2013

²⁶¹ Ibid.

its citizens, many do not enforce compliance as a way to encourage foreign investment. This was also echoed by Karamat Ali, who highlighted the necessity of separate institutions to ensure compliance with legislation.²⁶² These independent institutions would be under government mandate (labor ministry for example) but still functioning autonomously. This would allow for an added layer of regulation. Therefore, private endeavors and government regulation could work together to complement and enhance each other, filling in each other's gaps.

In "experimentalist governance" Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin define a process in which "government agencies collaborate with the private companies they regulate in order to develop broad goals and metrics." These goals and metrics are then used "to promote responsiveness to variation in local circumstances, learning and diffusion of best practices across private and public sectors, and ever-increasing compliance with government regulations."²⁶³ Although this proposition seems idealistic, this symbiotic relationship between the government and private regulating firms can be effective in improving and enforcing overlapping worker protection legislation and codes of conduct. Locke agrees that "laws and government institutions are critical to the success of private initiatives seeking to improve labor conditions in global supply chains."²⁶⁴ Further, Jodi Short and Michael Toffel also argue that "multinationals deploy codes of conduct for the limited purpose of monitoring their own suppliers, but the codes create

²⁶² Interview with Karamat Ali, director of the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research 11/10/2015

²⁶² Kasvio, Antti. "The Internationalization of Production and the Changing Position of Women Workers in the Textile, Clothing and Electronics Industries." *Acta Sociologica*. Vol. 28 No. 3 (1985)

²⁶³ Locke, Richard M. "Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?" *Boston Review* May/June 2013

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

possibilities for political mobilization that can improve labor conditions more broadly.”²⁶⁵

In the same vein, Gary Gereffi also responded to Locke’s argument by agreeing that “the most effective way to better global working conditions probably requires linking public, private and social forms of governance.”²⁶⁶ The last form of governance, social governance, is largely linked to crucial trade unions that bring together the voices of the workers themselves. Along with both public and private regulation, unionization is a key aspect in the movement towards a fairer global supply chain.

3.7 Unionization

The combination of both public and private regulation, coupled with unionization, is the best way to ensure the fair treatment of clothing and textile workers. According to Jonas Pontusson, “the aggregate, cross-national evidence [...] indicates that the egalitarian effects of unionization have become weaker over time, but it remains the case that more unionized countries are, on average, characterized by less earnings inequality and more redistribution than less unionized countries.”²⁶⁷ Unions ensure that workers are being heard and that their interests are being taken into account directly when legislation is being drafted. They also fight for fair wages and conditions, and work to secure benefits for their members. Nationally recognized unions, such as SACTWU, have the power to call out governments that are not putting their citizens before foreign investment. They also have the ability to “engage in a wide range of efforts to enhance the industry’s

²⁶⁵ Short, Jodi, Toffel, Michael “Promoting Political Mobilization” article part of “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains” forum. *Boston Review*. May/June 2013

²⁶⁶ Gereffi, Gary “Host Countries Can Act” article part of “Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains” forum. *Boston Review*. May/June 2013

²⁶⁷ Pontusson, Jonas. “Unionization, Inequality and Redistribution” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* Vol. 51 No. 4 pp. 797–825 (2013)

competitiveness and shift it to a sustainable long-term growth path.”²⁶⁸ In SACTWU’s case, these efforts come in the form of pressure for national mandates to implement safeguard measures on imports or even agreements with major national retailers to build relationships with local manufacturers.²⁶⁹ Ankita, a SACTWU shop steward, underlined the impact that the union has had on her life and the resilience she has developed because of her leadership position as a shop steward:

“Being a shop steward makes me a strong person. It makes me feel that I am capable of being somebody like a manager, or even a director. My boss can depend on me. I know I can work my way out of any problem [...] SACTWU has trained us to become someone great.”²⁷⁰

The union has given her the strength and training to be able to defend herself and her peers. Mavo, another SACTWU shop steward, shared a similar sense of responsibility to effectively communicate the needs of his fellow peers:

“In SACTWU, there is a sense of belonging. Traditionally, people share experiences, good and bad. When one feels pain, I feel the very same pain.”²⁷¹

Nonetheless, certain factories and governments are trying to suppress unionization efforts because they see this type of organization as a threat to profit and foreign investment. As Thembani highlighted in previous chapters, factories will actively seek regions with lower union participation. This actively contributes to the silencing and alienation of the clothing and textile worker that Marx underlined over 200 years ago. Unionization is essential because it gives agency to the clothing producers and allows for

²⁶⁸ Vlok, Etienne. “The Textile and Clothing Industry in South Africa” *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (2006)

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Ankita, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

²⁷¹ Interview with Mavo, SACTWU shop steward. June 2014.

a progression towards a more stable supply chain. The fact that they are being suppressed contributes directly to the perpetuation of the industry's exploitative environment. Unions should be given more power to voice themselves at the governmental level, helping to shape industry policy. Union voices are needed to ensure that initiatives towards better conditions are a reflection of worker needs, and not what company owners or legislators see as their needs.

3.8 Conclusion

According to Buchholz's Marxist-related belief system, "workers are exploited and alienated from the productive activity [...] to overcome this tradition, workers should be given more say as to what goes on in corporations and exercise more control over the workplace."²⁷² Even though both private and public regulation are necessary to ensure a more just clothing industry supply chain, it is unionization that guarantees that these actors are working towards improving conditions for workers, and not advancing their own agendas. Unionization gives agency to the worker, and along with enforced legislation from governments and effective private regulation from multinationals, can make a difference in the global, increasingly fast-paced fashion industry. However, the sheer persistence of the exploitative conditions in the industry underline the need for varied approaches to attempt to address the issues present in the industry. These varied approaches come in the form of different bodies acting to improve the industry, but also a recognition of the dual impact of globalization and gender, and specific measures to address the complex influence that both have on the worker, which is often overlooked.

²⁷² Hirschsohn, Philip "Union Democracy and Shopfloor Mobilization: Social Movement Unionism in South African Auto and Clothing Plants" *Economic and Industrial Democracy* Vol. 28 pp. 6-48 (2007)

In this way, the issues in the industry need to be better and more fully understood before attempting to tackle them.

Conclusion

Many of the clothing and textile industry's particular characteristics make it a uniquely exploitative industry. These characteristics include its gendered nature, its early adoption of outsourcing and global supply chains as industry norm, and its consumer-driven structure. These three characteristics act together, becoming enmeshed in one another and creating a cycle of exploitation that is increasingly difficult for the industry to escape. According to Stephanie Barrientos, "the ability of buyer-driven value chains to produce homogenous global products that sell for a high value on global markets arise from their ability to adapt to changing gender relations as an integral part of the functioning of the chain."²⁷³ Indeed, clothing and textile manufacturing is a prime example of an industry that is using and adapting its global functioning to rely upon women as a solution to the increasing pressures of the consumer.

This conversation surrounding the topic of clothing and textile manufacturing is not new, as Karl Marx was one of the first to highlight the issues particular to the industry that spur the ill-treatment of its workers over 200 years ago. More recently, in the fall of 1997, Duke University students were the initiators of a national student movement against sweatshops (SAS), specifically advocating for an adoption of a "code of conduct by which companies that manufactured Duke apparel and merchandise would have to abide."²⁷⁴ This code of conduct policy, proposed to university administration, set minimum wages and benefits, ensured a healthy and safe working environment for workers, prohibited

²⁷³ Barrientos, Stephanie. "Gender, Flexibility and Global Value Chains" *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2001)

²⁷⁴ Tedla, Aden. "Duke Students Campaign Against Sweatshops, 1997-1999" *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (2010)

forced labor, recognized employee rights to create a union and put forth a compliance monitoring program.²⁷⁵ Students organized a sit-in in the lobby of the president's office as members of SAS became "concerned that the administration would adopt a revised version of the code of conduct policy."²⁷⁶ After 31 hours, President Keohane agreed to uphold the original code of conduct, marking the end of the sit-in at Duke, but the beginning of similar ones at other universities throughout the country.

This episode in Duke's history underlines the persistence of the issue of human rights abuses in the clothing and textile industry. Karl Marx wrote about it, students were protesting 20 years ago, and I am writing my thesis on the topic today. The clothing and textile industry has a history of tenacious exploitation, which highlights the need for multiple and varied approaches to address the situation. The success of SAS, and the impact it has had on policy that is still in place at Duke today, underlines the impact that social movements and political organization can have. Although political mobilization has been deemphasized in recent years because of its seemingly ineffective nature, there are certain issues that cannot be solved any other way.

While there is no single clear-cut solution to the issues that plague the industry, government legislation and unionization, along with private regulation and ethical consumption, are key in the movement towards a fairer industry. The natural tendency in the United States is to look towards private regulation and ethical consumerism as the most effective means of implementing change. However, although some private efforts

²⁷⁵ Tedla, Aden. "Duke Students Campaign Against Sweatshops, 1997-1999" *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (2010)

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

have been successful, most are not large enough in scope and are lacking in compliance monitoring. Public legislation and institutional regulation, on the other hand, are crucial in the implementation of minimum wages, secure jobs and safe working conditions. Advocacy about industry issues in the public sphere and continuous policy changes in favor of workers have a powerful ability to be the top-down force in the movement towards a more just industry. Along with independently-functioning government institutions that regulate compliance, policy and politics are key in ensuring worker rights. Nonetheless, circumnavigation of government mandates is still an important issue to keep in mind as governments do continuously privilege corporate foreign investment over citizen rights. This underlines the importance of strong unions, which supplements and spurs government action, representing worker interests in both the public and private arenas.

However, unionization is not perfect. There are still improvements to be made within the unions, especially with regards to gender in the workplace. According to Wilma Dunaway, “in the second decade of the 21st century, feminists are still alarmed that the gendered questions at the heart of international political economy continue to be neglected.”²⁷⁷ In order to have the widest impact on the industry, unions need to recognize the effect that gendering has on the daily lives of the workers. At SACTWU, many of the shop stewards, elected union leaders and even union researchers (the department that I worked for) were men. Although they do acknowledge the number of women working in the industry, gender was not the focus of the working rights efforts. This is due to the “patriarchal logic of exclusion” that Dunaway highlights in her research. She argues that

²⁷⁷ Dunaway, Wilma. “Bringing Commodity Chain Analysis Back to its World-Systems Roots: Rediscovering Women’s Work and Households.” *American Sociological Association*. Vol. 20 No.1 pp. 64-81 (2014)

“men often fail to incorporate females into their research questions, even when women are impacted more severely (or differently) by the phenomenon being investigated.”²⁷⁸

Union work is concentrated on the effects of globalization, which is seen as the main reason for the low wages, unstable job terms and unsafe working conditions in the industry. Gender, on the other hand, is recognized but not taken into consideration enough when coming up with concrete solutions for union members.

I argue that unions need to take gender into account to have a deeper impact on the daily lives of the women in the industry. Understanding the unique effects that gendering has is crucial to be able to make more impactful improvements to the industry. Union action should therefore be taking into account both the forces of globalization and gender bias to achieve this goal. One of the main ways this could be achieved is by electing more female shop stewards and union officials. Men naturally fight for causes they are implicated in, most notably globalization’s impact on the industry. Women themselves are more aware of the particular issues that female workers face, and would be able to advocate for them more powerfully. SACTWU and other powerful industry unions should ensure that women are being represented by more female shop stewards to reflect the number of women that are in the industry. Unions have the ability to encourage female participation “at the bottom,” which can effect changes “at the top.”

Similarly, gender should also be taken into consideration when drafting both public and private regulation. Because of the overwhelming majority of men in managerial

²⁷⁸ Dunaway, Wilma. “Bringing Commodity Chain Analysis Back to its World-Systems Roots: Rediscovering Women’s Work and Households.” *American Sociological Association*. Vol. 20 No.1 pp. 64-81 (2014)

positions within corporations and male government majority, issues particular to women are often not taken into consideration. Efforts should be made within corporations' "codes of conduct" and government legislation and regulation to directly address gender discrimination and women's needs. Gender bias is present within unionization, but also public and private regulation, meaning that the actors working towards improving conditions are themselves overlooking a key aspect of why the industry is so uniquely exploitative. This makes it even harder to address gender issues in the workplace as the bodies working towards improvements are not addressing a key problem, contributing to the persistence of the industry's conditions.

In conclusion, the exploitative environment present in the clothing and textile industry is directly related to gender and globalization, and the unique way they overlap. Both gender discrimination and globalization pressure affect the wages, job terms and employment conditions of workers in the industry. This amalgamation of gender discrimination and globalization pressure are what make the conditions in clothing and textile factories so uniquely exploitative. The more recent addition of an increasing consumer-driven industry structure is also especially impactful on the workers at the manufacturing end of the value chain. However, unionization, along with public and private regulation, have the potential to be catalysts for change in the industry. To be most effective, unions, corporations and governments need to recognize the effect of gendering and make active decisions that take its effect into consideration.

Looking into the Future

As Anna Tsing highlighted, “women” are not one all-encompassing category, but a collection of narratives and systems.²⁷⁹ This paper has attempted to highlight how occurrences in South Africa are similar to, and representative of, others around the world. However, future research should take a closer look at the role that local race relations play in the clothing and textile industry, and how they intersect with both gender and globalization. Although race was mentioned generally as well as within the context of South Africa and apartheid, race relations vary greatly based on location. The differences and similarities between regions would be an interesting addition to the existing scholarship on women in the industry. Additionally, the impact of the informal sector on the clothing and textile industry specifically is of increasing relevance as production is moved outside of the traditional factory. Looking into this unique mode of production and its impact on the industry could add a layer to the existing research on women in the global work force.

²⁷⁹ Tsing, Anna. “Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection” *Princeton University Press*. (2005)

Appendix

If you would like to learn more about ethical shopping, fast fashion and where to find clothes you can feel good about purchasing, visit my website:

<http://sabrinatager.com/finalproject/finalindex.html>

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