

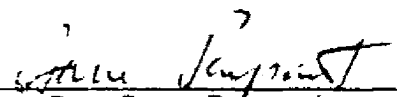
**WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: THE IMPLICATIONS OF  
A LESOTHO CASE STUDY FOR DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE**

©Allison Goebel

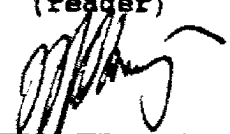
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree in  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the women of Mosebetsi, whose generosity and humour I'll never forget. It is for my two children, Jennifer and Adriane who still love me, and to Jane Parpart for her tireless work in getting my work presentable. Most of all it is for Marc Epprecht, my partner, who has grown with me through it all.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY  
MASTERS THESIS

**"WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: THE IMPLICATIONS  
OF A LESOTHO CASE STUDY FOR DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE"**

by Allison Goebel

**ABSTRACT:** Feminist inquiry has supported paid employment for women as an advancement from their economic dependence on men. Recent studies have questioned this, as employment does not always bring economic independence, or other advancements in status. Mainstream development practice (the World Bank) stresses export oriented industrialization, which often employs women, and entrepreneurship for employment creation. Thus it is crucial to understand the effects of employment on women.

In Chapter One, an historical account of the main strands of western feminist thought leads to the adoption of a socialist feminist perspective emphasizing capitalism and patriarchy and the importance of socio-economic, historical context. For women's employment, the two main influences are the labour market and the household. Chapter Two shows how the political economy of Lesotho is dominated by South Africa. An outline of the main socio-economic factors in Basotho women's lives reveals class and gender as major influences on women's experiences. For women's employment, both labour market forces and household structures are shaped by the regional political economy. While educated women enjoy good employment opportunities, poor rural women are at an extreme disadvantage in the formal labour market. Chapter Three examines a case study of a weaving business employing women in Lesotho. The women employed benefit in practical ways, but their strategic, long term needs are weakly promoted. The World Bank model of entrepreneurship for Lesotho is untenable, as it does not address Lesotho's dependence on South Africa. For the advancement of women, the development of capitalist businesses, even if they employ women, is a limited strategy. New models of radical structural change are needed.

# **WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: THE IMPLICATIONS OF A LESOTHO CASE STUDY FOR DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Women and employment is a primary concern of feminist enquiry of all theoretical stripes, in all geographical locations. Employment is the major form of making a living in industrialized countries of the 'East' and 'West', and increasingly important in Third World or 'developing' countries.

Broadly defined, feminism is about the advancement of women from a disadvantaged position compared to men in society. Women's disadvantaged position has many aspects including lack of political power, discrimination before the law, vulnerability to violence, less leisure, and a lower living standard than men. Feminists often argue that women's relative lack of economic independence underpins their inferior position in most societies. Hence, women and employment is a crucial concern of feminist thought and action.

Both in industrialized and developing contexts, questions have been asked about barriers to women's inclusion in the formal labour market, including employer discrimination, discriminatory laws, and social or cultural norms. Many feminist also ask questions about obstacles at the level of the household, including the sexual division of labour and

male resistance to their female partner's employment outside the household.

Underlying these types of questions is the assumption that gaining employment will advance women's status, because earning an income will give women some economic power on which to base more independence from men. Studies in the last decade or so have shown that this assumption itself must be investigated. The impact employment has on an individual women's status and well-being is determined by different factors in different contexts. In some cases, a woman will gain economic and personal freedom through employment. In other cases, a woman may earn money, but lack personal control over how it is spent. In still other cases, women may enter relationships on the job that are even more exploitative than those in the household, for example, through super exploitation of their labour, and/or sexual harassment by male superiors. What has emerged from feminist enquiry, therefore, is the need to problematize employment itself, and make its impact a focus of study.

Many of these new insights have come from cross-cultural studies, particularly studies on, and/or by, women in socialist and Third World contexts. As such, these new insights are particularly relevant to development studies, especially concerns with women and development.

A focus on women and employment in the Third World is also important because of recent trends in mainstream

development discourse and practice. The World Bank/ International Monetary Fund approach to Third World development in the 1980's and early 1990's has not only featured macro-economic policies of Structural Adjustment, but also micro-economic policies of enterprise development. The latter is seen as providing capital accumulation and investment to promote economic growth, as well as employment for the large numbers of un- and underemployed persons. What are the implications of these policies for women in Third World contexts? Will employment opportunities be available to them? If they are, how will employment affect women's well-being and status? These questions must be examined in light of a larger evaluation of the World Bank/ IMF strategy for 'recovery' in the Third World.

This thesis addresses these questions with a particular focus on Lesotho, a small country totally surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Chapter One outlines a history of feminist thought, building towards a conceptual framework for the study of women and employment in Third World contexts. Chapter Two focuses on Lesotho, looking first at the general picture of the political economy in historical and regional context, and then focusing on women in Lesotho, with particular attention to the context for women and employment. Chapter Three deals with a case study of a weaving business employing women in Lesotho. This enterprise is examined in light of the World Bank model for development, and for what it



reveals about the impact of employment on women in the particular context of rural Lesotho. Implications for development theory and practice are drawn out.

**CHAPTER ONE. Developing a Theoretical Framework: A Short History of Feminist Perspectives, and their Emergence in Development Literature and Practice.**

**INTRODUCTION**

There is no single theoretical position called "feminism". Indeed, some feminist scholars have categorized feminist thought into four main approaches:<sup>1</sup> liberal feminism, marxism or marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism.<sup>2</sup> Some feminist scholars dislike this categorization<sup>3</sup>, and there are several problems associated with it. For example, categorizing can obscure the fact that the approaches are not entirely mutually exclusive. Socialist feminism, for example, draws on all three perspectives, promoting some strategies for change that coincide with the other approaches, while still retaining a unique perspective in other ways. Strict categorization can also blur

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<sup>1</sup>. These divisions are used, for example, by Jagger (1983/1987), Jaquette (1982), and Bandarage (1984), and Stamp (1989).

<sup>2</sup>. Rosemarie Tong, (1989), in Feminist Thought, A Comprehensive Introduction. Boulder: Westview Press, expands these categories to eight, which is perhaps more useful in a focus strictly on feminist thought, rather than in a concern for Third World development:

Feminism, like most broad-based philosophical perspectives, accomodates several species under its genus. No short list could be exhaustive, but many, although by no means all, feminist theorists are able to identify their approach as essentially, liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytical, socialist, existentialist, or postmodern. (p. 1)

<sup>3</sup>. Angela Miles disagreed with this in a Guest Lecture at Saint Mary's University, March 20, 1991.

acknowledgment of how change occurs within each broad category which discounts some of the grounds for the divisions. Some in the liberal feminist category, for example, which has traditionally focused on promoting the equality of women in the public spheres of work, law and politics, are expanding into the so-called "private" issues of the relations within the household, especially the personal politics of the organization of housework in households with a working women, issues usually associated with a radical feminist perspective (Bandarage, 1984: 495). In this same vein, radical feminists are often characterized in an oversimplistic fashion, to some extent misrepresenting, their arguments in order to more easily dismiss them.

Despite these drawbacks, the categorization of scholarship on women into liberal feminism, marxism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism is adopted here, as it still helps to distinguish between feminisms with fundamentally different conceptual and strategic difference. The relevant contributions of feminist postmodernism will also be discussed. A definition and critique of liberal feminism is especially important, as much of contemporary feminist theory "defines itself in reaction against traditional liberal feminism" (Tong, 1989: 2). This is especially true for socialist feminism, which provides the framework for this thesis.

This chapter will trace the main elements of these four

approaches and how they emerge (or not) in development literature and practice. Their relevance for the study of women and employment is discussed in the socialist feminist section, which also presents the analytical framework for the analysis of the case study in the following chapter.

#### **LIBERAL FEMINISM AND THE LIBERAL TRADITION**

**Historical Development.** Liberal philosophy emerged with the growth of capitalism. The central value is the inherent equality of all men. Women wondered almost from the beginning why the new egalitarianism was not extended to them (Jagger, 1983: 27). For example, in 1700 Mary Astell wrote on marriage:

If absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State how comes it to be so in a Family?... If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born slaves? (Jagger, 1983: 27).

As Jagger states:

Liberal feminism has always been a voice, though one that often has gone unheard, throughout the 300-year history of liberal political theory (1983: 27).

This liberal feminist voice has always fought for equality with men under liberal ideals. The central liberal argument is that humans are separated from animals by their capacity to reason, and that since all men have this capacity and they should have political rights, regardless of their station in life. Further, although liberals differ on how they define reason, most agree that

a just society allows individuals to exercise their autonomy and to fulfill themselves (Tong, 1989: 11).

Hence there is a focus on individual rights to pursue personal goals, as long as this does not hurt other people.

The liberal feminists argue that women, like men, have the capacity to reason, a capacity which is of the mind, not the body, and hence uninhibited by women's different biology. If women act irrationally it is because of their psychological training or socialization, and their lack of exposure to education and public life, not some "natural" quality inherent to their sex (Jagger, 1983: 35-38). They also have the right to personal autonomy and self-fulfillment under the liberal ideal. That is, women should not be defined as objects, or functions, but as persons, like men (Tong, 1989: 16).

**Liberal Feminism in the 18th Century: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Argument for Women's Education.**

In the classic A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), Wollstonecraft adopted the liberal celebration of reason over emotion, arguing that women needed the same education as men to develop rationality. Women needed this rationality both because they would perform their roles as wives, daughters and mothers better, and because it was their right as human beings to be allowed to develop their full capacities. She did not question the value of traits traditionally associated with men, specifically, rationality, and was not much concerned with economic or civil equality. Her focus was on personhood, that is, the ability for women to

make autonomous decisions in an objective, non-emotional way, within the home, gained through an education for girls that was the same as for boys (Tong, 1989: 14-18).

**Liberal Feminism in the 19th Century.** John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Civil Rights and Economic Opportunities.

Since his early intellectual life in the 1820's Mill felt women should have equality in social and political life. This feminism was grounded in his concept of utility, that is, in the interest of the progression of mental and moral capacities which leads to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Through his experiences with intellectual women, and especially Harriet Taylor, Mill learned that some women were unhappy because of their exclusion from educational and occupational opportunities, and oppressed by unfair marriage and divorce laws. Mill held that women's intellectual and moral inferiority was caused by this unequal treatment, not by something inherent in their nature, and it was detrimental for husbands and for the quality of the whole society (Okin, 1979: 202-219). In his most comprehensive statement of his views on women, "The Subjection of Women" (1869) Mill wrote:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes -- the legal subordination of one sex to the other -- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality... (Mill, 1869, in Colloni, (ed), 1989: 119).

Mill rejected the prevalent view that women had inherently different intellectual and moral capacities to men, citing the achievements of great women as proof of their potential, and

pointing out that the enforced absorption of women in trivial things could not help but trivialize women's minds (Okin, 1979: 219-224).

J.S. Mill thought that women should be free to make the choice between wifedom and motherhood, on the one hand, and a working career on the other, but did not think it possible or desirable, to combine the two, unless the woman was able to organize the performance of domestic duties by allocation, ie servants (Mill, 1869, in Collini, (ed), 1989: 164-165). Although definitely an advance over Wollstonecraft, Mill did not question the role of the woman as a mother, that is, extending the parental role of the father to fill the vacuum left by a working wife (Tong, 1989: 17-22).

Harriet Taylor, who had a long standing intellectual relationship with J.S. Mill, and who eventually married him, shared many aspects of Mill's feminism, but was more radical. She felt, for example, that rather than force women to choose between a career and housewife, it was 'psychologically vital' for a woman to work outside the home. This was the only way for a woman to be a partner, not a servant of her husband. Taylor, revealing the middle class nature of her position, assumed that servants would care for the house and children while the mother worked (Tong, 1989: 17-22).

#### **Liberal Feminism in the 20th Century**

Liberal feminism in the 20th century is well illustrated by the American writer/activist Betty Friedan. Friedan's

path-breaking book, The Feminine Mystique (1963), called on women to leave the prison of the home for the workforce, in the interest of themselves and their families, a position very close to that of Harriet Taylor's. Post war American society defined a role for women, said Friedan, that crushed their individual potential as full human beings, the main human right as defined by liberal theory outlined above. This role, the feminine mystique, confined women's activities to the house, husband and children:

They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights -- the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for... The American housewife -- freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment (Friedan, 1963: 16; 18).

By the 1960's the unhappiness of suburban housewives made its way into the popular press: their depressions, their 'psychological illnesses', their bizarre sexual appetites, or tranquilized stupors. This "problem with no name" as Friedan put it, was interpreted by male doctors and psychologists as women's failure to cope with their female identity. For Friedan, the feminine mystique was crushing women's creative potential:

The feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive. There is no way for these women to break out of their comfortable concentration camps except by finally putting forth an effort... to break out of the housewife trap and truly find fulfillment as wives and mothers -- by



fulfilling their own unique possibilities as separate human beings (Friedan, 1963: 336-7).

The only way to find this fulfillment, was the same for women as for men: through creative work, or a job that was equal to her capabilities (Friedan, 1963: 344-5). While recognizing that women could face blockages from husbands and social pressure from other women, she felt these could be overcome.

The most important strategy seen by Friedan was the availability of higher education for women:

The key to the trap is, of course, education. The feminine mystique has made higher education for women seem suspect, unnecessary and even dangerous. But I think that education, and only education, has saved, and can continue to save, American women from the greater dangers of the feminine mystique (Friedan, 1963: 357).

Women face both external blockages to education through discrimination, and internal blocks such as emotional barriers against ambition. Educators had a duty to work on abolishing both these barriers, the former not only through ceasing discriminatory practices against women, but also in developing part time graduate programmes, and nurseries on campus (Friedan, 1963: 367-374). Although women should not expect special treatment, there is a need for changes in some of the rules, such as maternity leave, nurseries, and so on, so that women

will not have to sacrifice the right to honourable competition and contribution anymore than they will have to sacrifice marriage and motherhood... with a vision to make a new life plan of her own, she can fulfill a commitment to profession and politics, and to marriage and motherhood with equal seriousness (Friedan, 1963: 375).

In sum, Friedan advocated a dual career for women: both home and family, and a career outside the home. She focused mainly on the personal psychological barriers that women have in opting for this fuller life plan, and on the discriminatory barriers women face in the male dominated work and education world.

In 1981, Friedan's The Second Stage recognizes some of the difficulties women face in trying to have two careers. The new generation of women trying to "live the equality we fought for" (Friedan, 1981: 15) are having a hard time dealing with issues such as lack of child care, and with new images of women that are nearly as suffocating as the old feminine mystique:

the equality we fought for isn't livable, isn't workable, isn't comfortable in the terms that structured our battle (Friedan, 1981: 40).

Whether women are to trying juggle two careers of home and work, be single parents, or live independently of men, there is a new dissatisfaction, like the old "problem with no name", emerging in the minds of American women. Friedan argues especially against the radical sexual politics of some feminists who focus their anger on men as an oppressive group, opting for isolation from men, rather than working for genuine equality with men (Friedan, 1981: 50). Rather than a politics that divides women from other women, and women from men, we need new ideas, Friedan argues, on how

to achieve the new human wholeness that is the promise of feminism, and get on with solving the

concrete, practical, everyday problems of living, working and loving as equal persons (Friedan, 1981: 41).

What is needed, is change both in the family and in the workplace:

Women's new experience has to lead to further questions to create new standards at home and at work that permit a more human and complete life not only for themselves but also for men (Friedan, 1981: 80).

Men need the emotional development that comes through caring for children and other domestic tasks, while both men and women would benefit from a more human concept of work; one that allows for the demands of family life. The new feminist movement must thus also be a men's movement; rather than a movement focused solely on the rights of women it must be a movement by men and women for a more human society.

In North America, the biggest women's organizations are led by liberal feminists, working against gender stereotyping, and discrimination, especially in the law, politics, and the workplace. Following the liberal feminist tradition, they feel biological sex should not affect the development of psychological traits (Tong, 1989: 28-31).

Clearly, liberal feminism has historically been a voice for equality between the sexes under the liberal ideals and the capitalist system. It critiques neither liberalism nor capitalism. It simply demands that liberalism place women on the same footing as men. It accepts the fact that

Liberalism believes in the inherent viability and goodness of the dominant politico-economy and

ideological structures, namely, the capitalist system. While it recognizes the social inequalities and injustices within the status quo, it sees them as mere aberrations that can gradually be rectified through legal procedures and attitudinal changes (Bandarage, 1984: 495).

From the liberal feminist perspective, the subordination of women is an "aberration", which can largely be rectified by getting women out of the domestic sphere of the household and into public life as equals with men. As a result, liberal feminist strategy focuses on legal measures, equal rights, affirmative action and attitudinal change for both women and men (Bandarage, 1984: 495).

While critiques of liberal feminism can be devastating, (and these will be examined in subsequent sections), it is important to keep in mind that

Feminism owes a great deal to liberalism. Indeed, it owes so much that some Marxists characterize feminism as an essentially bourgeois phenomenon (Jagger, 1983: 47).

It is held here that feminism is more than a preoccupation of bourgeois white women; the roots of feminism in the rise of liberalism, and the continued importance of liberal feminists' contribution to the advancement of women, should neither be ignored nor underestimated:

Liberal feminism is by no means passe... We owe to liberal feminism many, if not most, of educational and legal reforms that have improved the quality of life for many women... such reforms are to be neither trivialized nor memorialized as past accomplishments. Liberal feminists still have much work to do... (Tong, 1989: 38).

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, some groups of liberal

feminists are changing, expanding their analysis, for example, to include some acknowledgment of the influence of race and class on women's experience, and the need to change some large social and psychological structures, not just pursue the individual liberation of each woman (Tong, 1989: 38).

#### **LIBERAL FEMINISM AND DEVELOPMENT: WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT--**

**WID** In the last 25 years, the field of development theory has blossomed. The dominant modernization approach emerged only to be critiqued by structuralist dependency theorists in the 1950's and 1960s (starting with Prebisch in the late 1940's and the ECLA school), and by both Marxists and liberal reformers in the 1970s. Feminist critiques also emerged in the 1970s. In this section the liberal modernization view, and its liberal feminist critique are discussed.

The modernization approach to Third World development characteristic of the decolonization period after World War II believed development was a transition from traditional, pre-industrial societies to modern societies like those in the western capitalist world. Societies were expected to evolve through different stages driven by essentially internal sources of change (Roxborough, 1979: 19). W.W. Rostow formulated a model of stages of growth that was central in the development of liberal modernization theory. The model outlined the steps of growth that the economic, social, and political systems of developing countries had to go through

before they would "take off" into selfsustaining economic growth and capital accumulation (Rostow, 1959: 1-7).

In the early 1970's liberal reformers critiqued modernization theory, seeking to reform it to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor. Alarm at economic recession, the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, intensifying political repression, increasing mass poverty, resource depletion, and the devastating impact of natural disasters on Third World countries, caused many liberal development thinkers to discard the unlimited growth model of modernization and develop new models of growth with equity, and basic needs strategies (Hoogvelt, 1982: 120-133; Wilber, 1984: 10-13).<sup>4</sup> Fairer terms of international trade, or a New International Economic Order (NIEO) were called for. The focus on poverty and basic needs penetrated institutions such as the World Bank in the 1970's.<sup>5</sup> The North-South Reports by Willy Brandt in 1980 and 1983 are a continuation of this approach into the 1980s. The focus in the 1980s and 1990s on structural adjustment and debt servicing has been called a "counter-revolution" for its rejection of this human faced development approach (Toye, 1987: 66).

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<sup>4</sup>. See for example, Hollis Chenery, ed, (1974), Redistribution with Growth. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup>. For a look at how this new perspective penetrated the big multilateral institutions, see the World Bank, (1974), Redistribution with Growth, and ILO, (1976), Employment, Growth and Basic Needs.

This critique of modernization was not feminist, or much concerned with women. However, the early 1970s also saw a liberal feminist critique of modernization development theory. Later in the decade, a more radical feminist critique emerged that came to be known as socialist feminism, or feminist political economy (Stamp, 1989: 10) For the present purpose, the mainstream modernization view of women will be discussed, followed by an outline of the liberal feminist critique of this view, the WID school.

### **Women in Modernisation Theory**

The dominant theory of Third World development as held by key institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), continues to be liberal modernization theory. Development is defined as the pursuit of the westernization of the economic, political and social institutions. On Africa, Patricia Stamp writes:

At one end of the spectrum are many African governments, Western governments, and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, who believe that Africa's problem is a lack of modernism in all its aspects, that integration into the world economy is the route to development, and that any policies or societal structures that prevent such wholesale integration are obstacles to progress (Stamp, 1989: 9).

For this dominant view, women are thought to benefit as an automatic result of modernizing changes:

It was assumed that the norm of the male experience was generalizable to females and that all would benefit equally as societies increasingly became modernized

(Rathgeber, 1990: 491).

Through, for example, participation in employment, and the benefits of modern health care, women are expected to become more equal to men. The fact that women lag behind in participating in development, and hence do not appear to reap the benefits men do is seen as "backward" and "irrational" behaviour caused by the traditional societies that are patriarchal and oppressive to women. Modern society is egalitarian by contrast. Development policy is hence "sex neutral" as is the process of modernization itself (Jaquette, 1982: 269).

The first feminist critique of this model of development came from a liberal feminist perspective. The publication of Ester Boserup's Women's Role in Economic Development in 1970 marked the beginning of the development of what is known as the WID school, or the women in development school. Boserup pointed out that contrary to the assertions of modernization theory, women had not benefited equally from development in the Third World, because the process itself was sex-biased.

Boserup argued that the process of modernization necessarily changed sex roles, endangering women's traditional status based on productive functions, and slowing down the whole development process:

Economic and social development unavoidably entails the disintegration of the division of labour among the two sexes traditionally established in the village. With modernization of agriculture and with migration to the towns, a new sex pattern of productive work must emerge, for better or worse.



The obvious danger is, however, that in the course of this transition women will be deprived of their productive functions, and the whole process of growth will thereby be retarded (Boserup, 1970: 5).

Boserup looks at women's roles in farming, focusing especially on Africa where "female farming systems" are common, noting how changes in technical aspects of farming, such as the introduction of the plough, puts stress on sex roles (Boserup, 1970: 35), usually to women's disadvantage:

It is usually the men who learn to operate the new types of equipment while women continue to work with the old hand tools... the productivity gap [between men and women] tends to widen (Boserup, 1970: 53).

Men also tended to do cash cropping, while women were left to grow food crops, leading to a decreased status of women in agriculture.

Boserup places the blame for these development on colonial officials who assumed that men were 'naturally' better farmers than women, and hence channelled technical assistance and training to African men:

European settlers, colonial administrators and technical advisers are largely responsible for the deterioration in the status of women in agricultural sectors of developing countries. It was they who neglected the female agricultural labour force when they helped to introduce modern commercial agriculture to the overseas world and promoted the productivity of male labour (Boserup, 1970: 53-54).

When women resisted these changes, they were considered by colonial officials as obstacles to development (Boserup, 1970: 64).

Boserup also looked at women in towns, stating that the

overwhelming bias of employers was to hire men, creating almost a cultural gap between the sexes, rendering women unfit for the modern world:

When jobs in modern industry, modern trade, and in offices are held exclusively or overwhelmingly by men, the productivity, attitude and outlook of men and women begin to diverge, just as we found happening when commercial farming replaced subsistence agriculture; men become familiar with modern equipment and learn to adapt themselves to modern ways of life, while women continue in the old ways (Boserup, 1970: 139).

Poor job opportunities in towns meant women were pressured into prostitution, or families were split up when males migrated to towns while women stayed in the country (Boserup, 1970: 192). Boserup argued that employment for women in towns would not exacerbate unemployment, but promote rural development by keeping some of the literate men in the villages to spearhead modernizing changes there (Boserup, 1970: 200).

Essentially, Boserup argued for the recognition of women's economic roles in Third World countries, and an historical understanding of how women had been discriminated against by foreign colonizers. She suggested that women's marginalization from the development process was a drag on the efficiency of the process itself, and therefore women should be integrated into development not only in the interest of equity, but in the interest of the success of economic growth and modernization.

This WID perspective took hold in the United Nations, and

was the driving force behind the launching of the UN Decade for Women in 1975. It has also gained the interest of the World Bank and USAID, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women in the academic community (Bandarage, 1984: 496). In 1973 the Percy Amendment was passed in the United States congress, which required all development projects of USAID to consider their impact on women. Since 1976 USAID has had a women and development office (Jaquette, 1982: 267).<sup>6</sup>

The approach is compatible with the early 1970s shift in World Bank policy to a focus on poverty and basic needs, as it was becoming increasingly obvious that the benefits of development did not 'trickle down' as efficiently as expected:

By 1973, the Bank had become acutely aware that many millions of people were neither contributing significantly to economic growth nor sharing equitably in its benefits (World Bank, 1975a: 5).

The Bank linked its new poverty approach explicitly to a new consideration of women:

[the focus on poverty] has inevitably led to a far more explicit consideration of the role of women in economic and social development than had been the case in the past (World Bank, 1975a: 5).

The booklet published by the World Bank in 1975 based on a

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<sup>6</sup>. For the continued 'paper' commitment to WID policy see the following commissioned reports for the World Bank and USAID:  
Buvinic and Nieves, (1982), "Elements of women's economic integration: Project indicators for the World Bank", report prepared for the World Bank, Office of the Adviser on Women in Development . Mimec.  
Dixon, (1980), "Assessing the impact of development projects on women," A.I.D. Evaluation Discussion Paper, no. 8.

paper prepared for the United Nations World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City concludes:

The need to recognize and support the role of women in development is an issue which the World Bank considers of great importance for itself and its member governments. The Bank expects to participate to an increasing extent in the efforts of those governments to extend the benefits of development to all of their population, women as well as men, and thus to ensure that so large a proportion of the world's human resources is not underutilized (World Bank, 1975a: 29).

The dual concern of equity and efficiency is clear, matching Boserup's themes.

In 1989, the World Bank published its first country study on women in development. The perspective of 1975 is virtually unchanged:

Kenya's approaches to women in development seem particularly effective not only in improving equity but also in increasing economic productivity of women (World Bank, 1989a: xi).

The WID approach is accepted by western development planners also because it does not challenge western sexual stereotypes, especially the sexual division of labour. While calling for new productive roles for women, women's responsibility for reproductive labour is never questioned (Parpart, 1989: 4). The approach never questions the structure of women's subordination:

This nonconfrontational approach avoided questioning the sources and nature of women's subordination and oppression and focussed instead on advocacy for more equal participation in education, employment and other spheres of society (Rathgeber, 1990: 491).

The United Nations Decade for Women ended in 1985, with

the World Conference on Women in Nairobi in July of that year. It was a forum for the voices of many different groups of women, not all liberal, or even explicitly feminist.<sup>7</sup> However, the document that came out of the 1985 conference, the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (FLS), is decidedly a WID document, showing the underlying liberal perspective of the United Nations. Maureen O'Neil, then Canada's representative on the UN Status of Women Commission, outlines the views promoted by the FLS, which was a document member governments were to adopt voluntarily as a guideline for policy on women:

the full participation and integration of women in all areas of society is crucial... the role of women in the economy, the participation of women in high-level decisionmaking, and the importance of the involvement of women in working for peace are broad areas in which advancement of the status of women is needed (O'Neil, 1986: 19-20).

Bilateral agencies such as Canadian government's International Development Agency (CIDA), have followed (if slowly), the lead of USAID and the Percy Amendment. Canada adopted a WID policy in 1984, requiring all proposed development projects to analyze their impact on women. In its 1987 policy statement, CIDA states:

A country can not hope to prosper if half its resources -- its women -- are neglected and ignored... CIDA supports projects developed by and for women... especially at the grassroots level. The aim is to empower women to build better lives,

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<sup>7</sup>. For example, DAWN, a socialist feminist Third World women's collective participated, as well as groups of Islamic women, and radical American feminists.

to take part in and to benefit more fully from the wider development process (CIDA, 1987: 43).

The theme of empowerment and its potential contradictions for a WID position will be discussed below.

In the academic literature on development, material on women and development, including that in the WID perspective has mushroomed since the early 1970s, mirroring the growth of Women's Studies in Western Universities. The WID perspective has become increasingly sophisticated (see Buvinic, 1986, for example). The focus is on data collection (what women do and experience)<sup>8</sup>, and project design, most recently on income generating projects. For projects, the concern is to establish the gender division of labour in a project area and to determine how women can both benefit most from the project and be most beneficial to the project. Both the roles of women and men at community level, and effects of external forces, such as legal systems, job opportunities and economic climate are considered (Overholt, et al, 1985: 4-5). Again, the dual concerns of equity and efficiency are the hallmark of the perspective:

equity and economic growth are compatible objectives and must be pursued simultaneously (Overholt, et al, 1985: 4).

In spite of its apparent acceptance by the World Bank, the

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<sup>8</sup>. See for example, Krishna Ahooja Patel, (1991), "Gender Distance Among Countries", which uses statistics on infant and maternal mortality, education, participation in employment, and other indicators to develop an Index of Women's Advancement (IWA) to measure the relative well being of women in different countries.

UN, and bilateral aid institutions, the WID perspective is still marginal to mainstream development thought. WID offices are chronically underfunded,<sup>9</sup> and concerns with women in the context of the broader organizations are always a low priority:

Although there has been much activity, development planning efforts still fail to recognize fully women's actual potential contribution to the development process or the effect of the development process on them (Overholt, et al, 1985: 3).

Projects in the 1980's still frequently failed to consider their impact on women (Rathgeber, 1990: 495-8).<sup>10</sup>

The failure of the WID perspective to significantly change the approach of the large development institutions results partly from the fact that WID projects operate within the broader context of development institutions run by men unwilling to allocate funds to women's projects, especially productive women's projects:

Behind this resistance are the actual and perceived costs and benefits to men-based development agencies (and related social institutions) of welfare versus productive action for poor women in the Third World (Buvinic, 1986: 659).

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<sup>9</sup>. Staudt (1990) estimates that 3.5% UN projects benefit women, and that WID projects receive .2% of budget allocations; less than 1% of FAO projects have strategies to reach women; UNIFEM has an annual budget of \$5 million, while its host, UNDP's budget is \$700 million; while the total transfers of USAID are \$4 billion annually, WID has had a budget around 1/3 million, reaching a high point one year of \$3 million. (Staudt, 1990: 9).

<sup>10</sup>. See, for example, Jennie Dey, (1981), "Gambian Women: Unequal Partners in Rice Development Projects?".

The big aid institutions have not moved far from a poverty, welfare approach to women, their main aim still being fertility reduction, rather than the promotion of economic equality (Buvinic, 1989: 1048). Furthermore, not only do male development officials resist a change that may take resources away from projects for men in the Third World, but they also fear changes in gender relations in their own professional lives (Buvinic, 1986: 660; Staudt, 1990: 10). Very few men are involved in research on women, showing that it has not yet become a fully legitimate areas of study in the eyes of male academics and development planners (Rathgeber, 1989: 29).

Bureaucracies characteristically resist change, constraining the choices and opportunities, especially for small groups, within them:

The argument that organizations will somehow be altered simply by virtue of recruiting women into them is... fallacious (Ferguson, 1984: ix).

Ferguson argues further that feminist organizations can not be "bureaucratic or they cease to be feminist" (p. 211), as they can not stay connected to the grassroots or be sufficiently decentralized. Coming from the development angle, it can also be said that a Western bureaucratic aid institution meets with serious internal constraints in truly serving the Third World poor. WID as an entrenched part of Western development bureaucracy is weakly linked with the "grassroots"-- ie poor Third World women-- being about poor women, but not a force of them (Bandarage, 1984: 500; Himmelstrand, 1990: 112). This is



one of the reasons for the disappointing results of the Women's Decade which has seen only worsening conditions for Third World women, not significant improvements (Bandarage, 1984: 499). Perhaps the best way aid organizations can promote the empowerment of women is through support of grassroots women's organizations (Himmelstrand, 1990: 112).

The main contributions of WID have been in expanding the concept of work to include informal sector activities and domestic labour, illuminating women's economic roles in the Third World, for example their predominant role in farming in Africa, and the unveiling of the Euro-centric gender bias in development planning and colonial history. The WID school has produced excellent data on women's activities in the Third World, from producers to heads of households, good data on education, law, housing, and health conditions, and has demonstrated the disproportionate poverty of women (Bandarage, 1984: 497). At a more general level, it has helped to question the 'trickle down' theory of the equalizing benefits of the 1950s and 1960s school of modernization (Kandiyoti, 1990: 6).

The main point of the WID specialists is that women have been "left out" of the development process. The main strategies then are removing the barriers to women's inclusion in the process, seen as "male discrimination and male domination of the cultural, political and economic values in society" (Jaquette, 1982: 272). Women must be given equal

education, job opportunities, and must not be bypassed by services such as agricultural extension, credit schemes or training programmes:

The objective of the WID school is to spread the benefits of modernization, the Western development model in particular, to women. This they hope to accomplish by the fuller integration through legal measure and changes in attitudes (Bandarage, 1984: 498).

These objectives are sought in the interest of fairness as well as in the interest of efficiency and greater productivity. These concerns echo liberal feminist thinking since Wollstonecraft. By ignoring women in development planning, a huge well of untapped potential is being wasted which could help propell developing countries into the modern world.

As with liberal feminism generally, the WID school does not critique the capitalist system:

As a distinct blend of Modernization theory and liberal feminism it assumes that all women can be liberated with the capitalist world system (Bandarage, 1984: 496).

It is essentially integrationist and additive, calling for no substantive change in the modernization concept of development. As with liberal feminism generally, some of the findings of the WID school, if taken to their logical conclusions, lead to a different, more radical perspective on women's oppression and on strategies for change. For example, by documenting women's economic activity in the Third World, it becomes increasingly difficult to call for women's

integration into the development process. Clearly, they are already integrated, only in a disadvantaged fashion. To think that women can be more fairly integrated at a higher level of the system without fundamentally challenging the system itself is also open to question as more and more people fall into poverty under the capitalist system, not only in the Third World, but also in the western industrialized countries (Bandarage, 1984: 499).

Another potential contradiction centres around the idea of empowerment of women. With the contemporary focus on crisis management through Structural Adjustment Plans (SAP)<sup>11</sup>, WID talks of women as 'managers of poverty'. This approach argues that women, through efficient use of resources and income generation, can be "empowered" for self sufficiency. However, difficulties are hidden behind the often vague definition of 'empowerment':

Behind the rather bland and uniform sounding recommendations to equip and empower poor Third World women, there may lie a wide range of frankly contradictory objectives from simply making women more efficient managers of poverty, to using their claims and organizations as a political vehicle for far-reaching redistributive measures, both within and across nations (Kandiyoti, 1990: 14).

In other words, WID's concern for empowerment of women and their organizations could lead to demands for structural change, not just liberal reforms, thus leading them out of the

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<sup>11</sup>. For the view of the International Monetary Fund see "The IMF's Compensatory and Contingency Financing Facility", Finance and Development, Dec. 1988: 9-11.

liberal paradigm itself. This tendency within liberal feminism has been noted above in the discussion of Betty Freidan's The Second Stage.

Furthermore, WID development groups are not homogenous, although their projects are strikingly similar, and groups vary in their objectives, particularly on whether or not they want to promote radical change through the empowerment of women (Kandiyoti, 1990: 19).

To conclude this section, the WID school is essentially liberal, it neither challenges world capitalism, nor the dominant view that Third World development entails the modernization, or westernization of developing countries. It seeks to integrate women into the development process for reasons of equity and efficiency. Bureaucratic inertia, and the male domination of aid institutions impedes the implementation of much WID policy. Despite this, much work done within the WID school, especially data collection, is important to feminists working on development issues from more radical positions, and, in some aspects, the WID perspective carried to its logical conclusions, leads to a more radical view on how to promote positive change for women in Third World countries.

#### **RADICAL FEMINISM**

Discontent among women in the New Left in the late 1960's led to the formation of autonomous women's groups within the

general category of left politics in North America (Sargent, 1981: xvii; Stamp, 1989: 16; Jagger, 1983: 83). Some groups stayed closely within the Marxist theoretical tradition, and were commonly called Marxist feminists. Another highly diverse set of groups has been called Radical feminist.

This loose category is most generally characterized by a nearly exclusive focus on patriarchy, or systematic male oppression of women, as the primary force of oppression behind all other forms such as race and class (Sargent, 1981: xx; Jagger, 1983: 84). Radical feminists often employ Marxist terms, but in a nonmarxist way (Stamp, 1989: 16). One of the most common examples of such usages is the conception of women as a class, first expressed by Firestone (1970):

the original and basic class division is between the sexes, and... the motive force of history is the striving of men for power and domination over women, the dialectic of sex (Hartmann, 1981: 13).

The elimination of patriarchy is seen as the primary 'revolutionary' goal, and women's autonomous groups as the best force to achieve this (Sargent, 1981: xxi).

Radical feminists insist that 'the personal is political', thus creating a political space for the so-called 'private' issues of personal relationships, especially gender relations (Stamp, 1989: 16). Concentrating on psychology, on analyses of divisions by sex in all aspects of life, for example in the media, medicine, the household and the workforce, and on sexual violence as in rape, pornography and wife and child abuse, radical feminists have made and continue

to make an important contribution to the understanding of contemporary western society (Hartmann, 1981: 14).

However, as a lens for understanding the experiences of women in other countries, especially in the Third World, or even the experience of women other than white, educated, middle class women in western society, radical feminism is inadequate on several accounts (Stamp, 1989: 16; Jagger, 1983: 84).

One of its main weakness as a useful cross-cultural theory, is its insistence that patriarchy is a universal aspect of all social systems, because men control most major institutions. (Hartmann, 1981, on Kate Millet: 14). As most societies fall into this general category, the theory does not help to distinguish between them (Hartmann, 1981: 14). By oversimplifying and universalizing male dominance, there is little room for understanding the diverse forms of women's subordination (Jagger, 1983: 84). Women's experience is essentialized on the basis of the lives of white western women. Stamp argues that radical feminism as an intellectual force has impeded progress on the understanding of women's subordination in the Third World (Stamp, 1989: 16).

This tendency towards a static formulation of women's oppression makes radical feminism both ethnocentric and ahistorical. Projecting current characteristics of patriarchal oppression into the past simply does not work, as conditions and manifestations of women's subordination have

changed over time (Hartmann, 1981: 14).

From a Marxist perspective, the main reason for these inadequacies is the lack of materialist analysis (Sargent, 1981: xxi; Hartmann, 1981: 12). By grounding women's experience in psychology and biology rather than in material conditions, not only do variations cross-culturally and historically escape the analysis, but a full understanding of the nature of western society is also unattainable;

materialist analysis demonstrates that patriarchy is not simply a psychic, but also a social and economic structure... our society can best be understood once it is recognized that it is organized both in capitalistic and patriarchal ways. While pointing out tensions between patriarchal and capitalist interests, we argue that the accumulation of capital both accomodates itself to patriarchal social structures and helps to perpetuate it (Hartmann, 1981: 3).

Inspite of these criticisms, radical feminism, with its insistent focus on patriarchal oppression of women, is an important force in the development of feminist thought, and has been crucial in the development of socialist feminism.

#### **RADICAL FEMINISM AND WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT--WAD.**

Some scholars, (for example Parpart, 1989: 9; Jaquette, 1982: 278-283), associate the trend of developing women-only projects, common especially among NGOs such as OXFAM and CARE, with a radical feminist perspective. This approach is often called 'women and development' or WAD. The thinking behind such projects is that men must be kept from interfering with, or reaping the benefits from, development projects meant to help women. This correlates with the radical feminist

preference for women- only groups, and separatism from men. While such projects may be appropriate in certain circumstances, they can also be easily marginalized, and fail to change anything in the broader society (Parpart, 1989: 9).

To conclude this section, the significance of radical feminism for the purposes of this thesis is in its contribution to the development of the socialist feminist perspective. Radical feminism has given dissatisfied feminist Marxists the basis on which to build a Marxist theory which understands the subordination of women as a gender not only as a product of capitalism, but also as a result of patriarchal oppression.

#### **MARXISM AND THE "WOMAN QUESTION"**

This is not a paper about Marxist theory, but on women and employment in the Third World; thus only a brief section is devoted to Marxism, mainly to show its contribution to the development of the socialist feminist or feminist political economy perspective.

Although Marx himself had little to say about women, Engels and Lenin both addressed the issue of the oppression of women in western society. But before tracing the traditional Marxist analysis of women in society, and its influence on contemporary feminist scholarship on the left, a brief look at Marxism as a social theory, radically different from liberalism in its conception of human nature and the nature of



historical change, is appropriate. This is important because socialist feminism adopts the historical materialist method of Marxism (Hartmann, 1981: 10).

Whereas liberal theory defines what is uniquely human as being the innate capacity to reason, Marxist theory defines the essentially human quality as the engagement in the production of the means of subsistence; that is, we are molded by the way we labour to meet our basic needs:

We create ourselves in the process of intentionally, or consciously, transforming and manipulating nature (Tong, 1989: 40).

Marx did not see this process as occurring only at the individual level, but at the level of society, where people act collectively to reproduce the society. The nature of that reproduction, that is, the material means through which a society meets its basic needs, the mode of production, shapes the individual:

the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (Marx, 1970: 182).

Hence the centrality of work in Marxist analysis.

Historical change or process is also determined, thought Marx, by the material conditions of a society. That is, the mode of production, the way in which needs are met in a society, and the relations of production, that is, how the production is organized, eventually leads to conflicts which

are the seeds of change:

At a certain state in their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production... Then begins an epoch of social revolution (Marx, 1970: 182).

Feminists drawing on the Marxist tradition agree with Marx that social existence determines consciousness, a theoretical position supporting the argument for the social construction of gender. Anything socially determined can undergo change: if there can be a class revolution, there can be a gender revolution, too. This theoretical position also leads leftist feminists to place great importance on analyzing women's work status and their related self image, that is, connecting women's poor self image to the low status of the work they usually perform either in the home or in the workplace (Tong, 1989: 40). The study of women and employment is hence a central topic of feminists on the left. Before examining further how feminists have used Marxism in feminist analyses, Engels' important study of women's oppression will be discussed.

In Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1885), Engels "showed how changes in the material conditions of people affect the organization of their family relations" (Tong, 1989: 47). Engels traced the historical development of the monogamous family, postulating that it was the creation of private property that caused men to want to control women's reproductive functions; it was only when men had property that

they were concerned about the paternity of children as they wanted legitimate heirs.

In primitive times, Engels argued, women had more status as "the absence of private property made men's productive work and women's household work of equal social significance" (Sacks, 1975: 214). Engels relates equality of status to social adulthood as defined by performing socially productive work (Sacks, 1975: 232).

When the domestication of animals became important, men controlled the animals, and the power shifted as men for the first time began to accumulate surplus wealth. According to Engels, male desire to transfer accumulated wealth to legitimate heirs, pushed men to seek greater control over the reproductive powers of women, which led to the development of the monogamous family. Previously, family forms were large extended groups, where domestic labour was more collective and therefore social, not private. The institution of the monogamous family, argued Engels, not only increased male control over individual women, but also privatized domestic work, leading to its loss of social status, and women's subsequent loss of social adulthood, and equality with men. For Engels,

The growth of male-owned private property, with the family as the institution that appropriates and perpetuates it, is the cause of this transformation (Sacks, 1975: 213.)

For Engels, the oppression of women is part of a pattern of exploitation inherent in the development of capitalist

accumulation:

Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others (Engels, 1975: 129).

However flawed and fragmentary the anthropological material may have been that Engels used, (Sacks, 1975: 211), his thesis opens the door to understanding gender relations as a socially constructed, historical process, not something permanent, natural, or biologically determined. Anthropological studies since Engels' time have indeed shown that gender relations vary cross-culturally and over time, confirming the relevance of a materialist approach to the analysis of gender (Sacks, 1975: 211).

Engels likened the relationship between a husband and wife in monogamous, bourgeois marriage, to that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Engels, 1975: 137) -- that is, essentially an exploitative relationship between one person who monopolizes the means of economic survival, the male bread winner, and the other (the wife), who has no option but to exchange her labour for her own economic survival.

For Engels, it was women's lack of economic independence that opened them to exploitation by men. The way to end this was to bring women out of the unpaid domestic sphere and into the work force. The monogamous family as an economic unit had to be abolished before men and women could come together

freely, out of love:

Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished (Engels, 1975: 137-8).

Engels also recognized the need to socialize domestic work, envisioning day nurseries, public kitchens and laundries to basically retire the need for the performance of domestic labour.

While serving as a starting point for feminist thinking on the left, several basic inadequacies have been pointed out in Engels' analysis. Engels assumed that marriage in proletarian families was born of free love, as first of all, there was no property to inherit, and second, proletarian women usually engaged in waged work along with men (Engels, 1975: 132). It is clearly not the case, either in the past or now, that women's waged activity precludes the subordination of the wife by the husband in working class families. Although, as Sacks suggests, Engels is right in a 'general way' that women are worse off in class and propertied societies, anthropological evidence shows that women are still subordinate in non-class and unpropertied societies. Female subordination also exists in societies where women own and inherit property. Thus, Engels' assertion that male ownership of property is the cause of social inequality of the genders must be questioned (Sacks: 1975: 220-229).

A more complete analysis of the causes of women's

universal subordination must look at the sexual division of labour, wherein women are responsible for most of the domestic work of maintaining and reproducing the family (Tong, 1989: 50-51; Sacks, 1975: 234). Engels paid only passing heed to the organization of reproduction in the family. He assumed that the role of women in performing housework and child care was 'original', based on the biological reproductive capacities of the female. But it is precisely women's responsibility for domestic work that favoured and continues to favour the predominance of men in the 'public' sphere of productive work, and the same sexual division of labour that legitimates the lower pay and opportunities of women who enter the paid labour force. In the latter case, as with Engels' proletarian family, social adulthood, won through a woman engaging in paid employment, does not lead to social equality (Sacks, 1975: 229-234). In other words, to end gender inequality, it is not enough to bring women into the public sphere of socially productive work: a change in the sexual division of labour within the domestic sphere is needed as well.

Feminists who have maintained Engels' focus on production, and women's relationship to the capitalist system, have tended to focus more on work issues than on relations between men and women:

Marxist theory appears to have little room for questions that deal directly with women's reproductive and sexual concerns (contraception, sterilization, and abortion; pornography,

prostitution, sexual harassment, rape, and women battering), and as a result Marxist Feminists have tended to focus on women's work-related concerns (Tong, 1989: 51).

They have looked at issues such as the connection between domestic work and capital accumulation (see Maria Mies, 1986), the denigration of domestic work, and segregation of the labour market.

One important debate within this line of thinking was the domestic labour debate, centred around Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1973). Dalla Costa, and others, argued for expanding the Marxist concept of productive work to include reproduction, as it also created surplus value for capitalist accumulators. She argued that women should get wages for housework on this basis, envisioning the arousal of class consciousness in housewives as they saw themselves more as a group of workers through this formalization of domestic work. As they unified as a class, they would struggle against the capitalist system which was what caused their oppression (Hartmann, 1981: 7-8; Tong, 1989: 54-56).

Other feminists working closely in the Marxist tradition have argued, more consistently with Engels, for the socialization of domestic work, focusing on women's exclusion from waged work as the source of their subordination (for example, Zaretsky, 1973).

The main concern of socialist feminists has been that this nearly exclusive focus on production and women's oppression under capitalism does not give enough consideration

to the fact that women's labour in the household supports male supremacy, and that the feminist struggle is against male values and power as well as against capitalism:

Engels, Zaretsky and Dalla Costa all fail to analyze the labor process within the family sufficiently. Who benefits from women's labor? Surely capitalists, but also surely men, who as husbands and fathers receive personalized services at home... Men have a higher standard of living than women in terms of luxury consumption, leisure time, and personalized services (Hartmann, 1981: 9).

Socialist feminists argue that women are systematically oppressed by men, above and beyond their oppression under the capitalist system. Patriarchal oppression "intersects only incompletely with capitalism" (Tong, 1989: 65), and therefore the institution of socialism will not lead to the dissolution of gender oppression. A direct focus on the system of patriarchy is needed.

As with liberal feminism within the broader liberal mainstream, a focus on women's oppression as outlined by Engels is not the mainstream within the Marxist position. The more common approach is compatible with V.I. Lenin's position.<sup>12</sup> Lenin saw the participation of women in the pursuit of communism as crucial to the revolution, supporting the full social equality of women (Zetkin, in Lenin, 1966: 97). But for Lenin this meant women should put aside any

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<sup>12</sup>. See the collection of Lenin's writings on women: The Emancipation of Women, with Preface by Nadezhda K. Krupskaya and Appendix "Lenin on the Woman Question" by Clara Zetkin. New York: International Publishers, 1966.



excessive interest in sex and marriage, which he thought a "bourgeois" preoccupation:

You must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between women's human social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will draw a strong, ineradicable line against the bourgeois movement for the 'emancipation of women'. This will also give us a basis for examining the woman question as part of the social, working-class question, and to bind it firmly with the proletarian class struggle and the revolution (Lenin as reported by Zetkin, in Lenin, 1966: 110).

This view of the role of women in socialist struggles, as held by the male leadership of revolutionary struggles, has been experienced by women not only in the Soviet Union, but also more recently in Cuba, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Nicaragua.<sup>13</sup> In a now often quoted passage, Heidi Hartmann

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<sup>13</sup>. On Cuba, see Elizabeth Stone, (ed), (1981), Women and the Cuban Revolution, New York and London: Pathfinder Press; on Nicaragua, see Maxine Molyneux, (1985), "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's interest, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua". Feminist Studies. 11, 2; for Zimbabwe see, Gay W. Seidman, (1984), "Women in Zimbabwe: Postindependence Struggles", Feminist Studies. 11, 3; for Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, see, Stephanie Urdang, "Women in contemporary national liberation movements" in M. J. Hay and S. Stichter, (eds), (1984), African Women South of the Sahara. London and New York: Longman.

Note: The Cuban Family Code which became law in 1975, is the most comprehensive legislation supporting the full equality of women existant. Along with the more usual reforms to marriage, divorce and alimony laws, it calls for revisions in the personal relationship between a husband and wife. A husband is supposed to share equally in the housework, and both husband and wife are to have equal opportunity in pursuing education or employment. (Stone, 1981: 17). The document illustrates a rare commitment in socialist countries, to a complete analysis of the factors of women's subordination, and to strategies to overcome it.

aptly describes a similar treatment of women's issues in left politics in North America in recent decades:

The 'marriage' of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism (Hartmann, 1981: 2).

This negativity towards any focus on women's issues that did not coincide with issues of class struggle helped to provoke the formation of autonomous women's groups on the left in the 1960's and 1970's in North America (Sargent, 1981: xviii). As the section on socialist feminism describes more fully, some of these groups worked towards a more equitable 'marriage' between marxism and feminism.

#### **MARXISM AND WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT**

In the development literature, Marxist perspectives on Third World issues form a major critique of the liberal mainstream. In the early 1970's, Marxism underwent a rejuvenation, which is best understood in the context of the radical Dependency critique of modernization theory, originating in the late 1940's and gathering steam in the 1950's and 1960's. Dependency theorists pointed out that the predicted benefits of modernization were not materializing in countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia (Wilber, 1984: 4).

The dependency school emerged in Latin America, but has

been applied also to Africa and Asia.<sup>14</sup> The centrepiece of the theory is a model of world development in which former colonies, termed the 'periphery', suffered a process of underdevelopment while the imperialist "centres", reaped the advantages of economic growth based on the wealth first plundered, then expropriated through unfair terms of trade from the peripheral countries.<sup>15</sup> The model fundamentally challenged modernization theory which assumed each nation could develop in the western capitalist mode, by stating that western capitalist development was possible only through the exploitation of the Third World.

Marxists who entered the development debates in the early 1970's, rejected the "vulgar Marxism" of the 1930's to 1960s, and focused on the historical materialist method to look at different forms of capitalist development in Third World countries (Stamp, 1989: 11-12). These 'neomarxists' critiqued both liberal modernization theory, and dependency theory, the latter which they criticized for its lack of class analysis,

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<sup>14</sup>. On Asia, see Colin Leys, (1977), "Underdevelopment and Dependency: Critical Notes" Journal of Contemporary Asia, 1: 1-26; for Africa, see Walter Rodney, (1972), How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

<sup>15</sup>. Andre Gunder Frank's Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution (1969) is only the most well-known example of this school. Samir Amin, Emmanuel Wallerstein are also central. Raul Prebisch wrote earlier on the inequalities of international trade, and founded the CEPAL group.

See Gabriel Palma (1978), Christobal Kay, (1989), and A. Foster-Carter (1976), for discussions on the dependency school.

and over-simplistic model of underdevelopment. Bill Warren's work proved seminal in developing this "New Marxism" or neomarxism.<sup>16</sup>

Neither the dependency school, nor the New Marxism gave much (if any) room to gender studies. Many Marxist women scholars in the 1970's contributed to the development of a new perspective -- socialist feminism -- that would accomodate gender studies, while retaining the Marxist method of historical materialism. Radical Feminism and the New Marxism formed the dual pillars of the new feminist perspective.

#### **SOCIALIST FEMINISM: A NEW PERSPECTIVE**

Socialist feminism puts the Marxist method of historical materialism at its centre, and uses Radical feminist insights of patriarchal oppression to develop an analysis which sees capitalism and patriarchy as dual systems of exploitation. For one prominent socialist feminist, in order to provide

an adequate theory of women's liberation, radical feminism will have to revise its ahistorical conceptualization of class, of patriarchy, and of women and men themselves. To attempt such a conceptual revision, while retaining the main radical feminist insights, is the distinctive theoretical project of socialist feminism (Jagger, 1983: 118).

Socialist feminism also takes account of the criticism of

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<sup>16</sup>. See for example, Bill Warren, (1973), "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization", New Left Review, Sept/Oct.

A recent example of neomarxist writing on development is James Mittleman, (1988), Out from Underdevelopment: Prospects for the Third World. London: Macmillan.

for example, black American feminists, and Third World women, many of whom argue that western feminist theories ignore the effects of racism and economic exploitation between nations. Historical materialism identifies the mode of production and class structure as the central organizing structures in a society. But it also can be used to draw out how the system of production (for example capitalism), gender systems (ie patriarchy), and divisions by race or nationality, are culturally and historically specific. This makes the method appropriate for cross-cultural studies. This new, flexible approach to the use of historical materialism is crucial in the study of women's experiences, but also important in analyses of society as a whole. Socialist feminism is not a Marxism for women, but a new Marxism. As Armstrong and Connelly put it,

...class has to be reconceptualized through race and gender within regional, national, and international contexts... class is dynamic and relational; it is the basis of change. Gender, race/ethnicity and regionality/nationality interact with class in various ways with one being more salient than another at different points in time. The problem for socialist feminists is to develop a theoretical account of these different types of oppression and relations between them with a view to ending them all (Armstrong and Connelly, 1987: 5).

#### **Some Basic Concepts of a Socialist Feminist Perspective**

Socialist feminism is flexible. It looks for relationships, interactions, and above all, context. There is no set, prefabricated framework to be applied in different settings. The socialist feminist perspective is better

understood as a set of conceptual tools, which themselves can be transformed in the process of research (Armstrong, 1991).

There are several key concepts utilized in a socialist feminist perspective. These are: capitalism/patriarchy (class and gender), public/private, and production and reproduction. These are discussed below. Struggles of socialist feminists to avoid western bias and dualistic thinking in using these concepts is also discussed.

#### **Capitalism/ Patriarchy (class and gender)**

Socialist feminist thought argues that class and gender are the most fundamental organizing systems of a society, and that these systems are both semi-autonomous and interrelated (Beneria and Roldan, 1987: 9).<sup>17</sup> Two main problems to struggle against when using these concepts are: first, the tendency to use patriarchy ahistorically, without context, and second, to slip into dualist thinking, when in reality class and gender are intertwined (Beneria and Roldan, 1987: 10-11). An example of the first problem can be seen in the tendency to project the drastic split between male and female roles in the western context, where women are relegated to the domestic, reproductive sphere of inferior status and men to the public, income earning sphere of superior status, onto other contexts.

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<sup>17</sup>. There are many variations on this. Maria Mies in Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour, 1986: 37-38, for example, makes a convincing argument that capitalism and patriarchy form one system, capitalism being the most recent and pervasive manifestation of patriarchy.

Even though most countries in the Third World had some colonial experience in which one of the main patriarchal religions and western values about gender roles were imposed, forms of the older culture survive. Although it would be wrong to suggest that most precolonial societies were not in some way patriarchal, in many cases, gender relations had and continue to have a more complimentary, interactive nature than experienced in the West, and women often had and have real spheres of power. For example, women in Lesotho traditionally had their own courts run by senior women to deal with women's affairs (Epprecht, forthcoming). A stark model of dominance and subordination is often misrepresentative. It follows that how status is defined will vary as do gender relations. Third World women must be allowed to make their own definitions of status from their own experiences (Brydon and Chant, 1989:62-66).

On the second point of seeing class and gender as interrelated rather than separate, it is useful to note that patriarchy and capitalism do not work independently in different spheres (for example, capitalism in the workplace, and patriarchy in the household), but both work in all spheres and interact with each other. The task of theory is to allow enough flexibility to enable the researcher to identify how these forces work and interact in different cultural and historical contexts.

#### **Public/Private**

A Western notion of family affairs being "private", which comes from the development of the nuclear family in the western, capitalist context, does not match many other cultures where extended family members or even members of the community have the "right" to investigate or interfere in affairs of the conjugal pair. For example, in Southern Africa, it is broadly the case that any adult has the right to discipline a child or advise on her upbringing. It is also a distortion to conceptualize "public" actions as separated from household influences. This is true not only in Third World contexts of more complimentary gender relations and a generally higher participation of women in production, but also in western contexts. The relations within households affect the way in which a wage labourer, for example, is incorporated into the labour force (public), or competing interests in the households can affect the support of political parties or the development of class consciousness.<sup>18</sup> It is also a distortion to see women,

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<sup>18</sup>. Pat Connelly, private discussion, March 28, 1991. The example discussed was that of the different class consciousness among female fish plant workers in different plants on Nova Scotia's South Shore. The fact that some were militant in demanding better conditions, while others were not, was attributed to the different relations their husbands had to the plant. Some were unrelated, which 'freed' their wives to press for improvements, while the inactive group had husbands that as fishers, supplied their wives' plant with fish. The idea is that it is not enough to consider a worker's relation to the means of production in explaining class consciousness. Relationships within households also play a role.



through being positioned in the "private" sphere of the household, as not being directly politically active in power groups parallel to men, and/or antagonistic to male political power, as was discussed above.<sup>19</sup> The Radical Feminist insight that the "personal is political" has been crucial in the development of this expanded sense of the political, and the breaking down of the public/private dichotomy.

### **Production/reproduction**

Socialist feminists have argued that reproduction, or the work carried out, mainly by women in the domestic sphere or household, has three main aspects, including biological reproduction, reproduction of the labour force through food preparation, cleaning, and so on, and emotional maintenance and reproduction of culture and ideology, or social reproduction. Furthermore, reproduction in all its aspects is linked to, and contributes to, the accumulation of capital, that is, production: that which generates surplus value.<sup>20</sup>

The western model of the nuclear family places the male

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<sup>19</sup>. see also, Caroline Ifeka-Moller, (1975), "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria", In Shirley Ardener (ed). Perceiving Women. Malaby, London, 127-58. As cited in Brydon and Chant, op. cit., p. 65, Ifeka points out that the so-called "riot" of Igbo women in Nigeria in 1929, was actually an organized, political protest. The ethnocentric gender ideology of colonial officials, and western historians blinded them from seeing this event for what it was.

<sup>20</sup>. see for example, Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen, (1982), "Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Roles in Economic Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications", Feminist Studies, 8: 165-166.

breadwinner or wage earner in the 'productive' sphere, and the female housewife in the reproductive sphere. The first task of the theory is to illuminate the links between these two spheres in the western context, for example, that capital benefits from the unpaid work of women in the domestic sphere in that it subsidizes the cost of the reproduction of the labour force, and that women are kept as a reserve army of labour to be drawn on in times of need. The second task of theory is to identify the western nuclear family model as culturally, historically and class specific, and in other cultures, and in the working class in western countries, processes that can be labelled 'reproduction' and 'production' can not be so clearly relegated to the separate spheres of the household and the workplace.

In many areas of the Third World, much production takes place within the household. The line between production for household use (and hence reproduction) and production for sale (and hence production) is often hard to draw. For example food processing, production of handicrafts or clothing, or subsistence farming, can all move from production for use to that of exchange, depending on economic circumstances (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 12).

Clearly, then, production and reproduction are best seen as a continuum, which takes different forms under different cultural contexts, in different classes, and under different modes of production.

With this basis of the socialist feminist perspective in mind, the concepts of particular use in the study of women and formal sector employment are discussed.

#### **WOMEN IN THE FORMAL SECTOR IN THE THIRD WORLD: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

##### **Why formal sector and why Third World?**

Focusing on formal sector employment does not imply an acceptance of a dual economy model, which sees the formal and informal sector as distinct and separate.<sup>21</sup> However, specific characteristics define formal sector wage employment, including relations to the means of production, conditions of work, and formation of class consciousness, making it useful to isolate the formal sector as a unit of study.

A focus on the Third World is useful in three main ways. First, and most obviously, understanding the situation of Third World women is essential if meaningful change for poor women is to occur. Second, although a main goal of socialist feminist theory is to develop theoretical tools that are flexible enough to be applied in any cultural or historical context, the theory has been dominated by a western, middle class focus. This was a great concern of Third World women which arose out of the debates during the United Nations Decade for Women (Parpart, 1990: 161). Focusing on Third World

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21. For an excellent discussion on the links between formal and informal sectors, see The Crossroads of Class and Gender: Homework, Subcontracting and Household Dynamics in Mexico City, L. Beneria and M. Roldan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Especially chapters 3 and 4.

contexts will illuminate key aspects of western bias or ethnocentricity that hinder the development of the theoretical tools useful in other, non-western contexts. Finally, it is increasingly important, with the intensification of the internationalization of capital, to see connections between the rich and poor nations of the world. Employment patterns in the Third World are not isolated, national phenomena. They are intimately linked to the forces of global capitalism that affect the entire world. Capitalism is a system which reproduces itself through the exploitation of poor nations (colonies), as well as poor classes and women, worldwide.<sup>22</sup>

#### **The socialist feminist viewpoint**

Socialist feminism suggests that the Marxist analysis of the nature of capitalism must be broadened to include systems of patriarchy, or the systematic exploitation of the female gender by the male. It is argued that capitalism and patriarchy interact and interconnect in the process of capital accumulation. Two main areas in which these interconnections are found are in the relationships between the household and the accumulation of surplus value by capitalists, and the nature of the direct incorporation of women into the labour

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<sup>22</sup>. see Maria Mies, (1986), Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. Women in the International Division of Labour. London: Zed Books: 1-2; 34. Mies' understanding of capitalism as a system to be analysed at the global level started with Rosa Luxemburg's 1923 analysis of colonialism as a necessary aspect of capitalism, not its final stage as Lenin held (1917). In Mies' analysis, women are also a 'colony' necessary to the accumulation of capital.

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class struggle and hence into the process of liberation, women therefore need to enter the labour force (Engels, 1975).

Feminists operating from a liberal perspective hold that economic independence is the crucial aspect of women's personal liberation from male dominance, because it supposedly gives a woman the option to leave or opt out of personal relations with men, or to share power with a male partner on a basis of equal cash contribution to the household. Employment also helps to elevate a woman to equal standing with men in the public sphere. She can become an equal in a male world.<sup>23</sup>

Research informing the socialist feminist understanding of women and employment has shown that formal labour market participation (FLMP) does not necessarily lead to the elimination or alleviation of gender subordination in the home or the workplace, as the liberals would suggest. In answer to the Marxist position, entering employment does not mean equal participation in the class struggle, both because of

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<sup>23</sup>. Much of the policy-oriented literature on women and employment in the Third World falls roughly into this category of a liberal perspective. Although increasingly sophisticated in its analysis, the focus is still on reform, and strategies to influence powerful bodies, such as aid organizations and governments, to integrate women, not on strategies to promote real structural change. While it is important that issues like pay-equity, maternity leave, etc, are pursued, these gains would never be the end of a socialist feminist strategy.

See, for example, Barbara Ibrahim, (1989), "Policies Affecting Women's Employment in the Formal Sector: Strategies for Change", World Development, 17, 7: 1097-1107.

discrimination by male dominated unions, and because the Marxist notion of the struggle does not incorporate gender subordination. In terms of the elevation of women's status, the Marxist position fails in that it does not include a discussion of the need to reorganize the domestic or reproductive work that is allocated to women. If women are still exploited in the household, their status compared to men will continue to be subordinate.<sup>24</sup> From this point on, a socialist-feminist position is adopted in the analysis of women and employment.

#### **Broad Trends in Women's Employment**

It is important to lay out the broad geographical and sectoral trends in women's employment worldwide and to locate these in the context of the world economy. With the increasing internationalization of the world economy, notably with the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) wherein developing countries are increasingly sites for export production, and with the debt crisis, which ties developing countries to the economic policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through Structural Adjustment programs, it is essential to keep a global perspective:

Women's economic participation, particularly in developing countries, has been affected in all sectors by this heightened exposure to the international economy (Joekes, 1987: 117).

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<sup>24</sup>. see for example, Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interest, the state and revolution in Nicaragua". Feminist Studies. 11, 2, 1985.

In a broad sense, women's economic experience is linked to the general economic situation in their region as shaped by the global conditions. In South-East Asia women have shared in the prosperity of the region, especially as that prosperity has largely been built on an export sector that has a high demand for female labour. In both Latin America and Africa, men and women have experienced a drop in living standard, but in both cases, women have borne a greater share of the burden of the recession in both job loss and decrease in living standard (Joeke, 1987: 122).

Everywhere in the world women's participation in the formal labour market (FLMP) is lower than men. In recent decades there has been an increase of women's participation globally in the officially registered labour force from 27% in 1962 to 34% in 1980 (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 161). In developing countries, taken as a whole, however, women's participation rate has stayed constant at 32% between 1960 and 1980, although there have been shifts in the participation rates in certain sectors, especially an increase in the industrial sector from 21% in 1960 to 26.5% in 1980 (Joeke, 1987: 80). By region, increases in women's FLMP are seen in Latin America, and South-East Asia, but in Africa there has been a general decrease (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 162). The statistics must be treated with caution as is usually the case with data on developing countries because of the problems in good data collection. Also, it must be remembered that they



do not represent women's economic activity, but only formal sector employment. The vast majority of women are economically active in informal sector activities because of discrimination or lack of demand for female labour by capital, and the greater ease of combining reproductive duties of child-rearing with informal sector activities (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 169).

### **Participation by Sector**

The industrial and service sectors are focused on here, although rural women are increasingly involved in wage labour in agriculture, and not just as subsistence producers (Joekes, 1987: 123). The informal sector is mentioned to maintain perspective on the broader context of women's economic activities.

#### **1. INDUSTRY**

In industry, women's participation is characterized by large regional variations. In South-East Asia, women comprise 30-40% of the industrial labour force; meanwhile in North Africa and the Middle East the participation rate is less than 10% (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 168). In developing countries as a whole, industry is growing faster than services or agriculture, and women's participation in industry is growing faster than that of men (Joekes, 1987: 80). Industrial growth has predominantly been export-led, with a preference for female labour over male: "Industrialization in the postwar period has been as much female

led as export led" (Joekes, 1987: 81). Changes in production

processes, because of the need for the "rationalization" of production, have caused capital to actively seek to exploit the 'colony', as Maria Mies would put it, of cheap female labour in the Third World. This is true also in the First World through the "putting out" system. These issues will be discussed further below.

## **2. SERVICES**

In three parts of the service sector women are usually heavily represented: in community services (health, education and social welfare), commerce (retail services and banking), and domestic service (Joskes, 1987: 107). In Latin American countries, women form 30-50% of the workforce in this sector; in South Asia they are just under 20%; in West Africa, just under 50%; in Southern Africa, just under 30%; and in North Africa and the Middle East, under 10% (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 173).

## **3. INFORMAL SECTOR**

Although this sector is not a focus of the analysis, it is important to remember that more women are involved in informal sector activities than in the formal sector. When we turn later to segregation in the formal labour market, it is important to add that such segregation exists in the informal sector as well: certain activities are dominated by one gender, often with formidable barriers keeping women out of activities dominated by men, just as in the formal sector (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 173).

### **Explaining Women's Position in the Labour Market**

Women's involvement in the formal labour force varies across nations, sectors and classes. Socialist feminists argue that these variations are dependent on two main factors:

1. the requirements of capital accumulation, that is, the economic structures in the organization of production, including the legal, and institutional framework of labour relations;
2. the nature of the household in the socio-economic, historical context.

Both of these affect the supply and demand of women's labour, and form interconnected aspects of the capitalist-patriarchal mode of production. These two main aspects affecting women's employment are discussed further below.

#### **1. Market and production factors affecting women's employment.**

##### **Industry**

In most types of industry, capital sees no productivity advantage in employing women where cheap male labour is abundant. In fact, capital benefits in several ways by keeping women's employment low. Women perform necessary reproductive labour without pay, and offering male workers a 'family wage', is still cheaper to capital than providing directly for that reproduction. Capital also benefits from keeping women as a 'reserve army of labour' that can be called upon in peak times, then fired when no longer required (Stichter, 1990: 17). By excluding women from employment, the

male breadwinner's power in the household is reinforced. This can compensate male workers who are exploited as a class in the workplace, and hence help to maintain the class status quo (A man's home is his castle). By maintaining a sexual division of labour in the workplace as well, that is, keeping women exclusively in certain low paid and low status jobs, the class hierarchy is further supported by the gender hierarchy (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 183).

In some industries, notably those located in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in the Third World, women are believed by capital to have a productivity advantage over men (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 172). It is felt that women's "natural" skills of high manual dexterity for fine work such as that involved in the electronics industry, make them more productive than men. Indeed, of the more than two million people employed in EPZs in the Third World, 80-90% are women (Fuentes and Ehrenreich, 1983: 12).

Socialist feminists argue that it is highly questionable if women's productivity advantage is, in fact, rooted in their "natural" dexterity or "nimble fingers". Firstly, if women are "naturally" more dextrous than men, why are most brain surgeons and dentists men? Secondly, if women have advanced skills in this area, it is more likely that it comes from domestic training in such skills as sewing, or sorting of grains than a "natural" feminine quality. Two processes can be identified here: first the misrepresentation of the source

of women's productivity advantage over men, and second, the labelling of a skill -- dexterity -- as a non-skill. In the latter process, capital is able to label the female workers as "unskilled" labour, and hence justify low pay (Elson and Pearson, 1981:148-150). In the former process other characteristics of the female labour force which are more important sources of women's productivity advantage to capital are masked. These include for example, the "natural" redundancy of workers upon marriage or childbirth. Capital assumes, to its great advantage, that women will quit work when they have children or get married, as they will have a male breadwinner to support them, and will be too busy in child and man care. While in some cases this may be true, in many cases women in factory work are the only bread winners in the family, even at times, of the whole extended family. This ideology justifies permanent "layoffs", lack of benefits such as maternity leave, and working conditions that quickly deteriorate the health and tolerance of the workers (Fernandez-Kelly, 1983: 220). Hence most workers in EPZs are young and single.<sup>25</sup> Capital further exploits gender ideology by taking advantage of women's submissiveness, learned in homes influenced by patriarchal religion and ideology. This training encourages women to back down in the face of

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<sup>25</sup>. For example, according to Fernandez-Kelly, 1983: 211, in the maquiladoras, the factories in the huge EPZ on the Mexican - US border, most workers are between 17 and 25, and 70% are single.

intimidation, and to hesitate about organizing resistance to poor conditions or unfair practices. Furthermore, women's marginalization in the labour market, creating a large pool of female labour to draw on, permits low wages. These are the real reasons for the preference for female labour in EPZs. Clearly, women in EPZ work are exploited as a subordinate gender by capital looking for a cheap, tractable, temporary, disposable workforce. Susan Joeques concludes:

The increase in women's participation in developing countries industry over the past 20 years has therefore reinforced -- certainly not undermined -- sexual stratification in the labour market (Joeques, 1987: 104).

Furthermore, far from the employment being a "liberation" from subordination as a gender, factory work involves new forms of gender oppression, from the sexual harassment of male managers and bosses, to the "commoditised" gender relations of the capitalist system, to the social ostracization that can lead to prostitution when a worker "retires" (Elson and Pearson, 1981: 157-159).

This example of EPZ work for women illustrates the interconnectedness of patriarchy and capitalism in the accumulation of capital and consequently, in the exploitation and subordination of women.

### **Services**

As shown above, women are significant in the service sector, except in Moslem regions, where women's FLMP is very

low in all sectors.<sup>26</sup> Some comparisons can be made between the service sector and the employment of women in EPZs. The service sector is characterized by low wages, and a dominance of women between the ages of 15 and 25, particularly in services such as hotels, restaurants and retail sales. As they age, women are forced out, usually into the informal sector, and replaced by younger women (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 175). Gender ideology, which associates women with the roles of servant and communicator, forms the justification for preference for women in these sectors (Stichter, 1990: 18). But the further ideological assumption that women are only supplementary earners in the household, further justifies the short term and low pay of service occupations. Women are exploited as a subordinate gender in this sector, and they find it difficult to escape from the disadvantaged position of poverty and low status that such employment reinforces.

Nurses and primary school teaches, nearly always women, although occupying a more favourable class position, also

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<sup>26</sup>. Although this topic is not pursued in this paper, it is important to note that recent work on the issue points towards a need for a complex analysis of the structural forces combining to create the phenomenon of the low FLMP of women in Moslem countries. The usual, and simplistic religious explanation is found wanting. Not only are Moslem women highly involved in the informal sector, but at least one important study in Algeria revealed that attitudes towards women's FLMP varied more with class than religion.

see for example, Marnia Lazreg, "Women, Work and Social Change in Algeria", in S. Stichter and J. Parpart, (eds), (1990), Women, Employment and the Family in the International Division of Labour, op cit: 183-197.

suffer from relatively low pay as professionals, for the same reasons as mentioned above.

The conclusion to be drawn is that segregation of the labour market on the basis of sex exists, making women subordinate to men in the labour market, and showing that gender ideology (patriarchy) is a factor along with class in the exploitation of female workers in the accumulation of capital.

#### **Impact of technical change.**

When discussing market and production factors in women's FLMP, there are a number of other aspects that must be considered. Firstly, the impact of technical change can have varying effects on women as workers. It is often been the case that when labour-intensive activities become more productive through the introduction of new technologies, female labour and/or control is replaced by more highly remunerated male labour. The development of cash crops in Africa is a case in point.<sup>27</sup> However, the impact of technological change varies widely with the technology itself, and the socio-economic and historical context. The introduction of high yielding varieties (HYVs) of crops associated with the Green Revolution, often increased

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<sup>27</sup>. see Iftikhar Ahmed, "Technology and rural women in the Third World", International Labour Review, 1983: 493-505.

For a comprehensive analysis for Africa, see Patricia Stamp, (1989), Technology, Gender, and Power in Africa. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.



employment for women as hired agricultural labourers, although there is some evidence that now increasing mechanization is displacing female labour in that sector (Joekes, 1987: 123-4). In industry, the microelectronics "revolution", which has led to the explosion of the electronics industry, has led to a significant increase in the female labour force in the sector as noted above. The impact of the biotechnological revolution in agriculture on the Third World, and particularly women, is yet to be seen, although the indications are that the creation of substitutes for traditional Third World exports such as cocoa for Ghana and vanilla for Madagascar will have disastrous affects for whole national economies in the Third World (Svarstad, 1987: 28-29). On the other hand, as with HYVs, biotechnologies in agriculture favour large scale, plantation type farming, which could lead to an increase in agricultural employment opportunities for female labour in some places (Ahmed, 1989: 553-569).

In services, technical change such as the introduction of the computer, has had less impact in the Third World than in developed countries. However, shifts can be identified wherein displacement by computers is followed by growth through the expansion of the sector (Joekes, 1987: 124).

#### **Influence of the market.**

The downturn in the global economy in the 1970s and 1980's, as mentioned above, led to the increased casualization of women's jobs, and more layoffs for women proportionate to

men. Women are more vulnerable to economic recession because their jobs are assumed to be less important to the maintenance of the family (Stichter, 1990: 20).

#### **The availability of male labour.**

Women's FLMP is affected directly by the availability of male labour. If war or labour migration drain the economy of male labour, women will come under increasing demand by capital, simply because there is no one else (Stichter, 1990: 20). In Lesotho, for example, a country whose economy is dominated by male migration to the gold mines of South Africa, women have a much higher profile in the FLM than in other countries in the region.<sup>28</sup>

#### **The role of the state.**

Finally, the state plays a significant role in determining the supply and demand for female labour. Labour laws, for example differential minimum wages for men and women, "protective" legislation barring women from nightwork or certain kinds of overtime,<sup>29</sup> the absence of pay equity

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<sup>28</sup>. International Labour Organization and the United Nations Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), (1985), Women in Economic Activity: A Global Statistical Survey. (1950-2000). Santo Domingo: INSTRAW and ILO.

Women as a percentage of the formal labour force in 1985 in Lesotho is estimated at 44%, which compares with the other two main labour reserve countries in the region of Botswana at 50% and Swaziland at 45%. Zimbabwe and Zambia, which are not labour reserves for South Africa have figures of 29% and 32% respectively.

<sup>29</sup>. see Voice of Women (Sri Lanka), "The Night Shift for Women?" in Miranda Davies, (ed), (1983), Third World -- Second Sex. Women's Struggles and National Liberation.

legislation, (or the lack of political will to uphold existing legislation), and laws on maternity leave, which can both encourage or discourage women and employers alike, can all affect the supply and demand for women workers. In addition, the level of public services supplied by the state, for example in child care, health and education, can affect the availability of female labour, as women are often responsible for these functions in the absence of state support (Brydon and Chant, 1989: 184-5).

Technical and sectoral changes, market conditions, the state and the profile of labour demand of capital, especially as it is influenced by the prevailing gender ideology, all affect the supply and demand for female labour in the formal labour market. It is argued, however, that these factors fail to provide a full explanation for FLMP patterns. Another set of factors are involved, determined by the nature of the household in a given cultural, historical, and class context. This leads to a discussion of the household as an influence on women's employment.

## **2. Household factors influencing women's employment.**

One of the main indications in the patterns of female employment indicating the need to include the household in the analysis, is the high variability in the relationship between fertility, marriage, age and employment. One of the western biases in earlier scholarship on women and employment in the

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Third World Women Speak Out. Londor: 2ed Books.

Third World, was that it was assumed the role of women as mothers and wives was incompatible with a role as a worker. This is a misconception, and Third World women often work because they have children, not stop working when they start to procreate (Bay, 1982: 5). This bias came from the western model, where until the last few decades, middle class women usually did not work when their children were young. A look at the general regional patterns of the age and marital patterns in women's employment shows the variations:

1. Central Peak (plateau): no drop in FLMP in child-bearing years. Found in the USSR, Eastern Europe, South-East Asia, some African countries, increasingly in the United States.
2. Late Peak: participation after child-bearing (often in widowhood). Found in some African countries.
3. Early Peak: pre-child bearing. Found in Western Europe, Latin America, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore.
4. Double Peak: pre- and post- child-bearing participation. Found in Korea, and the United States (up to mid century). In North Africa and the Middle East, there is an overall lack of peaks (Stichter, 1990: 22-24).

The fact that the impact of marriage and fertility on women's FLMP varies, suggests that more complex factors about the organization and form of the household are involved. Factors include the degree of self-sufficiency of the household, the sexual division of labour, the life cycle, and women's

skills, productivity and work attitudes. Before proceeding with an examination of these factors, a theoretical approach to the household is needed.

### **Conceptualizing the Household**

The neo-classical, or liberal mainstream view of the household, known as the "New Home Economics", sees the household as the basic socio-economic unit of society which operates as "utility maximizing unit motivated by stable, uniform preferences but constrained by pooled economic resources" (Fapohunda, 1988: 143). The main points of the theory are that households all have the same preferences regardless of class, incomes are pooled and fairly distributed among all members, and the household acts much like an individual in the market place to maximize its own benefit. It is assumed that people do not compete for resources within the household across gender and age and that everyone's needs are fairly met. The sexual division of labour in the household is "efficient", as women have a "natural" advantage in reproductive activities because of biology. This "natural" role of women is seen as the main reason they are not as active as men in the labour market (Stichter, 1990: 30-31). The theory was used originally to explain family behaviour in western countries, but since the 1970's has also been applied to Third World countries (Fapohunda, 1988: 143).

In Marxist analysis, the main unit of analysis is class. Households belong to a class, but there is little attempt to

differentiate between members of households. Household production (for use) and the reproductive labour of women is also inadequately dealt with (Folbre, 1988: 254).

Socialist feminists argue that the household is a crucial focus of analysis, calling on the Marxists to include it in more detail. In answer to the neo-classical model, it is argued that households are often arenas of conflict, rather than altruism and benevolent sharing. The neo-classical model masks important socio-economic processes involved in the interaction among family members, and these interactions must be explicitly taken into account to understand cross-cultural investment and consumption behaviour, (Fapohunda, 1988: 145-6), and, specifically here, women and employment patterns.

The notion of pooled incomes or resources, in particular, has proven false cross culturally. Among the Yoruba in Lagos, Nigeria, for example, 78% of households were non-pooling, with 80% of wives not knowing their husbands' income, and 65% not knowing their husbands' spending habits. Gender-specific expenditure is widespread, as is an entrenched division of responsibility by gender (Fapohunda, 1988: 147-150). Thus it is evident that the neo-classical model fails to describe households in Third World contexts. (It is also questionable that the model describes the middle-class, western household for which it was originally designed.) Furthermore, it is not the case that households in Third World urban, middle class contexts, take on western characteristics as described

by the model, that is, become more altruistic or prone to income pooling. In wealthier families in the Yoruba study, gender specific expenditure is actually accentuated:

A family member is likely to use an additional unit of income to fulfill his socially expected obligations, not to increase the general living standard of other family members (Fapohunda, 1988: 152).

Therefore, the socially constructed roles of individuals within a certain cultural and historical context within a household, will influence the activities, such as employment, undertaken by those members. If women are primarily responsible for the well-being of their children, as mentioned above in the African context, they will be found in large numbers in economic activities that allow them to fulfill that function as well as possible under the prevailing cultural and economic conditions.

Socialist feminists argue that the reproductive role of women is not "natural". It is socially constructed, including the number of children a woman decides to bear. Different households in different context organize "reproductive" labour of child-bearing and rearing, and domestic work differently, and this is a key aspect of a network of activities including production of goods in the household and wage labour that form the household strategy as a whole (Stichter, 1990: 37). Women's employment must be understood in the context of this whole strategy.

Finally, the term "household" should not be confined to

the nuclear family, as is implied by the neo-classical model, but is better understood to mean the domestic structures where the organization of production and reproduction are worked out (Stichter, 1990: 39). Women's FLMP must be seen as part of this organization of production and reproduction in the household. This is flashed out below.

#### **Categorising Household Effects on Women's Employment**

According to Stichter, there are five main aspects of household social relations in production and reproduction that affect the supply side of women's employment patterns (Stichter, 1990: 39-60). These are outlined below, indicating the ways in which each can affect women's FLMP.

**1. Reproductive Work.** The amount of reproductive work expected and completed, (ie the point in the life cycle in the household), along with the allocation of reproductive work within the household are important. How many children are expected? What kind of care does the culture and class call for? Who is responsible for childcare? The mother, grandmother, aunt, younger children? To what extent can, or is, this work transferred outside the household?

**2. Productive Work.** How much production for use or sale is undertaken in the household? What is purchased? Who performs this work? To what extent can or is this transferred outside the household? If women are highly involved in productive work within the household, as women in Africa are as subsistence farmers, for example, their FLMP will tend to



be low.

3. **Household Structure.** The size, age/sex composition of the household are important, along with the persistence of the household unit. Polygamous households operate very differently from nuclear households (or 'nested' extended families), and female-headed households are distinct from these. All these will vary with class, culture, and historical context. High female FLMP is often linked to a high divorce-rate, for example, although this may be connected to a high level of male unemployment in the area, and the extent of male patriarchal attitudes, rather than being an active choice of women based on economic security.

4. **Income and Resources.** What is the total level of income and the total value of productive resources of the household? How is income and the control of resources distributed among all household members, including immediately and through inheritance? The effect of level of income and resources is highly variable and contradictory. In some cases, higher income and the usually attendant higher education levels means a breakdown of traditional patriarchal attitudes and more freedom for women to break from the expectation that they will stay household-centred. In other cases, higher income means the opportunity to maintain the cultural norms, which lower income households are forced to break through economic need.

5. **Decision-making and power relations among members.**

The most important relationship here is the conjugal one, but other key relationships might be that of the mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, or the woman's natal parents with her, or the husband's male relatives, or even a woman's own son. To what extent is a woman free to make her own decisions? To what extent is male power threatened by a woman working in the FLM? A woman's decision-making power and autonomy are not necessarily directly related to her control over productive resources. Nor is it the case that women's power in the household will necessarily increase when she gains an income. As mentioned above, the use of incomes in a household is often gendered, and thus a woman may not gain control over any new areas of the household.

Clearly, there is no firm set of conditions and variables that will affect women's FLMP in all situations. It is necessary to hold a flexible notion of the kinds of forces that are usually involved in determining the patterns of employment. The above categories can act as a guide to the researcher doing a study of a particular context.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In analyzing women's formal labour force participation in the Third World, a socialist feminist perspective entails considering market and production forces, and the influence of the household. The approach is necessarily flexible, designed

to interact with a research study in a dialectical manner, more like a set of tools than a rigid theory, or even a framework.

Studies done so far indicate that contrary to the views held by Marxists and Liberal feminists, employment for women in the formal sector does not necessarily lead to higher status, autonomy, or greater participation in the class struggle. Instead, the findings point to the need to expand the Marxist concept of the nature of capitalist accumulation to include exploitation by gender, or patriarchal systems. This new understanding will lead to a new way of defining the struggle to overcome oppression by class, race, nationality and gender.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Women and Employment in Lesotho**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Lesotho is the country study for this thesis, with primary research being done on a weaving business employing women in a rural area near a main town.

This chapter has two main parts:

The first part introduces Lesotho generally, forming the background to the study of women. This introduction looks at:

1. the economics and politics of Lesotho in historical and regional context;
2. class formation, and especially rural differentiation in Lesotho.

The second part focuses specifically on women in Lesotho. Some of the main ways that Basotho women's lives are affected by socially constructed gender systems, as well as class divisions are investigated. Access to education, formal labour market participation (FLMP), access to political power, and women's status under the law are the main topics pursued.

The focus is then narrowed to rural women, to set the stage for the case study of the weaving business. Following from the discussion on rural differentiation in the introductory section on Lesotho, rural women's different experiences are discussed, in the context of a gender system which makes them highly dependent on marriage as a survival strategy. This discussion provides the socio-economic context for the sample group at the weaving business. The weavers in

the study emerge as a distinct group in the society as a whole, and this group's particular constraints and options are discussed.

The final section of this chapter outlines the context for women and employment in Lesotho. The forces of the political economy of the labour reserve, and the gender system as it operates in the home and the workplace are drawn out. This discussion provides the conceptual tools for analyzing the case study in Chapter Three.

#### **Lesotho: Political Economy and Class Formation in Historical and Regional Context**

Lesotho is a small, mountainous country of 30,000 square kilometres, completely surrounded by South Africa. It has a population of 1.7 million (1987 statistics). Lesotho, (then called Basutoland), was made a British Protectorate in 1865, gaining formal independence from Britain in 1966. However, it has been shaped as much by the South African dominated political economy of the region as it has been by British administration and aid.

Today Lesotho is poor: GNP per capita is \$US 510 and life expectancy at birth is 53 years (IBRD, 1984: 57). The most striking aspect of the political economy is its overwhelming dependence on South Africa in nearly all aspects, from the ownership and financing of business, to the supply of electricity, to the goods in the stores and in the street markets, to the livelihood of most families in the country through migrant earnings, to the people in political power:

Lesotho's dependence on South Africa is obvious and extreme. Both the country as an entity and its people as families and individuals are subject to violent disruption and instability in politics, economics, and almost every aspect of daily life as a result of decisions taken outside the country's borders (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 5).

#### **Lesotho: The Economy**

Nearly a half Lesotho's GNP comes from the earnings of the approximately 175,000 migrant workers employed by the South African gold mines (Cobbe, 1988: 74). These earnings also represent 70% of the mean rural income while only 6% comes from domestic crop production (Murray, 1981: 19). In fact, the 1986 census revealed that one quarter of the population had no access to land (Cobbe, 1988: 73), and agricultural productivity has continued to deteriorate: food self-sufficiency declined from 64% in 1977-8, to 39% in 1983-4 (Cobbe, 1988: 77).

Performance in manufacturing is also poor, forming only 6% of GDP and 20% of export earnings (Africa South of the Sahara 1988, 1987: 579). Tourism increased in the 1970s, but is mainly financed by South African business, so that Lesotho loses much of the earnings. Competition from the Bantustans is also increasing (Crush, 1983: 29).

The lack of viable agriculture, (only 13% of the land is arable), weak manufacturing and tourism sectors, the lack of other exploitable resources, except water,<sup>1</sup> the failure of the

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<sup>1</sup>. Construction for the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme, in which about 3 billion litres of water a day is to be diverted from the upper reaches of the Orange River in

government to stimulate employment creation at home, and the poor climate for entrepreneurship has entrenched Lesotho's dependence on labour migration. It has become virtually a labour reserve: "the Lesotho economy ceased to exist as a national economy and developed features very similar to those of the "native reserves" of South Africa proper" (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 46).

Analysis of Lesotho's poverty by the World Bank emphasizes internal factors, virtually ignoring the influence of the political economy of the region as developed historically. The particular model of Lesotho as developed by the World Bank is discussed further in Chapter 3, as is the role of international aid in the political economy of Lesotho. Here, an alternative, political economy approach to Lesotho's poverty is outlined.

A political economy view suggests that Lesotho's current condition was deeply affected by the development of capitalism in South Africa and the imperialistic struggles between the British and the Boers in the region. A vibrant, export

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the mountains of Lesotho, to the industrial heartland of South Africa, the Pretoria Witwatersrand-Vereeniging, commenced in 1987. Lesotho is to sell the water to South Africa for estimated annual earnings of R100 million by the year 2020. The project has sparked much controversy because of the move to even closer economic ties with South Africa, and the displacement of Basotho people (estimated at about 20,000) imposed by the flooding for dams. (See, "Lesotho", in Africa South of the Sahara 1988, 1987: 580; "World's Largest Water Project Launched", Africa Now, January 1987; and "Highland Water Scheme", New Africa Yearbook '87-'88.)

economy in the late 19th century (Murray, 1981: 10), in which Basotho farmers responded with great entrepreneurial spirit and efficiency to the market for grain in the booming mine districts in the Boer Republics, Basutoland, received a number of setbacks from which it never recovered.

In a 1865 war with the Boers of the Orange Free State, Basutoland lost great tracks of its most fertile land; Rinderpest in the 1890s wiped out 90% of its cattle; drought and pestilence in the early 20th century killed the grain harvests. Meanwhile, the soil in the now mostly mountainous country, was rapidly eroding (Leys, 1979: 101-120).

Besides these attacks on its resource base, Basutoland suffered from the imperialist struggles between the British and the Boers. Requesting British protection in 1865 because of the war with the Boers, Basutoland fell under the administration of the Northern Cape Colony, which imposed a Hut Tax on the new Protectorate in 1870. Meanwhile, protective barriers were erected against Basotho grain to help white Boer farmers win the lucrative market of the mining companies. Further, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 closed the usual trade routes. Pressure to pay tax, the decreasing returns on agriculture, and the open promotion of migration for Basotho by the administration in the Cape meant that by the end of the first World War, 50% of adult Basotho males were migrating to the mines in South Africa (Murray, 1981: 12-14).



Along with the development of Basutoland as a labour reserve, the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) facilitated the historical development of Lesotho's dependency and underdevelopment. SACU, first set up in 1910, includes Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, (BSL), and South Africa. Under the agreement, goods move freely throughout the union, with South Africa collecting the customs duties for the four states then redistributing the money, which equals more than half the total government revenue for each of the BSL states. South Africa unilaterally sets all customs rates and "operates the system to maximise the market for its producers behind substantial protective barriers" (Hanlon, 1986: 81). These barriers include high import taxes on goods that South Africa produces (almost everything), discouraging industry in the BLS states (Hanlon: 1986: 82-83).

From a historically sensitive, political economy analysis, then, Lesotho's poverty and dependence have been created in the process of the capitalist development of South African region, as shaped by the imperialist struggles of Britain and the Boers, and by the mineral-rich land they fought to control, not as a result of the failure of the Basotho to adopt modern farming techniques, or to take on western entrepreneurial values as suggested by the World Bank (IBRD, 1975(b): xv).

#### **Lesotho: Politics**

Lesotho's economic dependence on South Africa is accompanied by Pretoria's interference in Lesotho's national politics. In Lesotho's first elections in 1966, for example, South Africa favoured Chief Leabua Jonathan's Basutoland National Party (BNP), since the alternative, the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) had adopted a Pan-African socialist ideology and spouted nationalist rhetoric (Murray, 1981: 5). Jonathan was the only leader allowed to campaign in South Africa among the miners, and was given a helicopter to use for these trips. In exchange he promised friendly relations with South Africa. Jonathan won the election (Leistner, 1983: 209).

Jonathan lost the 1970 elections, partly because people disliked his obsequiousness to Pretoria (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 130), but he seized power unconstitutionally and declared a state of emergency. South Africa "offered immediate and substantial support to Chief Jonathan" (Hanlon, 1986: 109), although he later disappointed them as he switched to a more nationalist, anti-South African stance. Jonathan realized the extent of domestic distaste for his former posture (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 138). Furthermore, returns for his 'friendliness' had declined (Hirschman, 1979: 180). He was also acutely aware of his greater likelihood of receiving foreign aid in an international climate of increasing hostility towards South Africa, if he adopted a critical stance towards the Republic (Hirshmann, 1979: 181-3).

Nevertheless, no economic changes accompanied this provocative political change in tone.

By 1979 Pretoria had become impatient with Jonathan's behaviour and began supporting the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), the military branch of the banned BCP. Operating from South Africa from 1981, there were over 100 incidents between 1981-84 involving the LLA and even a raid by South African troops in 1982 (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 140). A second raid in December 1985 prompted Jonathan to complain about South Africa at the UN Security Council. However this did nothing to prevent the coup on January 20, 1986, which was precipitated by a blockade imposed by Pretoria in the early New Year (Africa Now. Jan. 1986: 15).

Major-general Justin Lekhanya, while not directly chosen by Pretoria, was significantly more accomodating than Jonathan. The day after the coup the General went to Pretoria where an informal non-aggression agreement was reach (Africa Now. March 1986: 16). It was in this new climate of accomodation that the Highland's Water Treaty was signed in October 1986, although the Lesotho government continued to use its vulnerability to Pretoria as a leverage for international support and aid (Cobbe, 1988: 83-4).

Clearly, Pretoria has the power to impose pressures through military intervention and economic blockade, which can contribute to the erosion of the power and/or popularity of a government of Lesotho. But this power has been balanced in

the 25 years of independence by Pretoria's interest in Lesotho's stability. Too much obvious intervention would meet with domestic resistance: the Basotho are fiercely proud of their independence and their critical stance to Apartheid. Lesotho's stability is important not only to the gold mines that benefit from the Basotho migrant labour, for which South Africa bears no cost for the education and post-contract livelihood, but chaos and unrest in Lesotho could have dangerous spill-over effects in South Africa, especially in the form of support for democratic change in South Africa. Indeed, at the height of Jonathan's anti-South Africa stage, African National Congress (ANC) refugees were welcomed into Lesotho (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 140). The current state of chaos and rioting in Lesotho following the April 30 1991 coup, in which a faction of the military deposed Lekhanya (Facts on File, May 2 1991), is testimony to the precarious state of domestic political affairs in Lesotho. These disturbances coincide with the loss of tens of thousands of mining contracts, suggesting that the whole political economy of Lesotho is currently under threat (John Gay, personal correspondence, June 1991). The processes of change ongoing in South Africa itself are undoubtedly contributing to this political and economic disarray.

#### **Class Formation in Lesotho: The Emergence of Social Differentiation**

The development of Lesotho as a labour reserve has been the main factor in the process of social differentiation.

Little has been written on class divisions in Lesotho, and it is difficult to categorize the different socio-economic groups. With the presupposition that class is fluid, a description of the broad groups is all that is attempted here.

#### **Class divisions in Lesotho.**

Communal agriculture was mostly replaced by peasant production for both subsistence and the external market by the second half of the nineteenth century in Basutoland. But this peasant production was short lived as the political economy of the labour reserve took over, outlined above (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 113). Today the majority is still rural based, but relies directly or indirectly on migrant earnings. Murray has called this group a rural-based proletariat, and as such, part of the working class of South Africa (Murray, 1981: 175). There are also significant differentiations in the rural population itself (see below), but for now we shall leave it as the largest class grouping in Lesotho.

Lesotho also has a small urban working class, divided by skill and income. About one fifth of this class is well paid and highly skilled, but the remaining majority earn about the same as the rural based unskilled worker. Both groups within this broader category earn less than migrants to South Africa (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 114-115).

The third distinguishable group, which could be called the middle class, is a diverse group, including shopkeepers, traders and small business-people on the lowest level,

prosperous rural farmers and rural contractors on the next level, and a bureaucratic segment, including the civil service, teachers and other professionals. There are huge disparities between the lower and higher echelons of this class and the line between its lower levels and the working class is blurred. This was especially evident when mine wages increased threefold in the mid-1970's, enticing some people in this group from the lower civil service downwards to become migrants (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 115-116).

The line between the higher levels of this third group and the fourth class grouping, the ruling elites, is also unclear. At this peak of the class structure are the people who run the state. Many are involved in forms of capital accumulation, besides their political roles, although much of the productive activity in Lesotho is foreign owned (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 116).

The chiefs in Lesotho do not form a homogenous class. Although division between them can be of political importance, their economic and political importance is much diminished. They are dependent on the state for their small income, and can even be dismissed by the state (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 117).

The military is conspicuously absent from the Bardill and Cobbe analysis. The army has a pervasive presence, and the government is currently a military dictatorship. Elites in the military are part of the ruling class, while foot soldiers

are approximately on a level with the small urban working class. Soldiers earn a wage, but it is less than a migrant. However, soldiers are infamous for supplementing their income through extortion and even robbery.

To sum up, the class structure in Lesotho is hierarchical, with a small group at the pinnacle of the structure that enjoys a living standard far removed from the pervasive poverty of the rural areas. Nevertheless, the rural group is also strongly differentiated, which is significant for the study of rural women.

#### **Socio-economic differentiation in rural Lesotho**

While noting significant inequalities in urban areas, the World Bank held in 1975 that rural Lesotho was marked by unusual equality in income distribution. The Bank attributed this to two main factors: the reasonably even distribution of productive resources including land and livestock, and the observation that the "incidence of migrant labor is higher among poorer families than among the richer" (World Bank, 1975(b): 21). The second factor meant, according to the Bank, that families poorer in productive agricultural resources, supplemented their earnings from agriculture to a greater extent from migrant earnings than did richer households. The central idea here is that rural families depend on either agriculture or migrant earnings as the main base of their livelihood, a point of view shared by Cobbe in 1976, although he subsequently revised this position.

Murray (1981) challenged these assumptions, as have Bardill and Cobbe (1985: 90). Murray asserts that there is, in fact, a marked degree of rural differentiation. This inequality is related to two main variables. The first is a household's access to migrant earnings, which is the only determinant of wealth. Murray states that it is only households with access to migrant earnings that can invest significantly in agriculture. Thus it is not a question of agriculture or migration, but migration or poverty (Murray, 1981: 87-97). While agreeing with the Bank that land is reasonably evenly distributed, productivity is not, as this depends on the availability of cash for inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds. Murray found, however, that livestock was not evenly distributed, with nearly one half of rural households having none. Furthermore, it was not grain-poor households that tended to hold livestock, but those with a high grain production (Murray, 1981: 89-94). Hence, Murray noted a definite concentration of high yielding productive resources and livestock with migrant earnings.

The second factor Murray discussed was the effects of the development cycle on the relative wealth of a household. Murray suggested that households occupied different class positions at different points in their development. Earning power is concentrated in the young to middle age range of men, while land allocation often comes sometime after the first years of working as a migrant. An elder man will have had



time to accumulate livestock and to achieve good productivity in farming through many years of migrant earnings. He may also have access to the earnings and/or labour of his grown children (Murray, 1981: 88-98). Demographic factors such as the lower average life expectancy for men compared to that for women, (49.3 years compared to 52.7), means that many households are headed by widows, who have less access to productive resources and cash without a husband.

Murray later revised his analysis (1987), even suggesting that his own emphasis on the development cycle was "misleading". He acknowledges that his earlier analysis assumes that most households have access to migrant earnings at some point in their development. This is increasingly not the case, he notes, as mine opportunities have decreased since the late 1970s. Hence households with migrants are emerging as an 'elite':

It is thus easy today to identify a relative elite of professional mine labour on the one hand, and on the other hand an entire generation of young and middle-aged men engulfed by a surging tide of structural unemployment (Murray, 1987: 239).

He also admits that he did not fully recognize that other segments of the rural population were 'relatively discreet', that is, not part of the "normal" cycle. Most notable of these were many of the female headed households of women abandoned, separated or divorced.

Spiegel (1981) also discusses the limitations of using the development cycle as a major determinant of inequality in

Lesotho. Spiegal points out that there are many reasons for a household to lack a migrant head: no contract, injury, divorce, death, abandonment, no sons to replace retired father's earnings. There are also variations in the amount migrants remit, and in the size and gender breakdown of the household that affects its relative wealth (Spiegal, 1981: 5-8).

The pertinent points concerning rural differentiation in Lesotho in the context of the migrant labour system are as follows. First, domestic agriculture and migrant labour are interdependent factors in rural survival, not discreet strategies. Second, a growing number of households have no direct access to migrant earnings, including those with male heads as well as de jure female headed households, intensifying rural differentiation.

The evidence suggests that there is a marked differentiation within households as well as between households: women tend to be worse off than men, both in the context of female-headed households, and as wives. This point is explored further below.

With this introduction to the political economy of Lesotho, and social and economic differentiation in the rural areas, a specific focus on women in Lesotho is now pursued.

#### **WOMEN IN LESOTHO**

In this section the situation for women in Lesotho as a whole is described, with specific attention to class

differences, affects of the gender system, and women's formal labour market participation (FLMP). Particular attention is also given to rural women to provide the basis for the case study in Chapter Three.

#### **Class and Gender in Women's Experiences: Structural Aspects.**

A study of the secondary literature and statistical evidence on women in Lesotho suggests that class and gender are the major influences on an individual's the experiences. Women across classes share some experiences, as they are often influenced by the same set of cultural norms for women's roles and behaviour, and women's status relative to men in the same class is virtually always inferior. Nevertheless, class divisions significantly influence the options women have to combat their disadvantaged position as a gender, and women of one class often identify more with men of their own class, than with women from another class. Women of an elite class, for instance, often have a bigger stake in protecting the interests of the men in their class, than they do in promoting the interests of women of all classes. Further, the gender interests of women of an elite class may actually contradict those of lower class women. An example of this is the use of maids by professional women to free the latter to go out to work.

The class divisions in Lesotho as discussed above, are extreme. A tiny elite, mostly urban, is supported by a mass

of, mostly rural, poor. The situation for the emerging "middle class" is also far removed from that of the rural poor.

To draw out the similarities and differences of women's experiences in different classes in Lesotho, some of the major structural conditions affecting women's lives are outlined below. The overall structure of the political economy of the labour reserve is paramount in shaping Basotho women's lives. It weaves through women's education, relationship to the labour market, the law, and women's relationship to the state.

#### **Women in the Political Economy of the Labour Reserve**

A dominant characteristic of Basotho society is the large number of men involved in migrant work in the gold mines of South Africa. Although some men find work in Lesotho on government projects such as road building, as construction workers, taxi or truck drivers, small trading store owners or grinding mill owners, none of these jobs usually offer wages remotely approaching minework. Consequently, most young men with little education, pursue mining contracts (Gay, 1982: 28). 1986 statistics put Basotho mining migrants at 121,450 men, more than one half the total male labour force (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1987: 15). Indeed, migrant work for men has become such an integral part of life in Lesotho, that to have a mine contract is a symbol of manhood and success in the villages:

Work in South Africa is conceptualized as a test of manly courage and endurance comparable to the

cattle-raiding and warfare of earlier historical periods. In this sense initiation is undeniably in part a preparation for the migrant labour that involves up to 80% of adult Sotho men (Coplan, 1987: 415).

Basotho women's lives are intimately structured by this large-scale male absence, but the impact differs significantly by class. These differences can be shown by looking at women and education and women and employment patterns.

#### **Women and Education**

Women in Lesotho are on average better educated than men: 33.5% of men have no formal education, compared to only 13.1% of women. 20.1% of women complete primary education, compared to only 10.6% of men. The 1976 Census revealed around 60% of women were literate compared to about 36% of men (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 19; 1). This is usually attributed to the economic importance of the role of boys as herders of the many cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and horses that are an important aspect of the assets of rural households. Furthermore economic opportunity for males is primarily in mining contracts, which requires little education. Returns for education are generally low for males, except at the tertiary level, and thus there is little incentive to educate boys. Educated girls, on the other hand, can fetch a higher brideprice (bohali) (Kimane, 1985: 182). Adult male involvement in migrant labour combined with the economic role of boys as herders, then, provide a structural situation where females enjoy a higher educational status than males.

The impact of education on women's lives, however, is significantly affected by the class structure. The education system in Lesotho is highly elitist (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 193). 1986/7 figures reveal that only 1.9% of the total population completed high school and 0.4% achieved a university degree or higher (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 18). While more Basotho women than men are exposed to formal education, only a small percentage of the population completes primary school, and an even smaller sector that completes secondary and tertiary education. Elite women, who start with the advantage of expensive private, English language primary schools, are better able to advance through the education system, which then provides a basis for employment opportunities. Keeping in mind that most of the elite live in the urban areas, and the poor in the rural areas, the following is revealing:

A regional breakdown of the population by education shows that for each level of education, the majority of those who have completed their schooling comes from urban rather than rural areas (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 18).

Poor women, on the other hand, while having more exposure to formal education than men in their class, gain few returns from their years of school, as most returns on education come only at the tertiary level.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>. Many poor families send children to secondary school at high cost, but few children pass. For 1986, only 27.8% of the pupils who sat the Cambridge exams passed. Considering attrition after the first year of the two year preparation for the exams, this means that only

## **Women and Employment**

Women make up 36.7% of government employees, and 21.6% of people employed in the private sector (1976 Census Figures, in Gay, 1982: 45). Women represent 77% of the teaching force at primary level, and 52% at secondary level,<sup>3</sup> 68.8% of sales workers, 69.8% service workers, and 50.7% of clerical and related workers (1976 figures in Gay, 1982: 68). Taken as a whole, women represent 44% of Lesotho's labour force (INSTRAW, 1985).

Women occupy this relatively prominent position, because of the high number of men that are out of the country for most of their prime years, working as miners in the gold mines of South Africa.<sup>4</sup> When mine wages went up three-fold in the

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19.7% of the students that entered the upper level of secondary school, passed (Government of Lesotho, 1987, Education Statistics 1986: 33). Without a good English base, pupils work at an extreme disadvantage in the English language secondary schools, which culminate in the demanding and academic-focused Cambridge "Ordinary" Level Exams.

- <sup>3</sup>. Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, (1989), Basotho Women and Their Men. Females and Males in Lesotho. Statistics Divided by Gender: Government of Lesotho: 21. Statistics in this collection are taken mostly from 1986/7 surveys. Where 1986/7 figures are unavailable, those from the 1976 Census are used.
- <sup>4</sup>. This structural situation is similar to that in Botswana where there is also a high rate of male migrancy to South Africa and a coinciding high rate of female participation in the workforce: 50% of the labour force is female. Figures for Zimbabwe and Zambia are notably lower, 29% and 32% respectively, as are the rates of male migrancy. (Statistic for women's labour force participation from INSTRAW, (1985), Women in Economic Activity: A Global Statistical Survey (1950-2000). )

1970s, even some men who could have worked in the lower levels of the civil service, chose mining for its better pay (Gay, 1982: 62):

there are so few employment opportunities available within Lesotho, and people with some years of secondary schooling must still go to South Africa for work... differences in level of educational attainment were more significant in the allocation of individuals to different occupational grades within the mining sector than in distributing individuals between mining and non-mining sectors (Murray, 1981: 41).

Some male secondary school teachers still consider mining a viable alternative to teaching, as the pay is comparable or higher, depending on the qualifications of the teacher (Goebel, 1990, Unpublished research). The mean length of migrancy is sixteen years for men from the lowlands, and thirteen for the mountains, with the years concentrated between early manhood and middle age (Murray, 1981: 41).

In spite of women's high numbers in the formal sector and their higher educational status, they are still found primarily in the 'traditionally' female jobs of clerical work, services, and the caring and child-focused professions of nursing and teaching. Stratification of the labour market on the basis of sex persists:

The concentration of women in service and clerical employment are both cause and effect of gender-typing of jobs, based on beliefs about qualities needed for the task and the relative abilities of males and females (Kimane, 1985: 184).

Furthermore, the national economy of Lesotho is small and weak, a condition directly attributable to the regional



economic system as controlled by South Africa described above. In this context, there are few domestic opportunities for employment for either men or women, especially the large majority without a complete high school or even university education.

To sum up, the structural conditions of male absence and elitism in the education system provides relatively good employment opportunities in the formal sector for Basotho women with advantageous class positions. Nevertheless, sex stratification in the labour market persists, showing the influence of the gender system on women's opportunities.

For the bulk of the female population, which is poor and rural, few employment opportunities exist. Relatively better educational status compared to men of their class and male absence do not lead to employment opportunities as with elite women. For poor, rural women, marriage is the best economic option, especially marriage to a migrant. Informal sector activities, development projects, and industry provide other, less viable options. Options for poor, rural women are discussed in a special section in more detail below.

#### **Women and Political Power**

Access to power is linked to class as is access to education and employment, discussed above. Poor people, either men or women, have little access to the state in Lesotho, although the state's control of the general population is pervasive. The bureaucratization and

militarization of the undemocratic state ensures that the state's tentacles reach into the remotest corners of the country. An example of this is the Village Development Committees (VDCs), created in Chief Jonathan's time, ostensibly as a development initiative. Mueller argues that the VDCs were, in fact, vehicles for political control. Only BNP members were appointed to the VDCs, and they were to report to the government on "security problems" in the village (Mueller, 1977: 160).

The gender system also influences access to the state. Women do not appear in significant numbers in the higher echelons of power in government, business or traditional power structures. A notable exception is the National University of Lesotho, where the majority of academics are women (Kimane, 1985: 184). There are no women cabinet members, although women are appearing in larger numbers in the middle and high levels of government bureaucracy, as men move to more affluent positions in international organizations, private business, or parastatals (Gay, 1982: 62). Work needs to be done on the effects of this influx of women on the power structure and gender relations. Women's historical role in politics also needs documentation (see Epprecht, Doctoral Thesis, forthcoming).

At a lower level, women are prominent in the VDCs mentioned above. Importantly, women do not figure in leadership roles, despite their superior educational status

(Mueller, 1977: 160).

In 1977, 27.3% of traditional Chiefs were women. This figure shows an increase, and is a significant minority, but Gay suggests the increase comes from the small economic reward of being a chief and the decrease in chiefly powers. Traditionally powerful, chiefs now deal mainly with land allocation, and issues of customary law in village affairs. Important men prefer to get better jobs (Gay, 1982: 57).

#### **Government's Development Policy and Women**

The integration of women into development is one of the six priorities of the GOL's development approach. The five other priorities are: 1. agrarian reform; 2. people's participation; 3. rural employment opportunities; 4. access to medical care, expansion of educational opportunities and rural sanitation; 5. food self-sufficiency. Although it would be naive to assume the political will and ability to achieve any of these goals, the stated priorities give some reflection of social pressures and state commitment or acceptance of social change. The priorities also reflect the agendas of international aid organizations as suggested by Ferguson, discussed in Chapter 3 below.

Women are targeted by the GOL for Food for Work programmes, in which work on a road, for example, is remunerated with food, and a little money. Significantly, an equivalent strategy by the Labour Intensive Public Work Unit employs primarily men and pays them wages. This reveals that

the GOL does not recognize the economic needs of many Basotho women, and its women and development strategy does not challenge the dominant gender ideology of the male breadwinner and the female caretaker in charge of food subsistence. The focus is on using women effectively and productively: Chief Jonathon called them "bulldozers with breasts" (Work for Justice, May 1991). There appears to be no commitment to the breakdown of sexual inequality (Hofstede, (1986): 51-54):

It may be altered, even modernized, but it is most conceivable that the principle of male dominance will be preserved in the entire process and outcome of the development strategy (Hofstede, 1986: 55).

#### The Women's Bureau

Like many developing countries, Lesotho set up its Women's Bureau in 1979 on United Nations' request in the late 1970s, as part of the initiatives of the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985. The Bureau comes under the Ministry of Rural Development, Cooperatives, Women and Youth Affairs, a structural position that buries women's issues. Hofstede's study suggests that Lesotho's Bureau, like many of its kind elsewhere, is for the most part integrationist in nature, often serving to coopt women's interests, rather than promote them (Hofstede, 1986: 69). It is poorly linked to other women's organizations, and hence often does not represent their interests. While some helpful studies have been done in the Bureau's name<sup>5</sup>, linkages with grassroots groups could be

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<sup>5</sup>. For example, the study on market women by E.L. Molapo referred to below.

crucial for the development of the Bureau as an effective voice for women in Lesotho.

The Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW), established in 1964, is also linked to government through the same ministry as the Women's Bureau, and has contact with the many village level women's groups, many of which are associated with churches. These groups are mainly for savings, spinning, garden clubs or prayer groups (Gay, 1982: 58-60), promoting women's traditional roles, rather than a feminist perspective. Generally, women's groups, including the Women's Bureau and the LNCW, while involving large numbers of women, do not promote changes in gender relations, or women's traditional roles in the society, and do not provide a means to political power.

To sum up, class and gender both affect access to power in Basotho society. A growing number of professional women appear in the middle and higher levels of the state bureaucracy, but no women occupy major decision-making positions. The Women's Bureau has little power within the government apparatus as a whole, and few links with rural women. Poor rural women may be involved in VDCs, but rarely in leadership roles. Women's organizations are pervasive but do not provide an effective link to the state, or a significant political voice for women.

#### **Women and the Law**

Basotho women's subordinate position as a gender is

underpinned by the legal system:

Law, whether it be customary law, statute law or common law, has been used as an instrument of discrimination to deprive women of that which they rightly deserve and to refuse them the recognition otherwise afforded their male counterparts (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 47).

The Bill of Rights of the Lesotho Constitution accords rights and freedoms to every individual regardless of race, political opinion, or sex. These rights include equality before the law, the right to personal liberty, and the freedom from inhuman treatment and discrimination, especially on the basis of race or sex. The laws of Lesotho contradict the Bill of Rights, particularly for women: "the laws of Lesotho offend the letter and spirit of the protections against sexual discrimination enshrined in the Constitution" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 48).

The most fundamental violation of the rights guaranteed by the Bill is women's legal status. Women in Lesotho are legal minors, first under the guardianship of their fathers, and then under their husbands when married. Other violations of the Constitution occur in health and employment laws.

Women suffer legal discrimination as a gender, but as with the other structural aspects of the political economy discussed thus far, women of different classes are affected differently by the laws, and have dissimilar resources in fighting or side-stepping their legal disadvantages. Class is the major factor, for example, in access to and knowledge of the laws. It is also the most important factor in whether

civil or customary law, under Lesotho's dual legal system, is applied. This is explored further below.

#### **Lesotho's Dual Legal System: Effects of Class and Gender**

One legacy of colonialism in Lesotho is its dual legal system. The first system is "customary" law, which "can be established by reference to long-term established customary practices, usually with the assistance of elderly citizens who are regarded as knowledgeable in such matters" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 48). The second system is "civil" or "common" law, which is Roman Dutch Law as practised by the English in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope and laid down in 1884.

In Lesotho's legal system, "customary" law is applied in cases where people live a 'traditional' life, and "civil" law where people have adopted 'modern' life. "Tests" of this include "the kind of marriage contracted, kind of employment, ownership of car, kind of education of the children, whether a person sleeps on a bed or on a mat, etc" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 49). The tests tend to be economic rather than cultural, even though "there is evidence that the majority of people hardly ever abandon tribal custom completely" (Seeiso, 1990: 50). A person's economic position or class, then, usually determines which set of laws is applied in court.

For a Basotho woman, the application of one set of laws rather than the other, could be either an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the nature of the dispute or charge. Some customary laws protect women better, while some

aspects of civil law afford women more individual freedom and rights.

These issues of class and gender are discussed below in reference to marriage, maintenance and employment laws, as these are the most relevant to the case study. Details on other laws affecting women are included in Appendix A.

#### **Marriage Law**

In Lesotho's dual legal system, there are two types of marriage, most recently described in the Lesotho Marriage Act No. 10, 1974. Customary marriage permits polygamy, while civil marriage does not. In many cases a man marries one wife under civil law and then a second under customary law, which is, in fact, unlawful, but indicative of the legal confusion caused by the dual system (Seeiso, 1985: 46).

Civil marriage is in community of property, which means that the husband controls his wife's property as no moveable property can be registered in her name. The husband has the right to dispose of his wife's property without her consent, although the wife is legally bound equally for debts incurred by the husband. A husband is the legal guardian of his wife, and must authorize all contracts and represent her in court (Mamashela, 1985: 166-7). Nevertheless, a woman is allowed to purchase household goods, have a bank account or insurance policy in her own name, or do public trade if her husband first agrees to it. If employed, a woman is entitled to her own wages (Gay, 1982: 55).



Under customary marriage, a woman's position as a minor is virtually the same, and even continues after her husband's death, when her husband's brother, or even her own son obtains legal guardianship. If the marriage is monogamous, there is little to distinguish it from a civil marriage in terms of property rights. However, if it is polygamous, each wife has some authority over the property attached to her own house (Seeiso, 1985: 52-53).

In customary marriage, brideprice, or bohali is paid by the groom's family to the father of the bride. Some Basotho women criticize this system as oppressive to women:

There are two problems with bohali. The first is that payment of bohali gives the husband very strong and almost absolute rights over his wife. This has resulted in the oppression of women by their husbands. The second is that bohali agreements have become enmeshed in a cash economy. Some bohali arrangements have resulted in bogged down, lengthy and acrimonious negotiations, and some negotiations have resulted in absurd requirements (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 52).

Under customary law, a woman is married to her husband's family, and thus in the event of the husband's death, her connection to them is unchanged, and male affines take the place of the husband, although an older widow usually has a high level of personal control over her affairs. A woman can divorce the family, only if the brideprice paid to her own parents is returned. In this case, the divorced woman would revert to the legal custodianship of her father. In civil law, a divorced woman is legally independent (Seeiso, 1985: 54).

From this discussion on marriage laws, it emerges that an elite woman of independent means would find advantage in civil law if she were widowed or divorced. On the other hand, a poor woman, with little income-generating power, would receive better protection from customary law, which gives her the right to continued support from her married family, if widowed. Divorce in customary law is possible, but undesirable, as a woman is seldom welcome to return to her natal home. This is explained further below in the section on options for poor, rural women.

#### **Maintenance Law**

The laws on maintenance are determined largely by the 1959 Deserted Wives and Children's Proclamation, amended in 1971 and 1977. The Proclamation was an attempt to mediate between conflicting civil and customary law, and defines who is liable for the maintenance of children, (born in and out of wedlock), and wives. The liability varies whether using customary or civil law (Monyamane, 1989: 1-2).

Under civil law, both parents have a duty to maintain their children from birth. This means that an unwed mother cannot claim expenses of a pregnancy. From birth, however, there is no legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, and responsibility for children within marriage continues after divorce, as does responsibility for children born out of wedlock in the case of a man's marriage to another woman. Responsibility usually continues until age

15 years (Monyamane, 1989: 2-3).

Under customary law, a man is required to maintain all children, including non-blood children of his wife under his roof, and the illegitimate children of his daughters. Illegitimate children are the responsibility of the woman's family, whether she is married or not. The father's (and his family's) responsibility is to pay compensation (six cattle) for an unwed girl (if he does not marry her), but the responsibility ends there (Monyamane, 1989: 4).

Maintenance cases often come up in the courts in cases of desertion. A woman is legally defined as "deserted" and entitled to maintenance if she leaves her husband's house (often returning to her natal home), because the husband assaults her or neglects her needs, or if the husband leaves her without support. If the wife deserts the husband, or is adulterous, she can not claim payment. In traditional custom, a deserted wife who resides in her married home can have a lover and bear his children, and still be supported by her married family, and the husband, should he return (Monyamane, 1989: 12-16).

Both criminal and civil proceedings can be pursued, but most cases are settled out of court. Women prefer criminal proceedings because of the desire to punish their husbands, Monyamane suggests. The courts prefer civil suits in the interest of the maintenance being paid. Most awards are of small amounts compared to the cost of living, and most cases

are among poor families (Monyamane, 1989: 17-25).

None of the deserted women in the case study below receive support from husband or married family, or even from the natal family. Clearly, the law fails to protect many women and this lack of protection is often related to class as well as gender. Poverty and lack of education often reduce access to the law.

#### **Employment Law**

Basotho society is largely defined by sexual differentiations, with entrenched beliefs about women's 'natural' and 'proper' place. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are no clearly spelled-out sex-discrimination laws against harassment, unequal pay, etc (Seeiso, et al, 1990:66).

Employment laws in Lesotho discriminate against women in the laws on pensions and maternity leave. Only in 1984 did married women in the civil service gain the right to hold pensionable positions, while the laws governing the private sector ensure that most women are not pensionable, as they often leave employment temporarily, or permanently after a short time due to responsibilities in the family, especially childbirth (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 68-9).

Maternity protection has existed in Lesotho labour law since 1967, but the provisions are inadequate. The laws allow for six weeks unpaid maternity leave, with dismissal prohibited during this leave. This does not adequately guard against dismissal at other points in the pregnancy, and "this sometimes leads to women committing abortions or wrapping

their stomachs tightly so that no one will know that they are pregnant because they are afraid of losing their jobs" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 69). Six weeks is often not enough time for recovery, and babies suffer from the health risks associated with bottle feeding in early infancy as mothers return to work. Seeiso suggests that an employer should be required to give three months paid maternity leave, as the government gives the civil service: "Without sufficient maternity rights, pregnancy jeopardizes employment" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 69). In the case study below, maternity policy is relatively humane.

Barriers to legal reforms of this kind include the cost to private business and the state. This position "ignores the well-being of individual women, their families and society" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 69). Another barrier to reform is the ease with which employers can hire fresh labour, as female unemployment is high.

In employment law, class is again an important factor. Only the relatively privileged women of the civil service have had enough power to press for decent maternity leave. Other waged and salaried women are highly discriminated against. Women doing piece work, as in the weaving business studied below, are unprotected by any of Lesotho's labour laws. Women depend on the good will of their employer for maternity leave and other benefits.

#### **Possibilities for Law Reform**

The Law Reform Commission Order was gazetted in 1988, formulated to review and reform the legal system. Lesotho has a Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) committed to pressing for reforms that end discrimination of women in the laws. They also work to make ordinary people aware of their legal rights, and to encourage women's groups to press government for reforms.

The formation of the Woman and Law in Southern Africa Research Project, with headquarters in Harare, in which Basotho women are involved, is a hopeful sign that competent analyses of the problems in the laws will emerge as well as useful suggestions for reform. Unfortunately, to date "little effort has been made by policy makers to enact anti-discriminatory laws and to prohibit discriminatory practices against women" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 47).

This analysis of different structural aspects of the political economy as they affect Basotho women has shown that gender and class are fundamental organizing systems in Lesotho. Class and gender interact in women's experiences, class often mediating the effects of the discriminatory gender system.

In the next section, the focus shifts to poor, rural women and their options, which provides a more detailed context for the women in Chapter 3's case study.

#### **Rural Women**

As noted above, marriage is the best economic option for poor, rural women, especially marriage to a migrant. This is

consistent with Murray's analysis (1987), revealing the presence of a migrant male head as the crucial factor in rural differentiation. While a wife usually does not share equally in her husband's wealth, her standard of living relates to her husband's economic status. In declining order of economic and social status, rural women can be divided into three main groups: 1. wives of migrants; 2. wives of resident males; 3. women as heads of households. The third category can be subdivided into (a) widows, and (b) separated, deserted, or divorced women. Each of these categories is discussed in turn, with particular attention paid to last category as the women in the case study fall into this group.

#### **1. Wives of migrants.**

The most recent statistics show that of all households in Lesotho, 36% have a migrant. This includes those who are not household heads, for example, sons of widows (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1988). A migrant male head exists in 28.2% of all households. Migrant households are not evenly distributed. 43.4% of households in the rural lowlands have one migrant worker, compared to 38.5% in the rural foothills, 26.7% in the rural mountains, and 17.0% in urban Maseru (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 54). Geographical differences are accounted for by access to transportation, (poor in the mountains), and for urban Maseru, the existence of alternative employment: 70.1% of total household income by main source in Maseru comes from wages and salaries (Lesotho

Bureau of Statistics, 1988:69).

Migration to the mines is primarily a rural phenomenon then, and the mountain regions are less involved than the more densely populated, and more fertile lowlands. Indeed, the mountain regions are generally the poorest of the country, with an average household cash income of 173 maloti, compared to 410 for urban Maseru, 237 for the rural lowlands, and 214 for the rural foothills (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 60).

Wives of migrants are the most advantaged group of women in rural Lesotho. Nevertheless, their lives are characteristically stressful, and even at times desperate. In a study of 525 wives of migrants from all geographical regions, Elizabeth Gordon found two main things. First, contrary to conventional wisdom, and the apologists for Apartheid and the 'reserve' system in South Africa, the extended families of the wives of migrants do not support the women during the absence of the husbands. Second, women do not gain independence in their husbands' absence, but rather are ground down by responsibilities that they lack the authority to deal with (Gordon, 1981: 69).

Migrants often fail to provide adequate means to carry out their own instructions. In other cases, a returned husband may beat a wife who has made an emergency independent decision. One woman Murray interviewed, who had conflicts with her migrant husband over spending priorities, said: "A



man hasn't got sense... he doesn't know <our problems>, yet if you don't do what he wants, he beats you..." (Murray, 1981: 159). Gordon argues further that the wives have no control over their husbands' decision to migrate, fidelity, or frequency of returns. These conditions, underpinned by the virtually vacuum of income making opportunities for women, "make the woman's position an especially dependent, passive and stressful one" (Gordon, 1981: 73).

A 1977 study by Gay shows that while households with a migrant male head enjoyed the highest average incomes, (twice those with a resident male head), they were dependent on the migrant for a higher percentage of the total income than other kinds of households, supporting Gordon's point about the migrant wives' economic dependence: in households with migrant heads, their earnings made up 75% of the household total income, while earnings of resident male heads contributed about 50% of the total (Gay, 1982: 25).

The high dependence of migrant wives on their husbands' earnings is often a cause for marital stress, as the wife has little control over how the man will spend his money. Although there are some legal measures and migrant company provisions for women deserted or in an emergency, few women know about these (Gay, 1982: 28). On average, (and there are wide variations masked by this average), 41% of migrant earnings are spent on the migrant himself, 31% on other household members, 19% on communal items, and 9% outside the

household (for example on brideprice) (Murray, 1981: 157). The relative wealth of the migrant compared to the rest of the household is clear, and the tensions created by this, plus the wife's high responsibility without proper authority to carry it out, and the at times haphazard and violent attempts by a migrant on leave to impose his authority, lead to a high rate of instability, dissolution and illegitimate births at the conjugal level (Murray, 1981: 112).

While Gay agrees that wives' of migrants are economically dependent, and stressed and inhibited by cultural norms that restrict their ability to carry out responsibilities that have been thrust upon them in their husbands' absence, she does not agree with Gordon that these conditions have made the women "passive". Rather, Gay thinks the realities of migrant labour have made women more innovative, and more interested in "modern" development such as in adopting new farming technologies. While the migrant labour system makes men more conservative as they rely on their traditional homes for stability and support, women are eager to be part of change, and look forward to the future (Gay, 1982: 78). Gay has also noted that most Basotho adults, both men and women, are involved in adulterous alliances (Gay, 1985). This behaviour departs from the 'traditional' model, especially for women, and comprises a defiance of a husband's legal right to control his wife. Males resist this female independence in such activities as attempts to delay the weaning of a child until

he is resident, as a woman does not usually engage in sexual activities while nursing a child. This independent sexual activity by women shows a degree of independence and autonomy, at least in personal conduct, not allowed for in Gordon's analysis. Gay's optimistic position is that these contradictions between the traditional cultural system and the realities of day to day life, will lead to new, more equitable forms of gender relations in Basotho society (Gay, 1980(a): 310). Gay also suggests there is an increasing matrifocal tendency (Gay, 1982: 16). The conflicts will undeniably lead to changes, but whether women gain will depend on their control of income and other resources. While Gay's position is perhaps overly optimistic, Gordon's picture of Basotho women as "dependent" and "passive" fails to capture the dynamism and formidable ingenuity Basotho women have shown for over a century in coping with the economy of the labour reserve. While the migrant labour system clearly puts stress on marital relationships, and causes differences in the outlook of men and women, it is important to keep in mind that on the whole, men and women in rural Lesotho still share the same social goals: the desire for a modern home (ie hewn stone or cement blocks) and a good herd (Mueller, 1977: 164). Both men and women need marriage and the building up of a homestead as men must retire to Lesotho and do not have access to fields unless married, and women have few resources (or status) if single or divorced (Mueller, 1977: 164).

Before leaving this discussion of women's autonomy versus their dependence in the context of male migrancy, another dimension should be added to the discussion. Any concept of women's power or autonomy must be seen in the regional context of capitalist development as it is bound up in the racial policies of South Africa. In this regional context, both Basotho men and women in rural areas are subordinated by race and class, and they both have little power to change their lives for the better. There is gender subordination in Basotho culture, but race is a more powerful discriminator in the political economy of the region (Mueller, 1977: 155). Lesotho's place within the South African dominated regional economy becomes increasingly disadvantaged, a fact only too clearly borne out by the recent cuts in mine contracts. Thus any increase in women's power or autonomy at the household level, or even at the level of village politics, "is a power within a context of increasing powerlessness" (Mueller, 1977: 165).

## **2. Women as Wives of Resident Male Heads of Households**

Little is written about this group of women, thus this section will be short. 37.5% of male heads of households are migrants to South Africa. Of the remaining male heads, 25.6% are non-migrants, 30.4% are daily commuters, and 6.5% are migrants within Lesotho. For their main income, 20.1% of non-migrant male headed households depend on subsistence farming, 11.7% on cash cropping, 17.9% on wages and salaries, 3.0% on

business income, and 19.3% on other sources (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 10; 28).

On average a resident male head personally contributes about 50% of total household income, which is usually about half that of a household with a migrant head (Gay, 1982: 25). In households that have been completely left out of the migration cycle, a wife's economic status is poorer than women with migrant husbands.

### **3. Women as Heads of Households**

27.6% of households in Lesotho are headed by women (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 9). Of these about 90% are widows, and about 10% are women separated, abandoned, or divorced (Gay, 1980: 214). This group of households has on average, the lowest subsistence level (Gay, 1980(a): 253).

#### **3.a. Widows**

From the discussion of women's legal status above, widows appear to enjoy some prestige and independence in comparison to a wife or single woman. If a widow continues to reside in her married home, which is usually the case, she can often keep the use of her house, land and property (Gay, 1980: 214; 222). A widow loses her rights to these, if she leaves the husband's family or remarries; most widows who have children, do not remarry. A widow who returns to her natal home because of disputes with her affines is among the poorest women in the society. In most cases, therefore, a widow stays in her married home. If she has grown children, especially males, she

can usually rely on some support in the forms of cash and/or labour. She may also have control of the labour of one or more daughters in law. It seems that "in a sense, it is only upon becoming a widow that a woman at last attains full adult status" (Gay, 1980: 223). While enjoying some prestige and power, contemporary economic conditions in which increasing amounts of cash are essential for survival mean a widow must usually generate some income. No one is going to "look after her".

A widow is entitled to ploughing by her male affines. Some widows without dependable affines can have wealthy patrons for whom they work in exchange for ploughing and other necessities. Others seek chiefly patronage. Since widowed women under customary law can continue to bear legitimate children, many have lovers, who often provide some financial support. They can also seek employment, with their affines approval, without losing their house and property. Most have to depend on brewing traditional beer or petty trade for income (Gay, 1980: 223-235).

The brewing of beer is the most important income generating activity of rural women, especially widows. It will be discussed further below in the section of income generation. But first, an outline of the situation of the most disadvantaged group of women.

### **3.b. Abandoned/Separated/Divorced Women**

From the legal discussion above, it is clear that single

women, whether abandoned, separated or divorced are disadvantaged legally, economically and socially. They form the most marginalized group of households in Lesotho. Without the customary access to cash and productive resources that comes only through marriage, it is these women, along with many widows, who are highly dependent on income generating activities in an economic and social system that puts them at an extreme structural disadvantage in this pursuit. The activities they pursue, mostly in the informal sector, will be discussed below.

Although some separated women do eventually return to their affinal home and/or their husband, many do not. Few separated women remarry, even if they are young, either because men fear the old relationship will reassert itself, especially if there are children, or because they themselves are fed up with the failure of men to support them properly (Gay, 1980: 269; 275).

A woman of a permanently broken marriage can not stay long in her natal home. She is often rejected by her brothers' wives, and seen as an economic burden with no proper rights or status. Socially, she is considered "loose" as she does not occupy a proper position under patriarchal control. Sometimes women in this position seek informal liaisons with men, often bearing them children, and are called "prostitutes" although they are not really earning money directly for sexual services. With no access to land, and no assured access to

male income, some form of income generation is essential for most (Gay, 1980: 270-275).

#### **Options for Income Generation**

A Basotho woman seeking to generate her own income has limited options. Opportunities for wage employment are particularly dismal for rural women. The lack of opportunities mean women will accept wages below the minimum wage, working as a domestic worker for example, which entails working long hours for pay inadequate for reproducing a family:

Even male day labourers must be offered salaries sufficiently high to compete with urban and mine wages, whereas women are so eager for work that they will settle for much less than established minimum wages (Gay, 1982: 50).

Domestic service is a significant form of wage employment for women in Lesotho, especially in urban areas. Women from rural areas often migrate to urban areas to work as a live-in domestic servant (Gay, 1980: 291). Even low income urban families often hire a domestic worker. The best urban jobs are with expatriates who tend to pay higher. Jobs are also available with teachers at rural schools, both expatriate and nationals (Khauze, 1982: 2). Rural women migrating to towns to work often employ village women to do some of their domestic work while they are away, creating a new kind of hierarchy in village class structure (Gay, 1980(b)).

Since most rural women have little education, they have virtually no access to wage employment. They turn to informal



sector activities to generate income. This reveals the relatively privileged position of the women in the case study, (that is within the category of women without men).

The most important income generating activity for women is the brewing and selling of traditional beer, but hawking either locally produced goods, or goods brought in from South Africa, is also important, and prostitution and illegal migration to South Africa form other, more desperate alternatives.

Brewing traditional beer for sale is a way for women to get access to mine remittances, as migrants on leave tend to spend a lot in the local shebeens, "in an attempt to gain status by creating an impression of wealth" (Malahleha, 1985: 46; Gay, 1980: 241). One sixth of families brew beer regularly, and brewing accounts for 23% of the cash income of women headed households (Malahleha, 1985: 45). A 1981 study which interviewed 345 women, found 48% engaged in some income-generating activity, 50% of which were brewing (Sebatane, 1981: 67). Gay found in her study that over one half of households brewed sometimes, while 20% brewed once a week (Gay, 1982: 46). Clearly, "liquor brewing as a survival strategy is thus considered a major source of income in both rural and urban areas" (Malahleha, 1985: 51). The residue from the brewing process can be fed to pigs, chickens and ducks, either owned by the brewer herself, or by other women. All ingredients can be grown, but commercial inputs can also

be used. Women can brew individually, or cooperatively, or in conjunction with savings or burial societies (Gay, 1980: 243-245).

Malahleha shows how women have taken the initiative to adapt the traditional skills of brewing, which has historically been an important woman's task as part of traditional feasts and cooperative work efforts. Risking the social stigma attached to being a "shebeen queen" and the risk of violence, they gain more control over their lives and economic power to be free of men and provide an education and better future for their children. They operate without a "configuration of male power relations" (Malahleha, 1985: 54), and indeed, "women who brew and sell beer appear to gain a new sort of power over men who drink" (Gay, 1980(a): 255). Gay goes so far as to suggest that "the monetarization of brewing has introduced a new element of equality into the relations between the sexes" (Gay, 1980(a): 255). Brewers at least show themselves to be innovative and self-determined:

far from being a downtrodden, spiritless creature... the Basotho woman shows determination and self confidence (Malahleha, 1985: 54).

Unfortunately, drunkenness is a serious problem in Lesotho, "an illness maintained by the demoralizing working and living conditions of male migrant labour" (Gay, 1980(a): 255). It is a major source of division between husbands and wives, a major deflection of migrant earnings away from his household and family, and a significant block to labour

militancy:

Tragically, this productive potential of rural women is channelled into a trade which is destructive to the health and vigour of the society and which contributes to keeping the African labour force defused and disorganized (Gay, 1980: 257).

Under the current structural conditions of the regional politically economy, and lack of alternative opportunities for women, brewing beer is one of the only activities that combine the accepted sexual division of labour, (keeping men out of the business), with a reasonable rate of return, for both rural and urban poor women. Brewing also provides opportunities for the most desperate women in a community who do "piecework" or odd jobs for other people. Such people gather firewood, haul water, or grind grain for others such as brewers. The shebeen also provides a locale for prostitutes (Gay, 1980(b)).

Prostitution is in evidence in both rural and urban contexts in Lesotho. No extensive discussion or study on the topic exists, but Gay mentions prostitution in the context of the shebeen above, and in its milder form of informal sexual liaisons with men who provide labour and perhaps money to women with migrant husbands. In an illuminating study of songs composed by Basotho men and women in shebeens, Coplan provides a small glimpse of the life and consciousness of women prostitutes in Lesotho. Composed mainly by divorced, abandoned or widowed women, as well as some wives of migrants, Coplan found the women's songs to express one of two main

themes. The first is nostalgia for traditional marriage in pre-colonial times, an ideal which is no longer obtainable in the current economic conditions of male migration. The second is a view that traditional marriage has always been oppressive to women:

the normative family model is inherently incapable of fulfilling women's individual needs and aspirations, subjects them to intolerable restrictions and social dependency, gives them major responsibilities without effective authority, and makes little use of their productive potential (Coplan, 1987: 424).

Some singers, consistent with view one, express the pain of social ostracization because of their prostitution. Their families disown them, although they were driven to it by economic need, they sing. Others, more in view two, sing of defiance, confidence, and maintain an unyielding criticism of men. The women's songs tell of "the violence, suffering, homelessness, alienation, and oppression that dog the footsteps of the independent working woman wherever she finds herself" (Coplan, 1987: 428). These women at the very bottom of the socio-economic system have an acute consciousness of the oppressive economic and gender systems under which they live. Their ostracization from general society is perhaps somewhat mitigated by their social and economic independence:

Brewing, sexual companionship, and performance within the shebeen context provide a degree of psychological as well as social and economic independence...<the composition of songs> provides a medium of collective self-expression and emotional reflection on the quality of their lives, their hopes, and their inalienable human dignity (Coplan 1987: 424; 431).

A study of prostitution in Lesotho would help us understand women's options and their consciousness of economic and gender subordination. From the available material it is clear that prostitution is seen as a desperate option because of the social stigma attached to it. Nevertheless, prostitutes often appreciate the relative economic and social independence the work provides.

Hawking is another important income generating activity for women headed households. The sale of locally produced goods such as knitting, sewing, vegetables, chickens, baskets and hats provide some women in urban areas with a small income. Women also sell goods brought in from South Africa including fruit and vegetables, as well as cosmetics and cheap manufactured goods (Gay, 1982: 47-8).

In a survey carried out in the capital city, Maseru, in 1985, 75% of the market women or street vendors surveyed had previously been married to a migrant miner who had deserted them five to ten years previously. 20% said their husbands had been disabled by mine work, leaving the woman no choice but to provide for the family. Others were widows with no other way to provide for their families (Molapo, 1986: 63). 90% of the women made between two and five rands a day (about \$1-2.50/day) and many complained about the burden of the "double day", pointing out difficulties in arranging childcare because of lack of money, and poor childcare leading to illness of children and time away from work for the mother

(Molapo, 1986: 64). It is a portrait of women on the very margins of society, outside networks of extended family support, and outside the mainstream of the economy. The retrenchment of thousands of migrants in recent months has lead to increasing numbers of men swelling the ranks of the market sellers. Recent correspondence from Lesotho spoke of men in hard hats selling fruits on the streets (Kate Showers, 1991, Personal Correspondence). This could have significant consequences for the market women.

Development Projects provide some opportunities for income generation for a small number of women. The most successful project is the CARE mohair project, begun in 1977. Raw mohair is brought to women in rural areas, then the spun wool is collected for the Maseru markets. In addition, about 500 women have been trained as weavers on various projects. They find work at one of the several weaving businesses (one cooperative), like the one in the case study. Participants in "Food for Work" projects run by the Catholic Relief Services and the World Food Program, are 98% women, and while the women get food, not cash, for work on rural projects, it still is a way to meet some of the basic needs of the households (Gay, 1982: 47-50). While this sort of project may meet a food need of some poor families, as mentioned above under Government's Development Policy and Women, the idea of paying women with food, while men doing similar work in the Labour Intensive Public Work Unit get paid wages, seems to fundamentally ignore

the economic needs and status as main provider of many Basotho women (Hofstede, 1986: 51).

A final option to be discussed here is migration to South Africa. In 1963 a border post was erected between Lesotho and South Africa and Basotho became officially defined by Pretoria as "foreign blacks". Men continued to be recruited by the Chamber of Mines, but women could no longer legally be recruited or go to South Africa to seek employment. Nevertheless, according to 1985/6 figures, 7.2% of all Basotho wage workers in South Africa were women, or a total of about 11,000 women (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 24). Many women work as domestic servants, farm hands, or in hotels, restaurants or factories. Being illegal workers, they are paid miniscule wages, and often suffer humiliations and abuse from employers (Murray, 1981: 154). Some women are self employed in urban areas, brewing, selling cooked food, sewing, pottery, old clothes, "even illicit diamonds" (Gay, 1980(a): 285). Women are also very likely working as prostitutes, although Gay does not mention this. Gay associates female migration with matrifocal households, where a grandmother once a migrant, lives with her daughter, now a migrant, and perhaps cares for her daughter's children. It is a cycle outside patrilineal control and indicative of serious stress on the fabric of Basotho culture (Gay, 1980(a): 295). For the most part, however, the danger, humiliations, separation from home and family, and the low returns of female migration, mean that

it is usually a last option of desperate women (Murray, 1981: 154).

#### **WOMEN IN LESOTHO: CONCLUSIONS**

This detailed discussion of the main cultural, social, and economic factors affecting Basotho women's lives, gives the context for an analysis of women in the labour market. It is only by outlining women's options in the broader society, in marriage, and in informal sector income generating activities, in light of their legal status, and the state's position on women, that the position of women in waged employment can be assessed adequately.

Two main themes emerge from this broader context. First, women in waged employment occupy a relatively privileged place among income-seeking women in Lesotho. The scarcity of employment opportunities, and the generally poorer returns of informal sector activities explain this. Second, this very paucity of options encourages employed women to be exploited through low wages and poor conditions. This structural position in the labour market is caused by a combination of patriarchal culture and regional capitalism, operating in both the home and the labour market.

A discriminatory legal system, employer discrimination, the government of Lesotho's concept of the proper place for women, and the social ostracization of independent women form the pillars of the patriarchal system. The pertinent aspects of regional capitalism are the migrant labour system, and the



overall economic dependency of Lesotho on the Republic of South Africa. Patriarchal culture and regional capitalism affect women's position in the labour market by operating both in the labour market itself, and in the household.

**Labour Market forces.** The labour policies of South Africa which bar legal migration of Basotho women, severely limits their options in the context of scarce domestic opportunities. This policy reflects the needs of the migrant labour system, which benefits from keeping Basotho women in Lesotho to provide a home base for the male migrants between contracts, and on retirement. If Basotho women also migrated, there would be the danger of permanent settlement in South Africa, and/or the loss of the home base in Lesotho. Maintaining that home base keeps the responsibility of the reproduction and training of the migrant labour force in the hands of Lesotho, as well as the subsistence of the migrants' families, and the retirement years of the migrants themselves.

Although women form nearly half the waged labour force in Lesotho, we have seen that this has been due primarily to the absence of sufficient numbers of men. There remains strong evidence for sex discrimination in the types of work women usually do, including their absence in positions of political or economic power, and their predominance in the caring professions and the service sector. This serves to keep women subordinate to men, except, perhaps within the small elite class. For this small elite, opportunities in the civil

service, development organizations, and academia, have given an economic base for choosing not to marry, or to leave unsatisfactory relationships.

**The household.** The household has an important economic purpose not only to the Chamber of Mines in South Africa, but from the point of view of Basotho individuals themselves. Migrant men, in particular, feel vulnerable in the economic system in which they are caught, and cling to their homes in Lesotho as the only security in their lives. There is strong patriarchal pressure from husbands, and from the state in the interest of the husbands, for women to focus on maintaining the household. Some women seeking employment, face resistance from their husbands, who fear the collapse of their home base, or perceive this as a threat to his authority as sole breadwinner. In the context of his overall powerlessness in the economic system, a Basotho man may attach great importance to the economic dependence of his wife, his personal control over her in some way compensating for the larger sense of powerlessness.

The economic system of the labour reserve also creates the conditions at the household level that often require women to seek income. Marriage breakups or insufficient remittances are inherent in the system of male migrancy, and leave women with no option but to seek an independent income.

**Contradictions.** Basotho women of different classes are clearly affected differently by the regional political

economy. However, for both rural poor and urban elite women, there are contradictions between the cultural ideals of women's roles, and everyday economic reality. For poor rural women, decreasing numbers of mine contracts available to men, and large variations in the amount and consistency of remittances of men with contracts, mean women are increasingly left without adequate male support, and must obtain income themselves. For educated urban women, well-paying jobs are often available, and many of these women deliberately avoid formal ties with men. These contradictions between new economic roles of women and the accepted cultural norm of women as economically dependent guardians of the household are generating conflicts and forcing changes in gender relations and household formations. The case study of the weaving business to follow, illustrates these points.

## **CHAPTER THREE. Women and Employment: Practical and Strategic Needs. A Case Study of A Weaving Business.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The general topic of this thesis is women and waged employment in Third World contexts. The central question is: Is formal employment beneficial for women? Related questions include: What needs of women are met by employment? Does employment affect women's status and/or well being, both inside the household and in the society at large? Does employment foster changes in gender relations, either positive or negative?

This chapter has two themes. First, what is the relevance of women's employment to current trends in mainstream development discourse and practice? Second, what can we learn from the complexities of a real life situation for a specific group of women in a specific third world context? It is vital that development theory and practice be rooted in a knowledge of real life situations. The case study for this thesis offers a valuable glimpse into the lives of a group of Basotho women, a glimpse which could inform development plans for Lesotho, as well as add to our knowledge about women in Southern Africa.

The first section analyzes the recent World Bank focus on entrepreneurship and the creation of small- and medium- sized businesses as the main engine of growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. Employment creation, as well as capital accumulation are major aspects of this model. As the case study analyzes a

capitalist business of medium size, the World Bank model can be 'tested' by examining a real life situation. Since the business employs women, the liberal women in development (WID) approach can also be 'tested'. As we have seen, the WID school advocates employment for women as a key strategy in the pursuit of equality, and incorporation into development. The extent to which this case study satisfies both the World Bank model and the WID approach is explored.

The second section investigates the limitations of the World Bank and WID models, particularly as they relate to the case study. For the Bank model, obstacles to the development of entrepreneurship in Lesotho are outlined. For the WID approach, questions about long term change and the nature of women's incorporation into the labour market are posed. What issues are left out of the World Bank and WID analyses?

Finally, besides the implications of the case for development theory and practice, the implications of the dominant development theory and practice for Lesotho are drawn out. Development strategies not only succeed or fail, but can profoundly affect the political and economic structures in developing societies (Ferguson, 1990: x'v).

**The World Bank Model of Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Structural Adjustment and the Role of the Entrepreneur.**

In the 1980's, the World Bank became disillusioned with the African state as a vehicle for development. A World Bank report argued that:

...widespread impression of political decline. Corruption, oppression, and nepotism are increasingly evident. These are hardly unique to Africa, but they may have been exacerbated by development strategies that concentrated power and resources in government bureaucracies, without countervailing measures to ensure public accountability or political consensus (IBRD, 1989b: 22).

The focus shifted away from assisting African governments in order to foster economic growth, and towards restructuring the governments and economies of Africa. At the macro level, World Bank structural adjustment lending, in conjunction with, and nearly always contingent upon, International Monetary Fund (IMF) stabilization programs, were implemented. These programs were intended to assist African countries to service their massive debts to commercial banks, which had become unmanageable. Structural Adjustment emphasizes export production to gain the foreign exchange needed for debt servicing, as well as dramatic cuts in government spending, particularly in 'non-productive' areas such as social services, food and other subsidies, and salaries of the civil service. Privatization, financial reform, currency devaluation, and economic liberalization are all key aspects of Structural Adjustment (Streeton, 1987: 1470; Cornia, et al, 1987: 50-52).

Underlying the World Bank's approach to the development crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa, is the assumption that the main causes of the crisis are internal. This conclusion is consistent with the modernization view of development outlined

in the first chapter. As the 1989 report on Sub-Saharan Africa suggests, external factors such as declining terms of trade are relevant, but not as important as the internal factors which have failed promote domestic economic growth, and exacerbated population growth (IBRD, 1989b: 23). Very significant in this approach is the downplaying of regional forces. Although the negative effect of wars and famine on economic growth caused by the regional destabilization in Southern Africa is mentioned in the report, strategies to alleviate these problems are not included in the development plan, and South Africa is never actually named as a key source of the problems (IBRD, 1989b: 22-23). While the Bank/IMF strategy is concerned with Third World countries' relationship to the global economy in terms of domestic currency value, export commodities, balance of payments, and debt servicing, the focus is internal. Government inefficiency, corruption and incompetence are seen as the main impediments to domestic economic growth. The unit of analysis is always the nation-state, not the region, or the globe.

At the micro level, the World Bank emphasizes the role of entrepreneurs in developing businesses, and hence promoting capital accumulation leading to investment and growth, and providing employment for Africa's vast ranks of unemployed:

Entrepreneurs will play the central role in transforming African economies... African countries can make the entrepreneurial catalyst a key strategy for promoting sustainable growth with equity (IBRD, 1989b: 147).

Labour-intensive operations are preferred because of the high unemployment (IBRD, 1989b: 137), especially if located in rural areas to help stop the flood to the cities (IBRD, 1989b: 138):

In the coming decades Africa's entrepreneurs face a monumental challenge -- to find productive employment for a labor force that will surpass 600 million workers by 2020... (IBRD, 1989b: 10).

Small- and medium-scale enterprises are given the most support: These jobs are more likely to be created in a myriad of small and microenterprises than in a few large firms (IBRD, 1989b: 10).

Outside the informal sector, small- and medium-scale enterprises are few and far between. The paucity of businesses that can link imported and local technologies -- the "missing middle" -- is a major impediment to Africa's development (IBRD, 1989b: 137).

Finally, the way to foster entrepreneurial activity, the Bank holds, is through institutional support and infrastructure development. Programs targeting specific groups, including women, are also important:

Despite efforts to liberalize Africa's economies, the number of entrepreneurs engaged in long-term productive investments is still small. African countries can help entrepreneurs overcome the barriers that remain by improving institutions and infrastructure that support entrepreneurs... Programs that target assistance to specific groups -- redeployed workers from public and private sectors, school leavers, women, and the poor can also perform a catalytic role (IBRD, 1989b: 144).

The World Bank development model for Sub-Saharan Africa then, features two main components. The first is a macro-economic policy of economic liberalization, fiscal restraint,



privatization, and export-oriented production (ie Structural Adjustment). The second is a micro-economic policy of fostering entrepreneurship, both to start the cycle of capital accumulation and investment, and to provide employment. The nation-state is the unit of analysis, and external factors such as terms of trade, and regional economic and political relationships are underplayed.

The WID approach fits into this World Bank model. As outlined in detail in Chapter One, the WID perspective does not fundamentally challenge a capitalist route of development, but insists on the fair and equal inclusion of women in this process. Women must be given equal opportunities as entrepreneurs, as well as in employment. Employment for women is seen as crucial in providing for their practical needs, particularly as the primary care givers and often the primary providers in families.

The extent to which the business in the case study satisfies the Bank model and the WID approach is explored below. But first, a description of the case study.

#### **Case Study. A Weaving Business in Lesotho.**

##### **Description of the Business.**

In order to protect the anonymity of the informants in the study, the business in the case study will be called Mosebetsi, which means "work" or "business" in Sesotho. Mosebetsi was founded in 1985 by a foreign white woman who had worked in Lesotho for the five years previously as a weaving

advisor in another weaving business. Wendy (not the founder's real name), used her own money to start the business, which began with four weavers, and had expanded to a total of one hundred and ten employees at the time of the study (1990). Of these employees, four were salaried workers (dyer, shopkeeper, supervisor and finisher), ten were spinners, twelve were carders, seventy-three were weavers, and two were management (including owner). All employees were Basotho, except the two managers, both of whom were foreign white women. Besides management and the four salaried workers, all other employees were paid by piece rate. Mosebetsi is located near the main road of the country, a few kilometres outside one of the small, main towns of Lesotho, and within a church-based community, surrounded by rural villages. Mosebetsi is one of five main weaving establishments in Lesotho, two of which are cooperatives, and three capitalist businesses. The three latter are all owned and operated by foreigners.

The study took place between January 1990 and July 1990. The researcher was teaching in a secondary school close to Mosebetsi and thus was able to make many informal observations of the business and its relations to the surrounding community. In the study proper, access was granted to the business' records about attendance, lateness, productivity and income of each employee. In addition, indepth interviews of thirteen employees, and the owner and the second management person were conducted, the Basotho employees being interviewed

through an interpreter. For a full description of methodology and English versions of the interview schedules see Appendix B.

#### **Mosebetsi and the World Bank and WID Development Models.**

Based on the World Bank model outlined above, Mosebetsi appears to be almost an ideal engine for economic development. The business is medium- scale, which the Bank prefers over large scale enterprises. The location is rural (although not remote), preferred by the Bank for discouraging urban migration. It is linked with foreign expertise in that the owner is a skilled, and experienced weaver from an industrialized country. Links with international markets are also developing as the owner was, at the time of the study, securing overseas orders, particularly in the EEC. Domestic inputs are used where possible, mostly because of the owner's commitment to Lesotho, but also because the FEC requires a certain amount of Lesotho content. Since it is usually easier to obtain inputs from South Africa, a concerted effort is often required to obtain Lesotho inputs. The example of mohair is illustrative. About one half comes from Lesotho, and the other half from South Africa. The owner explained that after a long search she had found only one Basotho trader who could supply one grade of mohair, because although Lesotho is a mohair rich country, the wool sheds are contracted to sell to South Africa. Potentially, this linkage between Basotho wool producers and traders and the weaving

establishment could be developed, particularly if processing advanced so as to provide more grades of wool, and better marketing made the wool more accessible to buyers in Lesotho. As for other inputs, linen warp all comes from South Africa, and the dyes come via South Africa. Linkages also existed between Mosebetsi and a few other craft groups, such as a group of women that make dolls in traditional dress and another group that make ceramics. These articles are sold along with the weavings in the business shop.

The World Bank model is also satisfied by the fact that the business is funded by independent capital: Wendy was adamant about the need to do business "in a state of economic reality". Besides never having received funding from any aid sources, she even refuses to borrow money from the bank. She disdains aid projects, which she regards as failures. At the time of the study, the prospects for sustainability appeared good; the business was selling well, mainly to the tourist market in Lesotho, and the owner had no plans of leaving.

Finally, the business is a significant employer, one of the main aspects of the World Bank model. For a WID perspective, the fact that the employees are women is an added bonus. The question of employment is pursued further below.

However, while fitting many aspects of the World Bank model, Mosebetsi does not fit in one way. The fact that the owner of the business is not a Basotho detracts somewhat from its other qualities. Basotho entrepreneurship is not being

directly fostered, although the potential is there through the training of Basotho in management skills. Another drawback is the potential threat to sustainability of the business. This question of sustainability is particularly apt in the recent context of violence and unrest, some of which has been directed at foreign business persons (Work for Justice, June 1991: 3). Before looking at potential problems with the World Bank model for Lesotho in general, Mosebetsi's relation to the WID approach is explored.

**The WID Model. The Benefits of Employment. Meeting Women's Practical Needs.**

From a WID perspective, employment for women, particularly in a context of poverty, is seen as an advancement, and an indispensable aspect of women's pursuit of equality. In the next part, the extent to which employment is an advancement for the women in the case study is examined. In order to assess this, we must know more about the women employed at Mosebetsi.

**The Sample**

In all, thirteen Basotho employees were interviewed, including nine weavers, two carders and two spinners. The sample selection was not random, but attempted to represent high, medium, and low earners. Weavers were focused on because they are the largest group of employees, have the highest potential to earn, and are the most skilled in the production process.

Educational status of the informants ranged from no

formal schooling to three years of high school, but most had between four and seven years of primary school. All women came from rural villages in the surrounding area. This supports the view in the secondary literature that rural women tend to complete little education.

#### **Weavers**

All nine weavers interviewed were living without men. The four younger women (under thirty years) had been abandoned by their husbands, left with children to care for and no support from husbands or their husbands' families. In one case the woman lived with her own mother, but all others lived alone, relying on either a paid domestic helper, or, as in one case, a female cousin for childcare. These women had no access to fields, but some had some livestock. All were sole earners in their households.

The five older weavers (over forty years) were widows, and one of these had been previously abandoned. These women were relatively better off than the abandoned women, as they had access to fields (except the woman who had been previously abandoned), livestock, and to the labour of other people. Some had migrant sons, or sons and/or daughters working in Lesotho, who contributed to the household. Some of the widows had access to the labour of daughters-in-law for domestic work. Only one of the widows was the sole earner of the household.

These characteristics reveal several things. First, the

relatively better position of the widows compared to the abandoned women. Although both groups are without husbands, the widows still reside within the bounds of normative culture, and enjoy relatively good status, and access to resources. They are also at a more advanced stage in the life development cycle than the younger women. The abandoned women, on the other hand, fall outside normative culture. They are neither supported by their married families (the Law of Maintenance notwithstanding), nor by their natal homes. Advancing in the life cycle will not affect these women in the same way as the widows, but they probably will get some support from their children when they reach income-earning age.

The weavers, then, are a group of women without men, occupying the third category of rural women outlined in Chapter Two. Both widows and abandoned women were in impoverished economic circumstances, all being members of the lowest income group of the country. The young abandoned women, however, were even worse off than the widows. It appears that it is precisely their lack of men that has driven these women to work, a point supported by the argument that marriage is the best economic career for a rural woman.

#### **Carders and Spinners**

Of the two carders and two spinners interviewed, three are married, and one is widowed. Among the married women, only one husband worked (miner), and his input into the

household represented about one half the total income. For the remaining three women, their income was the household total. Because of the small sample size, it is difficult to arrive at conclusions about this. It would be interesting to pursue such questions as, "Are carders and spinners more likely to be married?" However, this was beyond the scope of the study. Carders and spinners were interviewed mainly to gain a fuller understanding of the business, and to note any differences among the different positions in the business. Carders and spinners will enter the analysis mainly on the basis of the written records of attendance, productivity and income.

With this outline of the main economic and social characteristics of the sample laid out, the analysis of the impact of the employment is pursued.

#### **Evidence to support the WID Model.**

In the discussion in Chapter Two on the options for income generation for rural, undereducated Basotho women, it was clear that steady employment is a rare and privileged chance for a tiny fraction of women looking for income. In this context, the employment at the weaving business is as a very good opportunity. All but one of the weavers agreed with this view. Many of the informants, including weavers, carders and spinners, said they would "stay forever". Informants recognized that their options were very limited, naming hawking, knitting, crocheting or brewing as possibilities, but



questioned whether any of these activities would make them more money. The one worker (weaver) who disliked the work and wanted to leave, was the only person interviewed with a high school education (up to "Form C", or three years corresponding roughly to Canadian grades 8, 9 and 10).

Working at a piece rate means that the workers were not covered by many labour laws, such as the right to maternity and sick leave, and protection from lay-offs, and they were not eligible for union support. This puts the employees at a structural disadvantage in the work force. Nevertheless, the owner makes a point of not laying anyone off, keeping everyone working even in slow times. There was some evidence that working conditions at Mosebetsi were relatively better than some other weaving establishments. Six of the weavers and one of the spinners had worked at another weaving business previously. Six of this total of seven said conditions were better at their current place, including wages and better security. Workers at Mosebetsi were entitled to unpaid sick- and maternity- leave, given the security that they could return to their jobs.

Based on the business records for all weavers in the business<sup>1</sup>, average monthly earnings were 148.42 Rands

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<sup>1</sup>. Monthly income was calculated as an average over three months, excluding beginners, weavers with average absentee rates of over five days per month, and those for whom only two months of figures were available (45 weavers total).

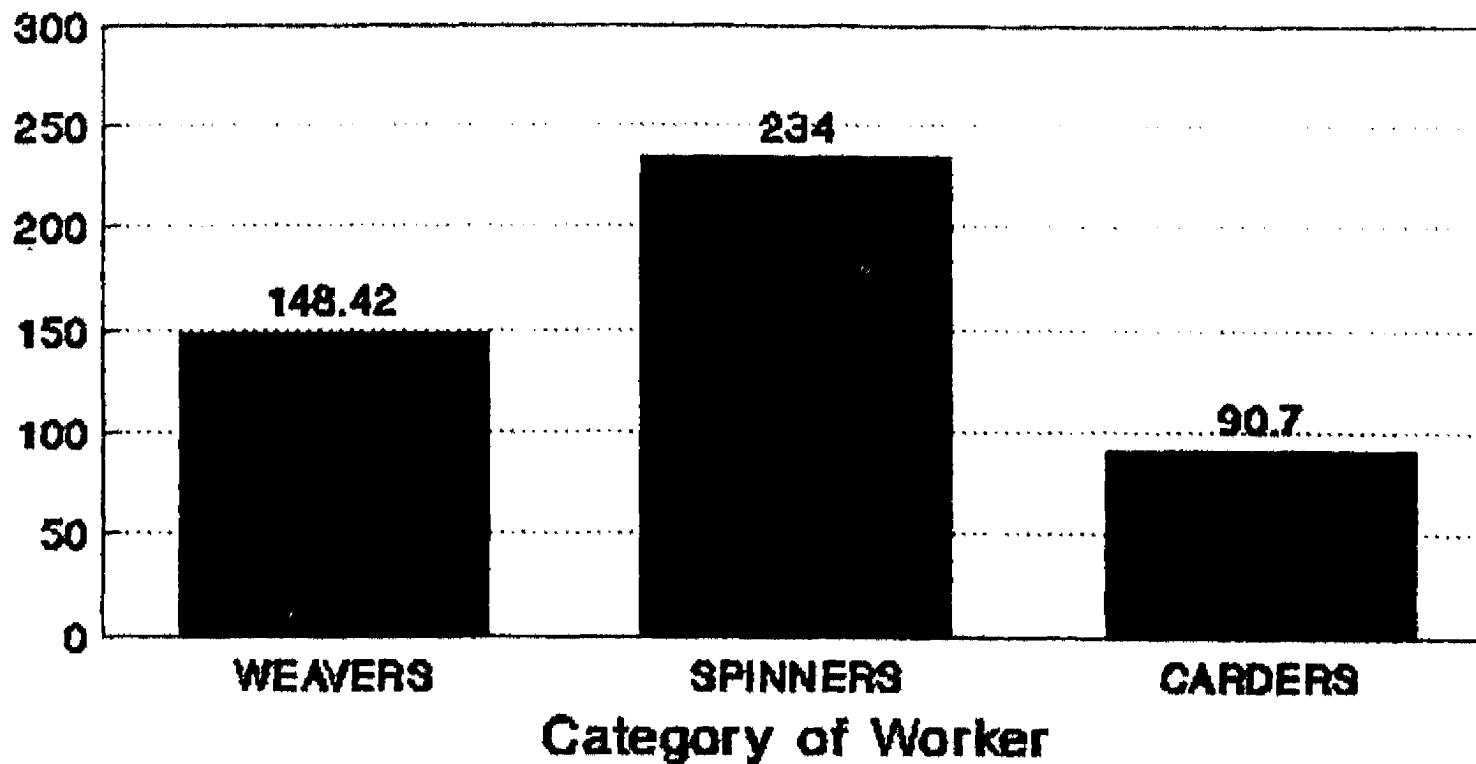
(Maloti)<sup>2</sup> in the first three months of 1990. This income is about four or five times that of a domestic servant, and nearly twice the official minimum wage (R80). Spinners made even more, on average, at R234 per month, while carders made significantly less at an average of R90.70 per month (see Figure 3.i.). The piece rate for carders is much lower than the others because of the low skill of the work. Under ideal conditions the weavers have a chance to gain the highest income because of the higher piece rate. The fact that the spinners emerged as the highest earners appears to be related to the relative ease of the work compared to the complicated weaving and hence the need for more rests, the fact that spinning could be partially performed outside in the sun on cold days while the looms were all inside, the fact that weavers were often dependent on management for colour choice and supply and hence often had to pause in their work, and that weaving requires the development of high skill and talent. The latter point meant that there was much greater variation in the weavers' earnings (R80- R329) than in the spinners' (R187- R286).

In conclusion, this section suggests that the World Bank and WID position on employment cannot be dismissed. It is clear from the literature, and from the point of view of the

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<sup>2</sup>. The Maloti is the Lesotho currency which is tied to the South African Rand. The two currencies are used interchangeably in Lesotho, having exactly the same value. R148 is roughly equal to \$75 (Canadian).

**Figure 3.i.**  
**Average Monthly Earnings (Rands)**



employees interviewed in this case study, that their employment offered a better and more stable income than generally available to rural women in that social and economic position. In the context of rural Lesotho, work at the weaving business is a superior option.

Is this the complete picture? The business under discussion raises certain problems as a model for development both in terms of the World Bank focus on entrepreneurship and business as the engines of development, and the WID focus on the practical benefits of employment for women. These will be discussed below.

#### **Problems with the World Bank Model for Lesotho.**

Although Mosebetsi is a successful business, it would be wrong to conclude that there is a good climate for entrepreneurship and small- and medium- scale business in Lesotho. Mosebetsi has captured a unique niche in the market. In other areas, South African goods dominate. South African food, furniture, clothing, shoes, and department stores, dominate the formal economy, and South African food, cosmetics and trinkets dominate the informal market as well. In the current regional political economy, there is little chance for Basotho business to compete with cheap, South African goods and chain stores. Furthermore, as outlined above, SACU rules impose duty on goods coming from the BSL states that compete with South African products which discourages development of competitive business.

Another barrier to the development of Basotho enterprise is the predominance of East Indian, Chinese, and Taiwanese business people in the small remaining business sector of Lesotho. Asian people run many petrol and natural gas stations, restaurants, butcheries, as well as shops (selling mainly South African goods) in the poorer sections of the urban centres. These Asian groups are resented by Basotho, who feel that

Basotho shop owners have been systematically undercut by foreign business people, who get business sites and business franchises, apparently by giving bribes to leading officials (Work for Justice, June 1991:4).

This resentment surfaced in the targeting of Asian businesses for looting and destruction, and violence against Asian people in the May 1991 unrest (Work for Justice, June 1991: 3).

A small fraction of politically well connected Basotho are also in business, indicating government privilege rather than opportunity for ordinary Basotho. In the May unrest, other businesses besides Asian ones were attacked, including a workshop of the Basotho Enterprise Development Corporation (BEDCO) (Work for Justice, June 1991: 3), a parastatal organization intended to foster Basotho entrepreneurship. BEDCO and the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC) were created in the 1970s to help spur the domestic economy. Government control of these bodies has strengthened government support in the business class (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 158), but the business- directed unrest suggests ordinary Basotho

feel left out of the business sector of Lesotho.

In terms of Basotho entrepreneurship, not only is the presence and privilege of foreigners a problem, but state control of vital funds for entrepreneurial support (mostly aid dollars), blocks the spontaneity of the sector and encourages patronage, corruption, and the expansion of bureaucratic control.

The political economy of the region, which maintains Lesotho's extreme political and economic dependence on South Africa, and the political climate of corruption within Lesotho, suffocates Basotho entrepreneurship. Hence the development of business in Lesotho is unlikely to be a successful "engine of development" without far-reaching regional and domestic transformations. In this context, it is not surprising that Mosebetsi is run by a foreigner.

#### **Problems with the WID Model: Women's Strategic Needs.**

Gender and development analysts have distinguished between two types of women's needs (Moser, 1989: 1802-1807; Grown and Sebstad, 1989: 944). The first are practical needs, such as access to food, clothing, housing and the means to care for children. Meeting these kinds of needs is usually the focus of WID literature and projects. The employment in the case study clearly meets these kinds of needs.

However, a second set of women's needs are strategic gender needs or interests. Strategic interests emerge when women's disadvantaged position compared to men is seen as

inherent in the social and economic organization and structure of a society. Overcoming women's subordination then, involves far-reaching structural changes, rather than simply improving women's opportunities in the current system. Meeting or promoting strategic gender interests requires working to dismantle and transform the mechanisms and structures which maintain women's subordinate position. Concern with strategic needs is associated with a gender and development (GAD) rather than a WID approach. The extent to which women's strategic needs are promoted through the employment in the case study is explored below.

#### **Strategic Needs and Employment**

In the area of employment, it is useful to ask questions about the nature of women's incorporation into the labour market and the nature of the household when approaching the question of women's strategic interests.

Women enter the labour market at a disadvantage to men. They are usually paid less, and occupy more marginal and insecure positions than men. One strategic interest for women, then, is the elimination of this disadvantage. In their employment at Mosebetsi, is the women's subordinate position in the labour force alleviated or exploited?

Informants were asked about their pay as part of this question. Of the thirteen Basotho employees interviewed, twelve said the pay they received was unfair. One of the weavers said the pay was fair, blaming herself for having too

many children, and hence too high a need. All others felt they worked very hard for little return. The weavers referred to the high prices fetched for the weavings compared to the pay they received, and to the imbalance between their needs and their income. Spinners and carders focused more on the small return for long hours of work. All informants said their income did not meet their needs.

As noted above, average incomes at Mosebetsi are relatively good for rural women of little education, but compare poorly to the earning power of most men in the same class, even those with less education. This is true for migrant men (about R800/month) as well as a labourer in Lesotho (about R180-R200/month). The average income of weavers at Mosebetsi is more than the average expenditure of rural female headed households in Lesotho (R116), but still less than the average expenditure of rural male headed households (R205) (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 1989: 27).<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Mosebetsi, women clearly enter employment at a disadvantage as a gender. In Basotho culture, women are mostly associated with weaving and other handicrafts, and thus are actively sought as the labour force in all the weaving establishments in the country. Nevertheless, the scarcity of opportunities for rural women means that even when they are the preferred workforce, women must accept lower wages over no

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<sup>3</sup>. Exact figures for Household incomes were not available in the gendered statistics.



job at all. In Lesotho this situation is worse for poor rural women than for educated women, as was discussed above. For educated women, the absence of men through migrant labour has opened up opportunities that often come with relatively good returns. In the case of Mosebetsi, the pay received does not promote positive change in women's disadvantaged position as a gender, but actually takes advantage of it. On this level, then, women's strategic interests are not being met.

This negative conclusion must be tempered somewhat by emphasizing that some individuals among the high earning weavers and spinners do achieve greater income than the average man in the same socio-economic group. This achievement should not be lost in the average. These women could become models of independence and relative success to other women, much like the successful brewers mentioned in Chapter Two. Furthermore, the retrenchment of thousands of migrant men this year could mean a significant drop in the average income of male-headed households, leaving the employees of Mosebetsi at relative advantage even in an average sense.

Whatever the employees' opinions about their pay, the owner adamantly justified her pay scale with a number of reasons. First she blamed the workers, especially the weavers, for failing to maximize their income. She pointed out that because they were paid a piece rate, the weavers' earning power was in their own hands. The owner felt that many of the

weavers absented themselves frequently or came late, wasted time during the day, "sitting in the sun, sitting chatting, taking snuff, going shopping, etc". The owner attributed this behaviour to her belief that "money was not the number one goal in life" for the workers. "Family obligations" in particular, she saw as more important to them. She also thought her workers could borrow or rely on family help if needed.

Given that the owner felt the weavers produced less than they could, and worked fewer hours than expected (she favoured a fortyfour hour week), she was asked what she thought would increase the hours worked and productivity. She claimed that raising the piece rate had not had a positive effect before. Changing over to a salary would not be workable because of the difficulties in supervision. The owner did not think workers owning a share of the company and earning dividends with increased productivity would help matters. She pointed out that they already controlled what they earned, and chose not to maximize their incomes. The owner also rejected the idea of a cooperative structure instead of a capitalist business, mentioning that the two weaving cooperatives in the country had worse attendance and more problems than Mosebetsi. She felt that the workers had little consciousness about protecting equipment, and efficient use of materials. They wanted management to look after them. Given these differing values and attitudes to work and materials, she could not

imagine co-sharing a business with her employees. The owner's plan for increasing productivity included the implementation of bonuses for punctuality and attendance. She also planned to continue issuing warnings to workers with extremely slack work patterns, with eventual firing as the end. She only issued such warnings in extreme cases, but found it usually worked to get people to "shape up".

The owner said she had considered some form of worker ownership, but on the whole she felt that she had invested her own money and a tremendous amount of time and effort into building up the business, and therefore she deserved to be the sole owner. She said she had taken many risks. She had "employed people as well as I can and paid them when I haven't paid myself, put everything back into the company to build it up". The owner hoped that some day the company could be run internally by Basotho, and she was training the four salaried Basotho staff in management skills. However she was skeptical that marketing, especially international sales could be handled by her staff.

Thus the owner justified her low pay policy because:

- 1) workers do not choose to maximize earnings even now;
- 2) workers can rely on extended family for emergency help; and
- 3) workers lack the work ethic that produces dedication and consistency in work.

These accusations raise a number of points. The owner's contention that her workers could rely on family for help, is

clearly incorrect, as the abandoned women, were all sole contributors in their households, and they did not received help, either regularly or sporadically from other sources. Most of the widows, on the other hand, could rely on contributions from other household members.

The weavers' alleged slackness on the job was a primary investigation point of the research study. Interviews with employees and the white manager, analysis of the record books and the observations of the researcher all explored this issue. While it would have been ideal to measure the actual number of hours spent weaving, this was impossible. The record books recorded lateness, absenteeism, productivity and income. In the interviews, the workers and the white manager were also questioned about these four things. The record books revealed that over a period of three months, 30.4% of the weavers<sup>4</sup> were late on average between 0-5.5 days/month. 32.1% were late 5.6-12.5 days/month, and 37.5% were late 12.6-22 days/month. In terms of absenteeism, 80.4% of the weavers were absent on average between 0-5.5 times/month, 16% between 5.6-12.5 times/month, and 3.6% between 12.6-22 times/month.

The rates of lateness for carders and spinners were significantly lower. 55.6% of the spinners' lateness fell into the lowest category, 33.3% in the middle one, and 11.1% in the highest category. For carders, 20% fell in the lowest

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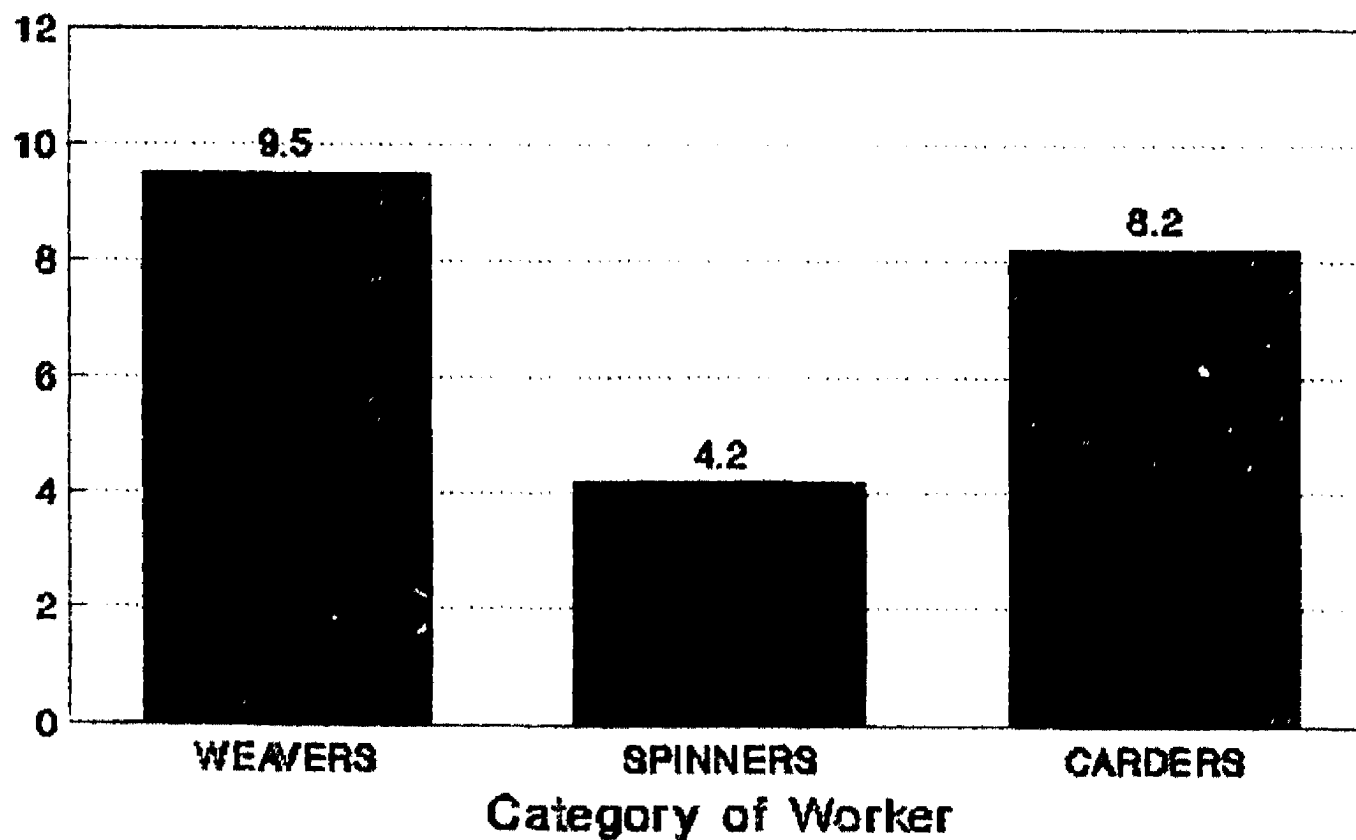
<sup>4</sup>. Excluding beginners and those for which only two months of records were available.

category, 50% in the middle, and 30% in the highest category. Please see Figure 3.ii. for a comparison of these statistics. Spinners and carders were also absent less often: 88.9% of spinners were absent on average 0-5.5 times/month, while 100% of the carders fell in this category.

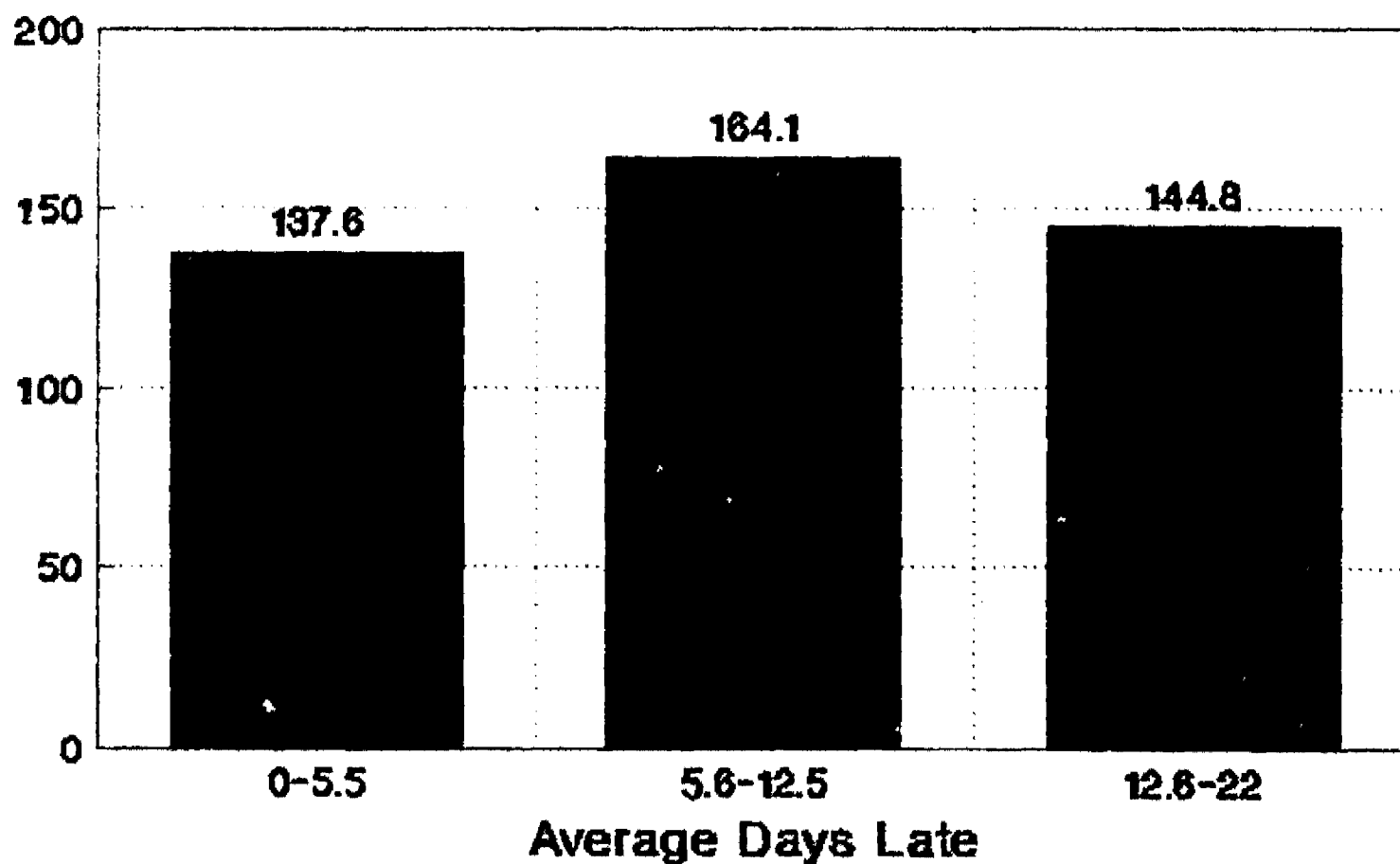
These statistics suggest that the owner could be correct in her view that weavers worked less than the carders and spinners. But the very fact that the statistic vary widely among the groups while the conditions of piece rate are consistent, suggests that the owner's argument that the weavers' lacked motivation because of their cultural values does not make sense. If this were true, the same behaviour would be noted among the carders and spinners. The explanation for the weavers' higher rates of lateness and absenteeism must lie elsewhere. Also significant in the statistics is the finding that the weavers in the lowest lateness category are not the highest earners on average. The weavers in the middle category of late 5.6-12.5 times/month are on average the highest earners (see Figure 3.iii.). In fact, the lowest earners on average, are in the category of lowest lateness. This throws into doubt even the owner's connection of lateness with low productivity for weavers. Interestingly, with spinners and carders, low lateness does correspond with higher productivity.

In addition to the reasons of lack of motivation already mentioned, the owner suggested that the carders and spinners

**Figure 3.ii.**  
**Average Days Late Per Month**



**Figure 3.iii. WEAVERS**  
**Average Earnings by Lateness**



were easier to monitor because of their smaller sizes as groups. The weavers were scattered in different locations, and were too many to supervise closely. The owner also felt that the weavers saw themselves as "special", and hence felt themselves entitled to an easier go of things.

Interviews with the weavers and the white manager who worked closely with them in colour and pattern selection, fixing mistakes and general trouble shooting, revealed new perspectives on this question. The weavers raised a number of issues concerning conditions of work that negatively affected their performance. Cold, particularly in the morning, and all the time in winter, made it difficult to do the intricate weaving work. The white manager also mentioned the cold. It was her view that gas heaters should be used in the large barn-like workshop which housed most of the weavers, instead of the electric heaters then in use. She suggested that the better gas heaters were not invested in because electricity was paid for by the mission, while gas would have to be purchased by the business. She believed this was the main cause of the weavers' tardiness. Spinners and carders worked in smaller buildings that warmed up more quickly and effectively. The manager also mentioned poor lighting as putting undue stress on the weavers' eyes. In her view it would be simple to install better lighting, but the owner inexplicably ignored this suggestion. While the owner chose to put money into expansion, the manager felt it made better



sense to improve the conditions for the workers on staff.

Another stressful condition mentioned by the weavers, was the conflicts caused by the Mosotho supervisor who graded the weavers' work. Extra money was given for high quality work and this was judged by the Mosotho supervisor. Five out of the nine weavers interviewed complained about the supervisor, saying she "played favourites" and brought conflicts from the village into the workplace. Sometimes these conflicts, and conflicts over the awarding of quality marks led to verbal and even physical fights in the workshop. Several weavers said the supervisor was too tough in awarding quality marks, a point on which the white manager concurred. The manager said the supervisor could also disadvantage people by not giving them difficult pieces that fetched higher prices. Some of the weavers said they preferred to be graded by a white woman, because she would be more fair, a point the owner said had come up several times in the past. A third of the weavers interviewed said they would prefer to do a different job at Mosebetsi (two said spinner, one said supervisor), because pay was fair and the work easier. In addition to these comments in the interviews, the researcher observed two "walk outs" of the weavers, where they left their looms and gathered in the courtyard to complain to the owner about unfair marking of their work. The owner supported the supervisor, telling the researcher how she (the owner) was committed to getting Basotho into management positions. In the interviews some of

the weavers complained that the owner did not heed their complaints.

Besides these conditions of work that negatively affected the weavers' performance, another point came up in the interviews that falls outside the owner's view. Seven of the nine weavers' interviewed said they stayed late or worked over lunch to make up for lost time if they were late, and eight said they spent little time not working while at work. The manager did not sense that many people stayed late, but she did feel that few of the weavers wasted time on the job. She mentioned that they often had to wait for her to get colours or patterns. As an observer, the researcher did not see many weavers 'wasting time'.

In order to pursue this question of work performance further, questions were also asked about productivity rates. Perhaps the weavers were working most of the time, but were they working at their full capacity? Were they going slow? While five weavers said they worked as hard as they could all the time, four said they worked harder when big expenses were coming up. This may mean that these four could increase their speed overall, although a higher speed may be physically and mentally difficult to maintain. In answer to another series of questions, eight said they would increase productivity if paid more, were threatened with job loss, were offered a bonus for high attendance, or bought a share in the company so got a dividend from high productivity. Five said their

productivity would increase if they received a salary instead of a piece rate, as long as it was high enough. Others feared they might be cheated this way. There was no interest in a cooperative structure, although there was also no opposition to it. People felt that if the administration was good, the structure did not matter.

The question of productivity is complex. Whether or not the weavers were producing at a reasonable rate under the prevailing conditions is difficult to determine. What is important here is to draw out the conditions that impede productivity, and the gap between the weavers' perceptions and the view of the owner. This gap was producing conflict, in the forms of weavers' discontent and their 'walk outs', and in the owners' apparent frustration, and even somewhat racist remarks.

It is suggested here that these conflicts are inherent to the structure of the business. The piece rate system is particularly disempowering for the workers. It disqualifies them from job security, disallowing them an assured income. It encourages the owner to make possibly unreasonable productivity demands, and to ignore aspects of working conditions that impede worker performance, instead putting the blame for 'poor' productivity on the workers' shoulders. Ironically, the owner was forced to leave her first position in Lesotho as a weaving supervisor in another weaving business, because she agitated for better working conditons,

and tried to organize the weavers to press for their interests. She was even called a 'communist' by the owner of that business. Now that she is an owner, her position has changed. While she still talks about the need for a healthy work environment and happy workers, her structural position in the business seems to have forced her into a stance seemingly incongruent with her values.

This attention to details in the working of Mosebetsi has drawn out ways in which the nature of the workers' (especially the weavers') incorporation into the employment is disempowering. In this sense, the employment does not promote the women's strategic gender interests. Rather than advancing their position in society, the employees enter a relationship with the owner, that is built on unequal power relations in terms of gender, class, and also race.

We have already discussed how women's disadvantaged position as a gender affects the way they are incorporated into the labour market. In terms of class, it is clear that the social and economic inequality between the workers and the owner provides the basis for their relationship in the business. The owner had the capital to start the business, and this translates into the power to make the decisions about the way the business is run, including hiring, firing, rates of pay and all other conditions of work.

As for race, the fact that the owner is a foreigner of Anglo-saxon origin, and the workers are African, creates

another level to the power relation. In most places in the world, people of colour are generally disadvantaged compared to 'white' people. In Southern Africa this situation is extreme. Besides all the advantages of education, relative wealth, etc, of her colour, the owner had access to the craft culture of South Africa. She also received deference from her employees, not only as an owner, but as a white person. When speaking of her, workers tended to express thankfulness that the owner was there to "provide for them".

It would be misleading to suggest that the owner of this particular business did her utmost to exploit the disadvantaged position of her employees. In fact, she did several things to try to mitigate those disadvantages, such as allowing pregnancy and sick leave (unpaid), avoiding lay-offs, training Basotho in management positions, and making plans for such things as a big garden at the workplace for the women's use in growing vegetables for their households. The owner also lived a relatively modest life, clearly not enjoying the opulent living standard of the owner (also foreign) of another nearby weaving establishment. The point is that none of these actions change the fundamental relationship between the owner and the workers, or move towards changing the workers' structural position in the labour market as a disadvantaged gender, class, and race. While the business may satisfy a WID model of development, it could never be a GAD model.

However, conflicts over conditions of work and pay were

not simply disempowering. Women working at Mosebetsi learned a good deal about their common experiences and they developed a consciousness of themselves as workers, and indeed, gendered workers. The long term movement towards strategic changes involves the consciousness of the subjects of such changes. The women in question must be involved as agents in this process. In the case of Mosebetsi it was clearly the case that 'class consciousness' was developing, particularly among the weavers. The evidence of their 'walk-outs' and their vocal dissatisfaction with their pay clearly demonstrates their consciousness. As in the case of growing militancy among some female workers in some export processing zones in Third World countries, this consciousness in the weavers could be seen as an important beginning in the long battle against subordination by gender, class, race and nationality. In this small way, the simple fact of exposure to formal employment, works towards the long term gender interest of women, a point that Engels made.

A related point is that the workplace brings women together in a new way, and hence can encourage new forms of solidarity for women. In the case study, all informants expressed how they enjoyed being with the other women at work, and the researcher observed a great deal of merriment, singing and dancing among the workers. Informants also mentioned being members of savings clubs, and burial societies with other women at work. Although these forms of cooperation are

common among Basotho women, the workplace provides a new forum for them. In this way the workplace clearly operates as a catalyst for support networks for women that often fall outside the networks of normative culture. These activities are evidence of the beginnings of strategic change.

#### **The Nature of the Household**

The impact of employment on women's position in the household is another aspect of an evaluation of women's strategic interests. The structure of the household is significant in two main ways. Firstly, conditions in the household are the most important immediate factor in whether or not a woman looks for employment. Economic necessity is an important aspect of this, but gender relations are also crucial. Chapter Two discussed how rural Basotho husbands often try to restrain wives from working outside the household, even when the man has failed to provide enough. In the case study, most of the women were without men. This not only produced conditions of economic necessity, but released the women to seek employment. It was thus their menlessness that in two ways was the major reason for their entering the labour market.

The second main way that the household structure relates to employment and its impact, is its influence on how employment, and independent income, affects a woman's status and well being as a household member. Do women control their own income? Is their total work burden increased? Is their

sense of autonomy or personal self esteem enhanced or decreased?

All of the women heads of households interviewed said they controlled their own income, which is to be expected as there was no partner to claim it. One of the married women said she shared control of her money with her husband, but the other two married women said they controlled their own money. Possibly these women had gained status in their relations with their husbands, but this was not covered by the questions, as the focus was on weavers -- all without men.

Most women workers experience the 'double burden' of continued responsibility for domestic affairs in addition to employment. Workers at Mosebetsi explained how their family responsibilities conflicted with their work. Responsibility for household tasks, particularly child care was the reason most often given for lateness. Women often worried about the quality of child care in their homes, especially in the case of a hired domestic worker, and some said they still had to attend personally to some situations, such as a sick child. Work at Mosebetsi in no way relieves this 'double burden' felt by working women worldwide.

Related to this issue of the 'double burden' is the point that in this particular case the strategic interest of women in a change in the sexual division of labour in the household is not achieved. Since there are no men in the households, there is no opportunity for men to take on the 'traditional'



women's tasks of child care and other domestic work. The working women simply allocate this work to other women or children, or continue to do it themselves. Nevertheless, women without men may have an advantage over married women in this arena because they have sole power to allocate tasks to children or domestic workers.

The question of women's sense of autonomy and self esteem is perhaps the most interesting, although most difficult to measure. The economic picture has already been drawn in which women at Mosebetsi emerged as clearly advantaged among rural women headed households, but still, on average, lagging behind married women and male heads in living standard. More intangible, but perhaps equally important, is the women's sense of pride in their autonomy and the significance of this for gender relations. Among the abandoned women, there was a general sense of being fed up with men, particularly husbands. None of them wanted another husband (except if he was a white man!). They preferred to be independent, even if it meant living at a lower economic standard. Having a job at Mosebetsi meant that these women could refuse to marry. This is a significant change in the normative gender relations, in which women are pictured as dependent on the institution of marriage for much of their sense of well being in society. In many ways, like the prostitutes that composed the shebeen songs mentioned in Chapter Two, these abandoned women have found a new kind of freedom and personal pride, inspite of

their lower economic and social status compared to married women.

To conclude this section, there are some ways in which employment at Nosebetsi promotes women's strategic gender interests, but the overriding structural factor of women's position in the labour market remains virtually unchanged. The employees are incorporated into employment under conditions of low reimbursement and piece rate, which are made possible by their disadvantaged position as a gender, as well as a class and race. Nevertheless, the success of individual women in gaining income significantly above the average male head in rural areas (in some cases over R300/month), works towards dismantling the image (and actuality) of single women as victims of the socio-economic system and actually allows women to survive without men. The ability to stay independent of men that the employment provides, is changing the balance of power between the genders and may have long-range implications for women's equity. Also the networking of women as groups in the workplace is empowering for the women as a gender. The development of women workers' consciousness of their exploitation in the workplace also raises the possibility of change as it could work towards positive changes in conditions of work and pay.

**The Implications of the Study for the World Bank and WID Models for Lesotho.**

There have been two main levels to this chapter: first the 'testing' of the World Bank and WID models of development,

and second, an investigation of the complexities of the real life experiences of women employed in a Southern African business.

In relation to the World Bank model of entrepreneurship and small- and medium- scale business as engines for development in Sub-Saharan Africa, observations can be made in the case of Lesotho in general and Mosebetsi in particular. Firstly, in the case of Lesotho, major structural obstacles to the development of business render the World Bank model unworkable at the moment. One main obstacle is the regional political economy in which South Africa dominates, hindering the development of business in the BSL states that could compete with South African business. The second major obstacle is the internal political economy of Lesotho, in which extensive government control of political and economic life impedes the development of Basotho enterprise.

In the case of Mosebetsi in particular, its success as a business emerges as a special case, which could not easily be duplicated outside the craft market, which itself is currently saturated. In the case of Lesotho, then, the World Bank development model of entrepreneurship as the main engine of growth is insufficient because while it recognizes badly run government as an obstacle to capitalist development, it is unclear how the state is to be side-stepped. The model also fails to include strategies to overcome regional constraints.

In the prevailing regional and domestic context of

Lesotho, trying to encourage business is unlikely to meet with much success. Ignoring the regional and and failing to deal adequately with domestic constraints in the design of a development strategy for Lesotho is likely to lead to more failures of development initiatives in Lesotho. In the past, a false picture of Lesotho as an agricultural country held together by the international aid establishment has encouraged the implementation of many expensive agricultural projects that have all failed.

Foreign aid has been important historically to Lesotho's economy. Aid from the United Kingdom was important until 1970. In 1966 it amounted to 17% of domestic financial sources (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 46). This went mostly to administration rather than on planned economic development. The UK withdrew most of its aid in 1970 because of Jonathan's unlawful seizing of power and the US and multilateral institutions stepped in to replace Britain. The World Bank, the African Development Bank, the World Food Program, and the UN Development Program are the main multilaterals involved. Altogether, over eighty international agencies are in Lesotho (Ferguson, 1990: 6-7). Lesotho also receives support from the European Economic Community, and has many bilateral sources of aid: between 1975-84 Lesotho received assistance from over twenty five countries including Canada, Denmark, the two Germanies, the United States, Britain, Kuwait and Libya: "Lesotho receives aid of almost all possible types, from all

possible sources" (Bardill and Cobbe, 1985: 66).

Aid has not alleviated poverty in Lesotho. Inappropriate projects and the diversion of a large percentage of aid money to South Africa through the buying of supplies and services have contributed to many failures (Woodward, 1983: 175). The diversion of funds to South Africa has meant that the established political economy of the region has been strengthened through aid to Lesotho. Aid has strengthened Lesotho's bureaucracy, as well, which has hindered the "trickle down" of benefits to the masses of poor.

**Aid: Bureaucratic expansion and the "development discourse".**

According to Ferguson (1990), an unintended effect of the activities of international aid organizations in Lesotho, has been the expansion and strengthening of bureaucratic control (Ferguson, 1990: xiv-xv). This occurs through the creation of new government bodies to carry out development projects:

The Public Service in Lesotho is already huge relative to other sectors of the economy and is expanding at a prodigious rate as the number of departments, parastatals and projects proliferates in response to international funding (Wellings, 1983: 506).

Bureaucratic power is also extended through massive corruption in relation to the aid 'industry', through fraud and embezzlement by public servants (Wellings, 1983: 500).

For Ferguson, while this bureaucratic expansion is not intended by the aid organizations, it nevertheless turns out to be in their interest. The bureaucracy gives the illusion of

government control of the country's development, a necessary part of the aid process. This is explained further below.

Ferguson's analysis begins by pointing out the "wildly inaccurate" (Ferguson, 1990: 29) picture of Lesotho as drawn by the World Bank in its 1975 Report, discussed above. As both liberal and political economy scholars on Lesotho would agree that the Report is factually flawed, the World Bank's picture of Lesotho, shared by most main development institutions, must be seen as completely outside academic discourse. Ferguson calls it "development discourse", which operates under its own rules which are very different from those of academia of either the right or left: "what is being done here is not bad scholarship, but something else entirely" (Ferguson, 1990: 29).

Ferguson suggests that since the World Bank's purpose is to develop and fund aid projects, it must have recipients that are suitable sites for these projects. Lesotho must be created as a suitable target for "the technical, apolitical, 'development' intervention" through "the theoretical work of translation of certain unmanageable sorts of facts into a more acceptable register" (Ferguson, 1990: 28). The Lesotho that emerges from this process, as found in the World Bank 1975 Report, is: 1) aboriginal, that is not connected to the rest of the world economically, and hence can be transformed and modernized through infrastructure projects, education, the introduction of a cash economy, etc; 2) agricultural, so

there can be agricultural projects which the World Bank is very good at; 3) having a national economy, so there can be an economic plan; 4) having governmentality, that is, the main features of the economy and society are in control of the government, so there can be development plans. Since Lesotho has none of these characteristics, the gap between academic discourse on Lesotho and development discourse, is particularly large:

the task of drawing up governmentalist plans for transforming a 'national economy' through technical, apolitical intervention requires preliminary theoretical rearrangements of a more than usually violent or imaginative kind. Lesotho is for this reason a privileged case in which the nature of this theoretical rearrangement is particularly visible, and in which the schism with academic discourse is unusually pronounced (Ferguson, 1990: 72-73).

It should be by now self-evident why projects nearly always fail in Lesotho: they are designed for a country that does not exist. But Ferguson's analysis also makes clear why the failures do not lead to the end of these projects, or a change in the "development discourse" on Lesotho: the purpose of development institutions is not to succeed but to exist. The current picture of Lesotho is ideal for the generation of opportunities for development agencies, and therefore it remains firmly in place (Ferguson, 1990: 70).

#### CONCLUSION

While aid is not fostering economic development in Lesotho, it is responsible for a good deal of activity. South Africa benefits through goods and services bought. The

oversized bureaucracy of Lesotho benefits by expanding and enriching itself, reinforcing the class structure, and molding the political scene. In sum, international aid works to reinforce South Africa's regional control, and to stabilize the political control of Lesotho's bureaucracy.

In the World Bank's new focus on entrepreneurship, a similar scenerio for Lesotho can be envisioned. Without strategies to cope with the regional and domestic constraints on the development of Basotho business in Lesotho, aid to this effort is likely to have the same result as previous aid for agricultural projects.

The case study also provides an opportunity to examine the impact of employment on a group of rural Basotho women. At this point the WID model becomes more pertinent than the World Bank model. The case study supports the WID position that employment for women is important because it provides women with the means to meet their basic, practical needs. However, the WID model fails to ask questions about women's strategic needs, and hence does not give a full picture of the effects of employment on women's lives.

Asking questions about women's long term, strategic needs or interests in the case study, led to a mixed picture. Women's disadvantaged position in the regional and domestic political economy remains virtually unchanged by the employment. Also, the structure of a capitalist business is inherently disempowering for workers, leading to frustration



over their lack of control of the fruit of their labour, a sense of dependence on the owner, and undue stress on their physical and psychological well being. Nevertheless, changes in their personal lives such as the ability to be economically independent of men, and new forms of female solidarity, do have a positive effect on their position as a gender. Chapter Two revealed that these kinds of changes in gender relations are also taking place among elite women, who have the opportunity to obtain employment, and hence the economic freedom to choose to live without men. The fact that pressure on 'traditional' gender relations is taking place at both ends of the socio-economic spectrum in Lesotho suggests that new realities and new models for women are spreading, perhaps leading to greater independence, status and autonomy in the society as a whole.

Given this picture, implications for rural Basotho women of the World Bank and WID models can be postulated. If such an approach was pursued, rural women, given their disadvantages in the labour market, would be unlikely to benefit unless directly targeted. If a WID approach was followed, identifying women as key economic actors in households, and hence worthy of employment and assistance as entrepreneurs, women would benefit in important, practical ways. Nevertheless, crucial aspects of the structures of women's disadvantaged position in the regional and domestic political economy would remain unchanged by such a strategy, severely limiting the kinds of positive changes open to women

in Lesotho. However, strategies that fulfilled strategic as well as practical gender needs could have important long-range benefits for women in Lesotho. These would require, however, fundamental changes to Lesotho's position in the political economy of the region, and the development of more democratic, accountable domestic government.

## **APPENDIX A. Other Laws Affecting Women in Lesotho.**

### **Inheritance Law**

In inheritance, civil law is applied only in the case of a will, in which case daughters and widows, as well as sons or the deceased's brothers can inherit (Seeiso, 1985:53). However, customary law states that this can be done only if the principal heir is not deprived of the major share, which has often led to conflicts within the family (Fanana, 1989: 2).

Most people do not leave wills, and therefore customary law applies. A 1953 Intestate Proclamation revised the customary law which barred a widow from inheriting anything, ensuring that widows were entitled to some share in the deceased's estate before being passed to the heir (Fanana, 1989: 16). Customary law also ensures the widow's and her children's maintenance by the heir, and usufruct rights over land and livestock.

### **Access to Land**

Land is the main immovable productive resource in Lesotho and it is allocated only to men. Women only get access to land through marriage, and single, divorced, or separated women do not usually have any access to land (Fanana, no date: 7).

### **Seduction, Abduction, Adultery and Rape**

Under customary law, cases of seduction or abduction of unmarried women or girls are brought by the fathers, and for

married women, by their husbands. Again, women are seen to have no locus standi in iudicio, in contradiction to the Constitution. Under civil law, cases of seduction are brought by the woman herself, but proof of being "led astray" is required, rather than only proof of intercourse as in customary law. Also, under civil law, a girl must have been a virgin, while this is not the case in customary law. While customary law denies the defendant's legal status, it appears to give her more protection (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 62).

Abduction of a girl or married woman, (ie removal from parental or husband's control without consent), is both a civil and criminal offense under customary law. The guilty party must pay compensation to the father or husband of the girl or woman. Under civil law, abduction is not a civil wrong, but is a criminal offense (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 63).

Under common law, both husband and wife have the right to pursue action against each other in cases of adultery. Under customary law, only the husband has this right (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 63).

The offense of rape carries the death penalty in Lesotho, but the sentences passed in the courts do not usually reflect this serious position on the crime. A major reasons for this is that women do not know the law which requires some evidence, such as a medical examination, clothing, or witnesses of the rapist's behaviour before, during or after the rape: "As a result important evidence of the crime is lost

and most cases are dismissed for lack of evidence" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 72). Statistics show rape is on the increase, and constitutes a serious problem for women.

#### **Health Law**

A woman's status as a legal minor means she must obtain her father's or husband's consent before undergoing medical treatment. However, a woman does not need this consent for family planning services. Some men are unhappy about this: "Some men protest against the selling contraceptives to their wives because they believe that contraceptives encourage infidelity on the part of women" (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 65).

Abortion is illegal, allowed only when the mother's health is threatened. This law makes many women criminals:

Both the abortionist and the woman who procures an abortion are criminally liable in law. Despite these legal restrictions abortions are committed in Lesotho by both married and single women. The migratory labour system prevailing in the country is one of the causes of most abortions in Lesotho because wives, in the absence of their husbands, have extra-marital affairs which result in unwanted pregnancies (Seeiso, et al, 1990: 65).

## **APPENDIX B. The Case Study.**

### **Methodology**

Method Defined: 'Method' usually captures three concepts.

1. Data gathering techniques;
2. Methodology: how research should proceed and for what purpose;
3. Epistemology: theory of knowledge and knowing.

### **Connecting Theoretical Framework and Method**

Adopting a socialist-feminist framework includes a commitment to non-neutral, activist research. Research is seen as a tool of social justice, here the focus being the injustice of women's subordination. All socialist feminist research must aim to promote positive change in women's lives, in addition to contributing to academic knowledge.

As such, the method rejects a positivist view of research, asserting that no research is 'value neutral', objective, or without political motivation. Research which pretends to be objective--mere fact gathering--in fact promotes the protection of the status quo and is laden with value judgements and ideology. Feminist research clearly sets out its political views and goals and sees them as a crucial part of research.

**Epistemology:** Social science research has historically been concerned with male views. Feminist method asserts women's views and experiences as crucial sources of knowledge not just on women, but on whole cultures. Here the view that the standpoint of the oppressed, adopted from marxism, is the justification. The idea is that the view of the oppressed is often more revealing than the dominant as the latter has an interest in the mystification of the dominating relations. Thus women are a central source of knowledge about societies.

### **Methodology of my Project**

#### **Methods of Data Collection**

1. Written Sources (a) journals, books, PhD theses, BA projects (National University of Lesotho)  
(b) government documents, statistics and reports.
2. Discussions with other researchers in the field, observations through residence in country.

### **Case Study of a Weaving Business**

1. Workers' records as kept by owner (income, productivity, attendance).

2. Indepth interviews with (a) workers (through interpreter)

- (b) management
- (c) owner

3. Observations of business over 6 months residence nearby.

#### **Use of Case Study vs. Survey Approach**

My project is to investigate the connections between household factors and women's employment. Therefore there is a need for indepth interviewing of a small sample. (not practical to use quantitative survey method).

**Strengths:** Talking directly with women about their lives renders many details and explanations. Also, there is a clear connection between the researcher and the informants, increasing the possibilities for the latter to benefit from the research process. Socialist-feminist theory currently suggests the need for attention to variations in experiences of different groups of women, to avoid false generalizations, particularly about non-white, non-western cultures. Small case studies can draw out these differences more effectively than broad survey studies, which can mask differences in generalized results.

**Weaknesses:** Inabilty to draw general conclusions about women in Lesotho.

#### **Research Project as Activism**

1. Academic Level: contributes to critique on WID position with its incomplete conception of women and employment. Also contributes new empirical material for use in theory-formulation and policy development.

2. For the Informants: participating in the interview process may promote consciousness and lead to struggle for better wages.

#### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR OWNER OF MOSEBETSI**

##### **A. The Business**

1. Can you describe the history of Mosebetsi? How did you get started? How has it evolved? etc.

2. How many workers do you employ and inwhat positions?

3. Please list your inputs, other than labour, and their

origins.

4. Is there any way to limit the involvement of South Africa?  
Are you interested in doing this?

5. Have you ever received, applied for, or been offered any aid? If so, from whom, and on what terms? If not, would you be interested in any form of aid?

6. Do you thin your business has influenced the starting up of any other businesses or economic activity in Lesotho?

**B. The Workers: general description of the jobs they do.**

1. How do you recruit workers?

2. Do you require any qualifications and/or adminster any sort of test of skill?

3. Do you ever fire people? On what grounds?

4. What is the rate of people quitting?

5. Please describe the average work cycle of each category of worker (ie from learner to 'expert' or proficient worker).

6. What are the conditions of work?

- (a) payment per piece (any other incentives?)
- (b) average time to weave a piece
- (c) penalties for poor attendance or work?
- (d) sick or maternity leave?
- (e) are any workers members of a trade union?
- (f) do conditions vary with the type of job?

**C. The Workers: their interest, commitment and attitude to their jobs.**

1. In your opinion, is a job at Mosebetsi a good opportunity for Basotho women in the area?

2. You mentioned before that you have a problem with women coming late or being absent. Are there any differences in these practices for the different categories of workers?

3. What do you think are the causes of these differences?

4. In general, why do you think workers do not come on times, or absent themselves?

5. Do you think they come late or absent themselves for any of the following reasons?

- (a) own sickness



- (b) sickness of others
- (c) work at home
- (d) gone visiting
- (e) prepare or attend a ceremony
- (f) felt they had made enough money that week/month
- (g) bored of working
- (h) bad weather
- (i) disagreements/arguments with other workers (or with you)

6. What do you think would make the women work more often (ie more hours per week)? What is your ideal hours/week for the workers?

7. Do you think any of the following things would increase the workers' hours per week, without having a negative impact on their rate of productivity?

- (a) higher payment per piece
- (b) getting a salary instead of piece rate
- (c) threatening job loss or other penalties for a certain rate of lateness or absenteeism
- (d) having workers buy shares in the company, and thus receiving dividends for high productivity
- (e) changing the structure of the business from a capitalist business to some form of cooperative

#### **D. The Future of Mosebetsi**

1. What are your long term plans for the business? Do you plan to leave/sell at some future date? What are the major reasons for this?

2. Have you, or would you, ever consider any form of worker ownership of Mosebetsi?

#### **Questionnaire for Weavers, Carders and Spinners.**

**Researcher:** Allison Goebel, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada.

**Statement of Intent:** I am making a study as part of the requirements for a university course I am taking in Canada on development. I hope that by learning something about Mosebetsi workers, their feelings about their work, their priorities in life, and about their families, I will be able to make a contribution to the knowledge people in my country and other countries involved in aid projects, use to design and implement projects in Lesotho and elsewhere in Africa.

Your responses are strictly confidential.

**A. Personal.** Before starting questions about Mosebetsi, I would like, if you don't mind, to ask you about yourself and your family.

1. How many people make up your household? What are their ages and sex and their relationship to you? (members of your household are any people contributing to and/or making demands on the family, eg. school fees, residence, care of children, etc.)

2. Does your household have any fields or livestock? Describe their size and number, and their value to the household.

3. Are there any migrant workers in the household? What jobs do they do?

4. If there are migrants, about how much of their earnings do they contribute to the household?

- (a) all (b) most (c) about one half  
(d) less than one half (e) very little

5. How much of the total household income does this contribution represent?

- (a) all (b) most (c) about one half  
(d) less than one half (e) very little

6. Are there any other members with a paid job in Lesotho?

7. If there are, how much of their earnings do they contribute to the household?

- (a) all (b) most (c) about one half  
(d) less than one half (e) very little

8. How much of the total household income does this contribution represent?

- (a) all (b) most (c) about one half  
(d) less than one half (e) very little

9. Are there any other members doing activities not yet mentioned through which the household gains income?

10. If so, about how much of the household's earnings do these activities gain?

- (a) all (b) most (c) about one half  
(d) less than one half (e) very little

11. What level of schooling did you attain?

**B. Work at Mosebetsi**

1. What job do you do at Mosebetsi?

2. How long have you been working here?
3. How long do you plan to stay?
4. What is your main motivation for working?
5. Do you have any other opportunities to make money?
6. Do you make as much money as you need?
7. Is there any other kind of job you would rather do if you got the chance?
8. Do you enjoy this job? YES/ NO  
What are the reasons for this? Choose as many answers as you like.

- | YES  | NO  |
|--|---|
| (a) I like the work                                    | -I don't like the work                      |
| (b) I like socializing with<br>other workers           | -I don't like socializing<br>other workers  |
| (c) I like making money<br>for                         | -I don't make enough money<br>the work I do |
| (d) I like the chance to get away<br>from the compound | -I don't like being away<br>the compound    |
| (e) others   | -others                                     |

9. How many times a week do you usually come late to work?
10. As well as you can remember, what were the reasons you came to work late in the last 2-3 months? (Check as many as you want.)
  - (a) I was sick
  - (b) I had to look after someone else who was sick.
  - (c) I had to do work at home (eg in fields, cooking washing, caring for children, house-building, etc)
  - (d) I had to visit a friend or relative
  - (e) I had to prepare or attend a feast/ceremony
  - (f) I felt I had made enough money that week or month
  - (g) I was bored working
  - (h) the weather was too bad to travel to work
  - (i) my husband did not want me to go
  - (j) my mother-in-law did not want me to go
  - (k) I was having disagreements with other workers
  - (l) I was having disagreements with the owner
  - (m) others?

11. Would any of the following things make you come earlier to work and to work more hours? (Check as many as you like.)

- (a) higher payment per piece
- (b) getting a salary instead of payment per piece
- (c) being told you would lose your job or suffer other penalties if you did not
- (d) being offered a bonus for high attendance
- (e) buying a share in the company so that you benefitted from increased production
- (f) if Mosebetsi was a cooperative instead of a private business
- (g) if you had more help for work at home
- (h) if your household lost some sources of its income (eg if someone lost a job, or stopped contributing to the household)
- (i) others

12. If you come late, do you stay late to make up the lost working time?

- (a) YES
- (b) NO
- (c) sometimes

13. How do you rate the amount of time you spend at work, but are not working? (ie talking with friends, eating, taking snuff, resting. Note: this is other than the official 30 min. break at 10 am and the 1 hour lunch break 1-2pm)

- (a) a lot of time
- (b) a significant amount of time
- (c) a small amount
- (d) hardly any at all

14. If you spend a lot or a significant amount of time not working while at work, what are the reasons for this?

- (a) I don't care how much money I earn
- (b) I find working all the time boring or tiring
- (c) I find it more important to enjoy a relaxing day than to work all the time
- (d) I see other people enjoying themselves and I want to join them
- (e) others?

15. Do you work extra hard when you have a big expense coming up?

YES/ NO

16. Can you estimate the contribution your earnings from Mosebetsi make to the household income?

- (a) all
- (b) most
- (c) about one half
- (d) about one quarter
- (e) a small amount

17. Is your money used for a particular purpose in the household? (Check as many as you like.)

- (a) food
- (b) clothes
- (c) school fees
- (d) house-building
- (e) your personal needs
- (f) others?

18. Do you have control of your own money? YES/ NO

19. Do you have a bank account? YES/ NO

20. Do you save money for any future use? YES/ NO

21. If you do save, for what purposes? (Check as many as you like.)

- (a) emergencies
- (b) food or household goods
- (c) school fees, uniforms
- (d) clothing
- (e) house-building
- (f) others

22. If you do save, about how much of your monthly income do you usually save?

- (a) all
- (b) most
- (c) about one half
- (d) about one quarter
- (e) a small amount

23. Would you rather do another job at Mosebetsi? YES/NO. If "yes" which job would you prefer? What is the main reason for this?

#### C. Feelings about Work Conditions.

1. Do you think the payment you receive is fair?

2. How do you feel about the other conditions of work? (ie benefits, job security, working environment, general atmosphere of the workplace.)

3. How do you feel about having Basotho supervisors?

4. Do you know of anyone who has been fired? What were the circumstances?

5. Do you know of anyone who has quit? What were the reasons?

6. Have you ever worked at another weaving place? Where? What were the conditions like there? Why did you leave that place?

7. Do you belong to a trade union? YES/ NO

8. Have you ever met with a representative of a trade union?

9. Are you aware of your rights as a worker according to government regulations?

THANK YOU!

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