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THE SEAMS OF SUBJECCTIVITY AND STRUCTURE:

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF GARMENT WORK IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND FIJI

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores women garment factory workers' contemporary experiences of the processes of industrial restructuring in two contrastive locations. Industrial restructuring has been accompanied by a tide of neo-liberal reforms that has swept the Pacific region within the current climate of globalisation. This thesis compares the impact of these processes on women garment workers' lives in one advanced industrialised country and one less developed country – Aotearoa New Zealand and Fiji respectively. Women workers' lives form the subject of the study because global industrial restructuring entails specific implications for women that demand closer attention in the Pacific region. The thesis argues that subjective and structural forces, such as patriarchy and capitalism, combine to shape women garment workers' lives in the two nations, although these forces act in ways particular to each site. An exploration of these subjective and structural forces requires investigation at a variety of levels of analysis: from the macro-level of the state and capitalist production to the micro-level of workers' families and communities. Participatory ethnographic research proved the best approach for exploring women's experiences of industrial restructuring and the combination of subjective and structural forces that shape their lives.

The New Zealand and Fiji garment industries have restructured in response to the state's implementation of trade liberalisation measures and creation of a permissive regulatory environment for industry as part of the neo-liberal approach. In New Zealand the state's reforms caused large-volume garment manufacturers to relocate production to offshore sites. Large companies remaining in New Zealand downsized their workforces and implemented high-technology innovations for the targeting of niche-markets. Smaller firms shifted more of production onto outworkers, and increasingly utilised the labour of migrants. In Fiji, the Tax Free Factories Scheme implemented as part of the state's reform programme prompted a rapid expansion in garment manufacture as foreign investors relocated their production to Fiji. The incentives scheme resulted in a marked increase in the demand for women workers.

Case studies of the lives of garment workers in New Zealand suggest that restructuring of the industry for flexibility has hinged upon the casualisation of work, involving the substitution of part-time, temporary, contract, or outwork for full-time factory jobs. The Fiji case studies indicate that firms achieve flexibility by taking advantage of women's cheap labour and the state's slack enforcement of its regulatory legislation on the industry. The women garment workers in both sites are shown to absorb many of the costs of firms' flexibility, and to have highly uncertain futures as trade liberalisation threatens the competitiveness of their industries. Women garment workers employ a variety of creative methods to negotiate the constraints that capitalist production, the state and patriarchy pose on their lives. However their negotiation efforts are limited by cultural, religious and gender ideologies about women's appropriate societal roles.
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ABBREVIATIONS

ACC Accident Compensation Corporation
ALTA Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act
APEC Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ATTB Apparel and Textile Training Board
CAD Computer Aided Design
CAM Computer Aided Manufacturing
CER Closer Economic Relations
CPI Consumer Price Index
ECA Employment Contracts Act
EN Export News
FAGW Fiji Association of Garment Workers
FT Fiji Times
FTUC Fiji Trades Union Congress
FWRM Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
GFL Garments Fiji Limited
G-7 Group of Seven
HS Harmonised System
ICFTU International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO International Labour Organization
IMF International Monetary Fund
ITO Industry Training Organisation
JIT Just-in-Time
MFA Multi-Fibre Arrangement
MP Member of Parliament
NIC Newly Industrialising Country
NZH New Zealand Herald
NZQA New Zealand Qualifications Authority
ODT Otago Daily Times
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOS Occupational Overuse Syndrome
OSH Occupational Safety and Health
PAFCO Pacific Fishing Company
QR Quick Response
RNZ Radio New Zealand
SPARTECA South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement
SST Sunday Star Times
TFF Tax Free Factory
TOPs Training Opportunities Programme
TQM Total Quality Management
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
URL Uniform Resource Locator
WTO World Trade Organisation
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores women garment factory workers' contemporary experiences of the processes of industrial restructuring in two contrastive locations. Industrial restructuring has been accompanied by a tide of neo-liberal reforms that has swept the Pacific region within the current climate of globalisation. This thesis compares the impact of these processes on women garment workers' lives in one advanced industrialised country and one less developed country – Aotearoa New Zealand and Fiji respectively. Women workers' lives form the subject of the study because global industrial restructuring entails specific implications for women that demand closer attention in the Pacific region.

In both New Zealand and Fiji, state reform programmes severely affect women due to their joint productive and reproductive roles combined with discrimination against them in the labour market. In Fiji, discrimination against women in legislation and decision-making institutions compounds the impact of the state reform programmes. Kelsey underscores the severity for women of the “New Zealand Experiment” – the neo-liberal governmental reforms implemented since 1984 (1995:285-7). Emberson-Bain similarly points out that the state’s structural adjustment reforms since the 1988 coups have exacerbated women’s poverty in Fiji. Women in Fiji live at a greater level of poverty than men, and experience higher levels of disease associated with poor nutrition (Emberson-Bain 1992:146).

The garment industry was chosen as the focus of this study because as a highly mobile industry, it is one of the best cases for considering the implications for workers of the enhanced mobility of capital and production that characterise globalisation. While the global availability of cheap labour is a prerequisite for industry mobility, the garment industry is particularly mobile primarily because of the small amount of capital required to enter the industry compared to other industries (Carr and Latham 1988:2). Ross and Trachte assert that as of 1990, US$50,000 was sufficient to open a legal garment factory in the United States, and even less was needed to open a sweatshop. They outline the other factors contributing to the mobility of the garment industry:
Furthermore, the ease with which entrepreneurial functions can be separated from productive tasks, and one productive task from another, facilitates the separation of the productive process over space. In particular, it makes apparel production a likely candidate for the export of some stages of production to other regions, while sales and management functions continue to be located in the original site. (1990:160)

New Zealand and Fiji make excellent sites for the comparative research because of the relationship between the garment industries in the two countries. Much of the investment in Fiji's garment industry originally came from New Zealand, and the New Zealand market is a key market for Fiji's garment exports. Both garment industries have dramatically restructured during the 1980s and 1990s.

The primary aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of the forces shaping women garment workers' lives within the current climate of globalisation. On a general level, this thesis argues that subjective and structural forces, such as patriarchy and capitalism, combine to shape women garment workers' lives in the two nations, although these forces act in ways particular to each site. An exploration of these subjective and structural forces requires investigation at a variety of levels of analysis: from the macro-level of the state and capitalist production to the micro-level of workers' families and communities.

With respect to the macro-level, this thesis argues that trends in the garment industries in New Zealand and Fiji are part of the same processes taking place within the different conditions of each locale. These processes are the state's pursuit of international competitiveness under pressure from globalisation, and subsequent implementation of trade liberalisation measures and creation of a permissive regulatory environment for industry as part of the neo-liberal approach. At the level of the garment industry, in New Zealand the state's reforms caused most large-volume garment manufacturers to relocate production to offshore sites. Large companies remaining in New Zealand downsized their workforces substantially and implemented high-technology innovations. Smaller firms tended to shift more of production onto outworkers, and increasingly utilised the labour of migrants. Multiskilled workers were sometimes used. In Fiji, structural adjustment involved a shift from import-substitution to export-oriented production. At the level of the garment industry, the Tax Free Factories Scheme implemented as part of the state's reform programme prompted a
rapid expansion in garment manufacture as foreign investors relocated their production to Fiji. The incentives scheme resulted in a marked increase in the demand for women workers as companies take advantage of women's low-wage labour and gender ideologies about their innate capabilities and submissiveness.

The forces shaping garment workers' lives are explored on a micro-level through the case studies of nine garment workers. Cultural, religious and gender ideologies are argued to affect women's negotiation of the above state policy changes and processes of industrial restructuring. Most recently, neo-liberal ideology shapes women's negotiation attempts. Women are shown to be active agents negotiating the constraints on their life situations, such as poverty and poor educational opportunities. The women use their garment industry employment as a key component of their strategies to resist their wider life constraints. However, new constraints are imposed on them within the employment situation, particularly relating to divisions among the workers – for example, between factory and outworkers or migrants and national workers. Struggles to transform garment workers' conditions will require collective mobilisation across the various divisions among garment workers, which companies currently manipulate to their advantage.

The thesis is set out as follows: chapter two outlines the theoretical grounding of the research. The discussion of the core labour process literature begins with Braverman's deskilling thesis and works through the main critiques that are relevant to this study. Key points are drawn from the discussion of the labour process literature as a guide to querying how changes in firm strategy in the current climate of globalisation affect workers' experiences of industrial restructuring. The need to explore the arenas of subjectivity and structural forces, both inside and outside the workplace, in order to understand workers' experiences, emerges as the key theme from the review of the labour process literature. The two main theoretical approaches to global industrial restructuring – the flexible specialisation and regulation approach – are then briefly considered to provide a wider context for the case of the restructuring of the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji.

The methodological approach employed in the research is detailed in chapter three. As the lives of women in Fiji and migrants from less developed countries in New Zealand form the central subject material of this thesis, the postmodern feminist critique
of ethnography on the lives of “third world” women is necessarily taken into consideration. The postmodern feminist critique serves as an important reminder not to generalise “third world” women into a monolithic “other”, but to bear in mind women’s historically constituted and culturally specific subjectivities. This thesis takes the perspective that the specificity of women’s subjectivities must be situated within the context of global processes. The discussion of the methodology of the thesis thus reiterates the interplay of subjective and structural forces in shaping the lives of women. Participatory ethnographic research proved the best approach for exploring women’s experiences of industrial restructuring and the combination of subjective and structural forces that shape their lives.

The case study of the New Zealand garment industry is presented in chapter four. A profile of the industry examines firms’ restructuring in response to the state’s neo-liberal reforms. A discussion follows of changing trends in garment training based on the participant observation undertaken for this thesis. Trends in garment training reflect the transition in the industry away from mass production and towards niche market production. Case studies of three migrant women factory workers and two outworkers then enable consideration of the impact of restructuring trends on the workforce. The case studies suggest that casualisation of work, involving the substitution of part-time, temporary, contract, or outwork for full-time factory jobs, is the basis of many firms’ “flexibility” rather than technology innovations. The women garment workers are shown to absorb many of the costs of firms’ flexibility, and to have highly uncertain futures as the state’s tariff reduction programme threatens the competitiveness of the remaining New Zealand garment firms.

The case study of the Fiji garment industry is the subject of chapter five. A profile of the industry and its recent expansion precedes the case studies of four women garment workers. In Fiji, most garment firms that have set up operations to capitalise on the state’s incentives programme employ a deskillled “Taylorist” labour process, and achieve flexibility by taking advantage of women’s cheap labour and the state’s slack enforcement of its regulatory legislation on the industry. Again it is the women workers who absorb the costs of this approach to flexibility, and they employ a variety of creative methods to negotiate the constraints that capitalist production, the state and patriarchy pose on their lives. Their futures are also uncertain as trade liberalisation
erodes manufacturers’ preferential access from Fiji into the key markets of Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Chapter six compares the two case studies and places them in the context of globalisation. Globalisation is taken as a context because it is impossible to fully comprehend trends at the local level without this broader perspective since local developments are part of processes transcending national borders. Both of the case studies reveal increasing insecurity and uncertain futures for women garment workers under globalisation. A discussion of women’s resistance and consent in the two sites shows women to be active agents negotiating the constraints of their life situations. Garment work is one avenue women use to resist their wider life constraints, but some of the constraints are reproduced in the employment situation, limiting the effectiveness of women’s resistance efforts. The subjective and structural forces shaping women’s lives are therefore argued to be mutually determining.

Finally, chapter seven summarises the research and places the findings of the comparison back in the theoretical context introduced in chapter two to draw wider implications from the research. The latest developments in the garment industries in New Zealand and Fiji are presented to suggest how workers’ resistance may increasingly extend to a collective level of protest against the state in response to the processes of globalisation. What is lacking if their conditions are to be transformed is a challenge to the ideological hegemony of globalisation as a natural and inevitable process. A counter-hegemony needs to be developed based on an understanding of globalisation as a process arising out of specific historical conditions and open to transformation.

As a case study of the impact of global industrial restructuring on women workers, this thesis is relevant to the situation of workers in other industries in New Zealand and Fiji. In New Zealand, trade liberalisation has similarly affected the automobile industry, and the case study of workers’ situation in the garment industry bears many parallels with the experience of automotive workers. In Fiji, garment industry issues are closely linked to the concerns of women working in the fish canneries. The study’s relevance also extends beyond New Zealand and Fiji. In the Pacific region, similar issues face workers in other export-oriented industries such as cannery workers in the Solomon Islands and American Samoa, as well as the workers of Yazaki Samoa – a manufacturer and exporter of automotive wire harnesses in Western
Samoa. The relevance to the garment factory workers in the Northern Mariana Islands’ twenty-seven garment factories is clear. The timeliness of this study is underscored by the 9 September 1998 announcement of the upcoming closure of American Samoa’s sole garment factory – BCTC-Samoa – “because of increasing competition, due to global free trade agreements with the U.S., which makes American Samoa less competitive” (Samoa News 9.9.98). At the most general level, the results of this comparative research pertain to the workers of high wage countries from which factories have departed and to workers of low-wage economies where factories have relocated to take advantage of women’s cheap labour.
CHAPTER 2: THEORISING THE LABOUR PROCESS AND GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING

Introduction

This thesis explores the impact of restructuring brought on by global forces on women at the local level in New Zealand and Fiji’s garment industries. As a primary feature of the restructuring is the decline of mass production in New Zealand and its growth in Fiji, two bodies of literature which illuminate trends in the organisation of capitalist production will be reviewed. An overview of the core literature on the labour process, consisting of the work of Braverman and the ensuing critique, is a useful starting point to understand the driving forces in the restructuring of mass production, and what trends in restructuring may spell for workers. The later work of Burawoy is also briefly introduced as it offers a framework for an understanding of changes in the labour process in both first and third world contexts. A discussion of the approaches of flexible specialisation and regulation theory then provides further context to the decline of mass production in New Zealand and its growth in Fiji. While neither flexible specialisation nor regulation theory is adequate on its own for the consideration of the restructuring of the garment industry in the two countries, both approaches offer meaningful background for the study at hand.

Theorising the Labour Process

Although it has been extensively criticised, Braverman’s Labor and Monopoly Capital (1974) is an essential point of departure to consider the reorganisation of production occurring under the pressures of globalisation. In 1974, Braverman made a long overdue attempt to theorise the development of the labour process within the era of monopoly capitalism. Braverman argued in Labor and Monopoly Capital that management gains control over the workforce through the separation of conception and execution, orchestrated through Taylorism. Frederick Taylor followed in the tradition of Charles Babbage, a classical economist during the latter part of the Industrial Revolution, who advocated:

the manufacturer, by dividing the work to be executed into different processes, each requiring different degrees of skill and force, can
purchase exactly that precise quantity of both which is necessary for each process. (1835, qtd in Wood and Kelly 1982:81)

Taylor put Babbage’s techniques into practice at Midvale Steel Works in the United States where he had worked as a lathe operator in the 1880s. Based on his experience on the factory floor, Taylor developed his theory of “scientific management” to increase productivity. It was the science of the management of others’ work, and attempted to determine how to best control labour power. Taylor restricted his methods to management and the organisation of labour – he was not concerned with increasing the efficiency of technology. Scientific management, characterised by the stopwatch, speed-up, and the piecework system, enabled management to dictate to the workers precisely how to execute a task. Taylor’s “slide rule” determined the optimum combination of choices for each step in the machining process (Braverman 1974:111-12). The strategy sought to pass control over the labour process into management’s hands.

Braverman argued that the Taylorist principles of scientific management form the basis for all management under monopoly capitalism. The basic principles are identified as:

...dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers...
...separation of conception from execution...
...use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution... (Braverman 1974:113-19)

Braverman’s key tenet was that management hinges upon “the control over work through the control over the decisions that are made in the course of work” (1974:107). At the heart of the control dilemma was the need to convert labour power purchased in the market into actual labour in the pursuit of surplus value. For Braverman, the dilemma of capitalist control determined the development of the labour process, and management dealt with the problem of managerial control through the separation of conception and execution, resulting in the general deskillning trend of capitalism and the degradation of work. Braverman’s argument that capitalism results in a general deskillning trend is known as the deskillning thesis. Criticism of Braverman has revolved around six general inadequacies of his deskillning thesis which are relevant to the study at hand, and each area of criticism will be considered in turn.

The first area of criticism of Braverman charges that his deskillning thesis was too sweeping on three counts. Braverman conceptualised skill as characteristic of craft forms of production – an objective quality based on workers’ control over the
instruments of production, or of the content of jobs. The first problem with his approach was that deskilling was a much more uneven process than Braverman implied, and his thesis did not account for reskilling of some areas of work. Secondly, Braverman had a romanticised notion of skill in craft industries. Littler points out that craft control was more complex than Braverman had conceptualised: many craftspeople “were petty employers themselves within a system of internal contract”, and some industries were never craft-based at all (Littler 1982:186). Elger (1982) further criticised that the real subordination of labour, which Braverman ascribed only to Taylorism, is possible even under craft forms of production.

Thirdly, criticism brought the objective nature of skill into question, suggesting that skill is a social construct (Littler 1982:9-10). The argument was that the label of skill on a job does not have to do so much with the content of the job, as with the contestation between workers and management over whether their work is skilled. The success of a worker in maintaining the construct of their job as skilled has to do with the “strategic position of their job in the production process” and with the extent of worker organisation (Sturdy, Knights and Willmott 1992:4). Frances (1993:3-4) notes the relevance of the notion of skill as a social construct to the study of women’s work, as women have often been unsuccessful in contesting the nature of their work as skilled where it involved training acquired outside the workplace. While it is now generally recognised in the literature that skill is a highly contested matter, some definition of the concept is necessary in order to discuss it, and Frances provides a useful interpretation:

... an objective definition of skilled work in the manufacturing context refers to work which involves a variety of tasks, an element of judgement and a degree of special dexterity (speed, accuracy and particular technique). Work is more or less skilled to the extent that it embodies these features in greater or lesser degree. (1993:4)

The second major area of criticism of Braverman’s deskilling thesis targeted his simplistic view of Taylorism as the means of management control. Friedman (1977) and Edwards (1975, 1979) presented the main challenges to Braverman’s neglect of the impact of worker resistance on managerial control strategies. They saw the labour process as an arena of conflict and the workplace as a contested terrain. From this basis they theorised that work was organised in order to contain conflict, and managerial control did not necessarily lead to the separation of conception and execution and subsequent deskilling (Edwards 1979:16). Friedman takes management’s need to deal with worker resistance to the deskilling of their jobs as a starting point. As a result of the need to accommodate worker resistance, management sometimes invokes a strategy
Friedman asserts that direct control arose under competitive capitalism, and refers to the methods of scientific management and the treatment of workers as though they were machines. Responsible autonomy, on the other hand, is specific to the era of monopoly capitalism. Although still driven by profit-seeking motives, large firms are able to sustain short-term losses in the interest of long-term goals, because of the high degree of insulation from competition in the monopoly era (Friedman 1977:52).

Relieved of some of the pressures of competition, large firms invoke the control strategy of responsible autonomy, which awards concessions to workers in response to their resistance to the implementation of Taylorism, and imposes less restrictive systems instead. Managerial authority is maintained “... by getting workers to identify with the competitive aims of the enterprise so that they will act ‘responsibly’ with a minimum of supervision” (Friedman 1977:48).

Edwards proposes not two but three types of managerial control in the era of monopoly capitalism: simple, technical and bureaucratic. Simple control prevailed under competitive capitalism and is utilised in small firms. Under simple control, power is distributed more or less openly and arbitrarily, and is exercised personally, for example through personal supervision. Ultimately power rests on the company’s ability to fire or layoff workers (Edwards 1975:8). Under monopoly capitalism, a more structural form of control developed whereby “power was made invisible in the structure of work” (Edwards 1979:110). Through technical control, “more formal, consciously contrived controls could be embedded in ... the physical structure of the labor process” (Edwards 1979:20). Technical control involves “designing machinery and planning the flow of work to minimize the problem of transforming labor power into labor as well as to maximise the purely physically based possibilities for achieving efficiencies” (Edwards 1979:112). Technical control is epitomised in continuous flow production, first implemented in the nineteenth century. New computerised technology is expanding the potential of this type of control by enabling the monitoring and evaluation of work to be subject to technical control.

Bureaucratic control, the third type proposed by Edwards, incorporates control into the very social structure of the organisation, making “power appear to emanate
from the formal organization itself" (Edwards 1979:20, 145). Rather than obeying a supervisor, workers meet criteria determined for their jobs by Taylorist time and motion studies, and are evaluated against these criteria. Unequal relations between people are made to appear as relations between job holders or between jobs (Edwards 1979:145). Edwards asserts that the development of internal labour markets within large firms is an integral part of bureaucratic control. Monopoly capitalism has created conditions whereby large firms face minimal threats and have the resources to maintain internal labour markets (Edwards 1975:21). Large firms reward workers for demonstrating stable work habits, rules orientation, predictability, dependability and internalisation of the enterprise’s goals and values (Edwards 1975:11-12; 1979:147-50). Edwards argues that the variety of control strategies creates corresponding segmentation of the labour market. This segmentation further serves as a control mechanism as workers are divided and do not have a common experience of work around which to unite (Edwards, Reich and Gordon 1982).

Other criticisms of the idea of Taylorism as the means of management control came from Beechey, Littler, Pollert and Willis, who extend their analyses beyond the workplace. Beechey (1982) notes the role played by the state in managerial control strategies. She argues that Braverman’s focus on control by individual capitalists is inadequate, due to the state’s role in organising “…the general conditions of production and accumulation and in regulating the supply and conditions of labour” on behalf of collective capital (Beechey 1982:55). Littler argues that the labour-market context influences the nature of the control relationship, because “the ultimate form of managerial control is the power to threaten loss of employment” (Littler 1990:67). Pollert and Willis discuss how management control is sometimes facilitated by the adaptive strategies of workers to industry. Pollert (1981) demonstrates that cultures of femininity play into the interests of management. Additionally, she shows how patriarchal hierarchical relations are imported from the domestic realm into the factory to reinforce managerial control. Willis (1977) demonstrates how definitions of masculinity among working class school boys serve to facilitate their adaptation to monotonous, heavy industrial work corresponding to those definitions.

The third general area of criticism of Braverman’s work charged that Braverman failed to take into account the organisation of workers’ consent as a control mechanism. Where Braverman asserted that the deskilling of work through Taylorism was the means by which management gained control over the labour process, critics have countered that the control relationship is much more complex than Braverman allows – involving control, consensus and bargaining (Littler 1990:65; Burawoy 1985:32-5).
Littler favours a reconceptualisation of control, taking into account its dual or two-fold nature:

For the employer there is a central contradiction between treating labour as a commodity and treating it as a non-commodity – that is, as a continuing social relationship... In particular a contradiction arises because employers are faced with continually transforming the forces of production; indeed, rationality in manipulating a technical system implies constant and significant innovation... This, in turn, entails stimulating motivation and harnessing labour's creative and productive powers. Thus employers must to some extent seek a co-operative relationship with labour.

With respect to labour:

... side by side with labour's resistance to subordination and exploitation lies the fact that workers have an interest in the maintenance of the existing economic relationships and the viability of the units of capital which employ them. Thus, instead of a simple dialectic of control and resistance, there is a fractured interplay of control, consensus and bargaining... (Stinchcombe 1974, Cressey and MacInnes 1980, ctd in Littler 1990:65)

Littler underscores that in addition to the two-fold nature of the control relationship, the limitations of monitoring and information systems necessitate the organisation of workers' cooperation and consent at some point as there are always aspects of the production process that cannot be monitored (Littler 1990:68).

In his ethnography, Manufacturing Consent, Burawoy (1979a) proposes that changes in the nature of capitalism have led the organisation of consent, as opposed to coercion, to be management’s paramount concern in the conversion of labour power into actual labour. Burawoy argues that competitive capitalism was characterised by a despotic labour process utilising coercion to convert labour power into actual labour. Because individual firms could not control the market, workers were compelled to labour because the firm's survival – and consequently their own – depended on it. With the advent of monopoly capital, large firms are able to protect themselves from the market, or even to control the market. Additionally, because of increasing organisation of the labour movement, wages are more independent of individual expenditure of effort (Burawoy 1979a:27). Shop floor labour is only indirectly linked to the survival of the labourer. A hegemonic labour process has to be invoked within monopoly capitalism to organise the workers' consent in the translation of labour power into
actual labour. In sum, "Anarchy in the market leads to despotism in the factory", while "subordination of the market leads to hegemony in the factory" (Burawoy 1979a:194).

Burawoy argues against Braverman’s thesis of deskilling as the distinctive feature of monopoly capitalism:

In identifying the separation of conception and execution, the expropriation of skill, or the narrowing of the scope of discretion as the broad tendency in the development of the capitalist labor process, Harry Braverman missed the equally important parallel tendency toward the expansion of choices within those ever narrower limits. It is the latter tendency that constitutes a basis of consent and allows the degradation of work to pursue its course without continuing crisis. (Burawoy 1979a:94)

The mechanisms that contribute to hegemonic control in the workplace are identified as changes in the system of piece rates and in the organisation of work, the emergence of an internal labour market, and the development of an internal state. These changes serve to coordinate the interests of labour and capital, and obscure the relations of production (Burawoy 1979a:198). Burawoy is best known for his discussion of shopfloor “games” such as speed competitions, which deflect worker opposition to management into conflict between workers under incentive systems based on interdependence. Burawoy found shopfloor games to be very effective in securing hegemonic control – indeed sometimes through the games, “workers actively struggle against management to defend the conditions for producing profit” (1979a:72).

In relation to the fourth area of criticism of Braverman – the primacy attributed to control of labour as management’s central problem – critics have argued that there are other central issues in the organisation of production. Thompson endorses this area of critique, remarking that “the extraction of surplus value is only one moment alongside its realisation and the prior purchase of labour…” (Thompson 1989:231). Littler best elucidates the criticism, suggesting the possibility that the drive for efficiency, or the realisation of profits in the market may be central in the development of the labour process (Littler 1990:72).

Littler invokes Gordon (1976) to shed light on the possible centrality in managerial strategy of the drive for efficiency. Gordon distinguished between quantitative and qualitative efficiency, defining a production process as, “quantitatively (most) efficient if it effects the greatest possible useful physical output from a given set of physical inputs (or if it generates a given physical output with the fewest possible inputs) … a production process is qualitatively (most) efficient if it maximizes the ability of the ruling class to reproduce its domination of the social process of production and minimizes producers’ resistance to ruling class domination of the production
process” (Gordon 1976, qtd in Littler 1990:75-6). Littler describes Gordon’s argument that,

... capitalist employers resolve conflicts between efficiency and control in favour of the latter... Thus Gordon explains the development of industrial capitalism in terms of the fact that employers searched for quantitatively efficient production processes, but increasing working-class opposition forced them to search for the most qualitatively efficient process... ‘Those capitalists who discovered the most successful combinations gained comparative advantage over their competitors – not necessarily because their costs were minimized, in some prices-of-production sense, but because they were better able to discipline their workers, avoid strikes, and extract surplus product from their labor.’ (Gordon, qtd in Littler 1990:76)

The circuit of capital critique, as espoused by Littler and Salaman (1982), suggests that management may be more concerned with realisation of profits in the market than with the organisation of production. Littler and Salaman (1982:257) remind: “Surplus value has to be produced but also realized in the market.” Littler endorses both Gordon’s analysis and the circuit of capital critique, advising that the important question to ask regarding the centrality of managerial control is: “under what circumstances would one expect labour strategies to dominate managerial initiatives?” (1990:54). Littler suggests that the following factors promote the centrality of control over labour in managerial strategy: “new technology, lack of well-structured external labour markets, low unemployment, changing nature of competition, high dispute level, facility of international comparison...”. Factors which are likely to diminish the centrality of control over labour in managerial strategy include: “stable technology, well-structured external labour markets, high unemployment, cartels, monopolies, low dispute level, and organisational insulation” (Littler 1990:54). The centrality of control over labour in managerial strategy therefore arises from specific conditions and cannot always be assumed to be management’s primary concern.

The fifth area of criticism of Braverman’s work calls into question his underestimation of the importance of gender’s impact on the labour process. Discussion of gender has been a strength of labour process literature since Braverman, who looked at gender in relation to labour markets. Still, Braverman has been criticised on a number of counts for his inadequate conceptualisation of the importance of gender in relation to other aspects of the labour process. As noted previously, Braverman’s
objective conception of skill overlooks the social construction of skill and the role gender plays in this process:

far from being an objective economic fact, skill is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the sex and power of the workers who perform it... skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. (Phillips and Taylor 1980, qtd in West 1990:248)

Sturdy, Knights and Willmott point out that through patriarchal ideology, “specific skills and job differences ... come to be seen as gendered or ‘natural’ ” (Sturdy, Knights and Willmott 1992:8). Cockburn (1981) provides the example of how “the physical units of work and the form of technology are political in their design – built by men and for men” (Sturdy, Knights and Willmott 1992:9).

Hartmann (1982) and Beechey (1982) have criticised Braverman’s isolation of the labour process from the family, where the reproduction of labour power occurs, resulting in neglect of the relationship between domestic work and paid work. Hartmann and Beechey argue that because women are considered to bear the primary responsibilities in the home and family, their domestic work of reproducing the labour force disadvantages them in the labour market. West illustrates this with reference to the current restructuring of the capitalist labour process (1990:245). Casualisation of work is a fundamental part of restructuring to enhance flexibility. Beechey (1985) suggests: “The desire for flexibility takes a gendered form...” (qtd in West 1990:264). Indeed, pursuit of flexibility has seen full-time employment replaced by part-time, temporary and contract work, and it is primarily women who accept the casualised jobs (West 1990:261-3). West relates the prominence of women in casualised sectors to “the vulnerability of women in the labour market” stemming from their domestic responsibilities (1990:265):

Undoubtedly women’s domestic responsibilities, especially for young children, typically compel them to accept low pay and unsocial hours, lack of fringe benefits and job protection. Mothers are also driven to make individual bargains with employers who grant concessions, like unpaid time off. The costs to women of such concessions – dependence on a particular employer, fear of unionisation, etc. – all these are benefits to employers. (Freeman 1982, ctd in West 1990:265)
West emphasises that women's vulnerability in the labour market and concentration in casualised sectors “must also be understood in the wider political context of government economic and social policy” (1990:263):

...these benefits to employers are not just determined by women's position in the family. They depend also on political factors such as inadequate childcare provision... They depend, too, on state policy encouraging or enabling employers to keep hours and pay below the thresholds for tax and employment protection, and discouraging increasing numbers of the poor from declaring their earnings. (West 1990:266)

Women's roles in the family, gender ideologies about those roles, and state policies which serve to reinforce the roles and ideologies all add up to a sexual division of labour – ascribing particular positions in the labour process to women, to the benefit of capital (Beechey 1982:54-62). Hartmann, Beechey and West therefore emphasise the importance of considering the family and patriarchy in order to comprehend capitalist control.

Walby's Patriarchy at Work (1986) complements the above approach by highlighting the construction of gender not only in the family but also in the workplace. Workplace studies prior to Walby were marked by an “almost tautological position that the labour power of women differs from the labour power of men because the familial responsibilities of women makes [sic] their labour power different to that of men” (Williams and Lucas 1989:147). Walby contributes the notion of the workplace as a “site of tertiary socialization”, where gender is constructed in addition to the domestic realm. Cockburn (1985) reinforces Walby’s approach, illustrating the ongoing social construction of gender in the workplace through a discussion of women’s strategies to negotiate exclusionary practices such as sexual harassment (Williams and Lucas 1989:149-50).

Thompson summarises that both the workplace and outside arenas such as the family are important in understanding the reproduction of capitalist social relations (Thompson 1989:165, 171). Thompson suggests:

This orientation creates a better basis for recognising a more equal and historically based ‘partnership’ between patriarchy and capital, in which the latter consistently develops through existing patterns of social
domination and subordination, reinforcing them in the process.
(Thompson 1989:200)

In sum, the relationship between “non-class forms of subordination” – particularly gender and ethnicity – and the capitalist labour process demands closer attention (Phillips and Taylor 1980, ctd in West 1990:268).

The final area of criticism of Braverman’s work that is relevant to the study at hand queried his neglect of the role of subjectivity in the labour process. Burawoy first raised the issue of subjectivity with his criticism of Braverman’s deskilling thesis because it does not account for incidences of workers’ consent to managerial control. Burawoy asserts the importance of understanding the labour process, “... in terms of the specific combinations of force and consent that elicit cooperation in the pursuit of profit” (Burawoy 1979a:30). Burawoy argues that the organisation of consent to managerial control occurs in the subjective, or ideological realm, and insists on the necessity of exploring this area for an understanding of the labour process.

Burawoy returns to Marx’s model of the labour process: “…the capitalist mode of production is not just the production of things but simultaneously the production of social relations and also the production of ideas about those relations, a lived experience or ideology of those relations” (Burawoy 1978:268). Burawoy argues it is in the ideological realm that workers’ interests are organised, and that within the era of monopoly capitalism the immediate interests of labour and capital are no longer antagonistic, for workers’ survival depends on the production of profits (Burawoy 1978:256). Burawoy revives Gramsci’s analysis of 1935, arguing:

Unlike feudal serfs who produce and consume their own surplus independently of the lord, capitalist laborers depend on the production of profit. Their future interests, as organized under the capitalist mode of production, lie in the production of surplus value. Here rests the material basis for capitalist hegemony, according to which the interests of capital are presented as the interests, both present and future, of all. (Burawoy 1978:265)

Burawoy maintains that while the material basis for capitalist control is the dependence of the workers on capital’s successful realisation of profits, workers’ consent and cooperation to the system of domination is generated in the subjective or ideological arena, where capital obscures its securing of surplus value. Burawoy argues that it is the simultaneous securing and obscuring of surplus value, organised in the arena of subjectivity, that is the essence of capitalist control in the era of monopoly capitalism.
(Burawoy 1978:266). He holds that "...advanced capitalism cannot operate effectively..." without the arenas of subjectivity (Burawoy 1978:274).

In his earlier writings, Burawoy argues that subjectivity is primarily formed on the factory floor at the level of the work group. Burawoy asserts that "the ability of the factory to contain struggles and to produce consent" under monopoly capitalism necessitates taking the labour process as a starting point for analysis (as opposed to the state, school, family, religion or culture) (1979a:202). He concludes that consent is organised primarily at the point of production, and that the labour process is "relatively autonomous" – insulated from the external consciousness that workers acquire outside the factory. Burawoy's thesis runs counter to the Frankfurt School's suggestion that subjectivity is formed by external factors such as religion, media, and other cultural institutions (Littler 1990:70). Burawoy's critics have argued that external and internal factors "interpenetrate" in the formation of worker subjectivity. The criticism brought Burawoy to reassess his stance on the autonomy of the labour process, but the importance of Burawoy's thesis lies in opening up the area of subjectivity to analysis to complement the analyses of the political and economic aspects of the labour process.

Burawoy's focus on subjectivity was taken up by Littler, who expands upon the importance of ideological control in the labour process. Littler proposes that ideological control organised outside the workplace can be utilised to align the goals of workers with their employers. For example, in relation to bureaucratic control, Littler argues that workers' compliance to the rules has to do with their beliefs about the legitimacy of authority (1982:37). Littler asserts that ideological control strategies based on familialism and nationalism have been largely successful in Japan (Littler 1982:192).

Burawoy and Littler's focus on subjectivity and ideology have been applauded by Thompson, who calls for inquiry into both the objective and subjective factors which enable capitalist control. For Thompson, an understanding of control structures must incorporate a discussion of the "'subjective' facets of people's experiences of work... The objective fact of control ultimately depends on the existence of subjective consent" (Thompson 1989:152). Thompson calls for analysis of both "the objective and subjective factors which legitimise social relations in the workplace..." (Thompson 1989:154).

Similarly, Knights and Willmott (1989:549) charge that labour process writers who choose sides in the objectivity/subjectivity debate are guilty of a dualism that obstructs effective analysis. Even the writers who engaged in labour process analyses as part of an emancipatory project were divided between those who held that: "the exploitative structure of the capital-labour relation is the only key to analysing oppression and the basis for emancipatory action"; and those who subscribed to the
view that: "emancipation is dependent upon the complex ways in which we, as human beings, form our subjectivity and reproduce/change the labour process" (Knights and Willmott 1990:39). Storey highlighted the problem with this sort of approach in relation to managerial control:

... ‘structure’ itself is of course only institutionalised action. In the last analysis, the organisational structure may be regarded as just an expression of managerial style. But the less structured expression of managerial action is more recognisable as a product of agency. (1985:201)

Knights and Willmott argue that the distinction between the objective and subjective corresponds to the dichotomies of structure/agency and determinism/voluntarism. They assert that such divisions obstruct analysis of the ways in which subjectivity and power are mutually determining (1989:554).

*The Politics of Production*

We now turn from Braverman and the ensuing critique to a look at what the literature on the labour process can offer in terms of conceptualising changes in the organisation of production at a more general level. Burawoy offers the best approach to the study of how changes in the labour process fit into larger-scale restructuring of the global economy. Through his concept of the “politics of production”, Burawoy reassessed his earlier writings, which he found placed an unwarranted focus on the factory. He opted for a more complex and holistic approach, concluding that worker subjectivity constituted in external arenas such as the family is important as well as subjectivity constituted at the point of production. Burawoy’s idea of the “politics of production” incorporates both internal and external apparatuses of production which contribute to the regulation or development of workplace struggles (1985:87). This later focus proved particularly useful for this thesis, as it takes into account the elements of the labour process which fall outside actual production and the accompanying social relations:

The process of production also includes *political apparatuses* which reproduce those relations of the labor process through the regulation of struggles. I call these apparatuses the *factory regime* and the associated struggles the *politics of production* ... (Burawoy 1983:587)
Burawoy’s politics of production allow a focus on a variety of levels: from the micro-level of the workplace through the macro-levels of the role of the labour market and the state in the international context. This approach is also the most applicable to an exploration of the labour process in a less developed country context, as Burawoy identifies varying types of factory regimes, one of which – “colonial despotism” – explicitly discusses the relationship between the labour process and the state in less developed countries. Colonial despotism is said to be:

“despotic, because force prevails over consent; colonial, because one racial group dominates through political, legal and economic rights denied to the other”. This system is contrasted with the “market despotism” of early capitalism, the “hegemonic despotism” of late capitalism and the “bureaucratic despotism” of state socialist societies. (qtd in Munck 1988:68)

Munck suggests substitution of “dependent despotism” for “colonial despotism” to account for continued economic subordination despite political independence in the post-colonial situation, and that the domination of one racial group may not apply to the general context in less developed countries (1988:68). Burawoy’s concept of factory regimes, particularly dependent despotism, is useful in considering the coercive regime in Fiji. Military coups in 1987 created a military state, which backs up the rule of law with the threat of force. The military state initially prohibited unions for garment workers, and later circumscribed unions’ powers through a series of labour decrees in 1991. High unemployment also serves to generate “consent” to poor wages and working conditions.

Burawoy argues that historically in the advanced industrialised countries, market despotism led to worker resistance and crises of underconsumption, and intervention at the level of collective capital (the state) ensued to resolve the crisis through the social wage and the limitation of managerial control (Burawoy 1983:589-91). State intervention resulted in hegemonic regimes, wherein,

…management can no longer rely on the economic whip of the market… Workers must be persuaded to cooperate with management… The despotic regimes of early capitalism, in which coercion prevails over consent, must be replaced with hegemonic regimes, in which consent prevails, although never to the exclusion of coercion. (Burawoy 1983:590)
Burawoy advises that with the enhanced mobility of capital and the subsequent vulnerability of collective labour in recent years, a new form of despotism is emerging out of the previous regime – hegemonic despotism:

That is, workers face the threat of losing their jobs not as individuals but as a result of threats to the viability of the firm. This enables management to turn the hegemonic regime against workers, relying on its mechanisms of coordinating interests to command consent to sacrifices. (1983:590)

The regime remains hegemonic because workers’ interests are still “concretely coordinated” with those of capital (Burawoy 1983:603), but the balance of class forces has shifted in favour of capital:

...workers are now presented with a choice between wage cuts ... or the loss of their jobs. The new despotism is ... the ‘rational’ tyranny of capital mobility aimed at the collective worker... The fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, the transfer of operations, and disinvestment. (Burawoy 1983:603)

Burawoy’s discussion of hegemonic despotism provides a helpful context for considering recent trends in New Zealand. The economic decline of the 1980s in New Zealand and the permissive regulatory environment created by the state have eroded hard-won wages and working conditions. New Zealand is not alone in this trend. Burawoy asserts, “...there are signs that in all advanced capitalist societies hegemonic regimes are developing a despotic face...” (1983:603). Burawoy proposes that free trade zones in the poor countries signify an attempt to restore the conditions of market despotism, which are firstly, that workers have no choice other than to sell their labour in order to survive; secondly, that work is deskilled in terms of the separation of conception and execution, reducing the power of workers to resist coercive controls; and thirdly, that competition leads enterprises to constantly seek to intensify work, lengthening the working day, or implementing new technologies (1983:588-90). Hence, hegemonic control is not a key feature of such zones as the conditions of market despotism allow coercion to prevail over consent. These themes will later be considered in relation to Fiji’s Tax Free Factory Scheme.
Contributions of the labour process literature

The core literature on the labour process, from Braverman to Burawoy, has much to contribute to an understanding of the restructuring of industrial work and women's experiences of it. Two key points emerge from the above discussion. First, to comprehend women's experiences of global industrial restructuring, it is necessary to analyse how the organisation of production is being transformed and how the changes affect workers' skill levels. Although the literature on the labour process disputes whether control is always central in determining management strategy, it is nonetheless a key area to consider to understand the experience of work. The discussion of the core literature on the labour process suggests that managerial control strategies vary along a spectrum with direct control strategies such as Taylorism at one end. Due in part to worker resistance to the deskilling of their jobs, and the nature of the workplace as a contested terrain, a variety of other control strategies exist along the spectrum, including technical control, bureaucratic control, responsible autonomy, and the organisation of consent. In practice, management's approach to the problem of control will almost always involve combinations of aspects of different strategies, and the impacts on the workforce can only be determined through empirical research.

Second, to understand women's experiences of the restructuring of their industries, it is necessary to look both at the workplace and beyond. The experience of work may be influenced by state politics, the labour market, the family, and the ideological realm. The partnership of patriarchy and capitalism must also be explored when seeking to understand the effects of restructuring on women workers. The relationship between domestic and paid work must be taken into account, and work should be viewed in light of family economic strategies. Attention should be given to worker subjectivity alongside the objective facets of work in order to comprehend the interplay of agency and structure in determining women's experiences. Finally, the experience of work cannot be divorced from an exploration of how the increased mobility of capital under globalisation may affect the organisation of production and managerial strategies.

In making problematic the areas of skill, control and consent, which are crucial to an understanding of the experience of work, the literature on the labour process provides a context for empirical research into the experience of work in the era of globalisation. This review of the literature on the labour process has concentrated on changes in the organisation of production at the level of the workplace. It is now necessary to engage with restructuring at a more general level, and the following section discusses two approaches to theorising global industrial restructuring. The
perspectives of flexible specialisation and regulation theory both shed light on the restructuring of the garment industries in New Zealand and Fiji, and suggest avenues of inquiry into women workers’ experiences of these processes.

Theorising global industrial restructuring

It is widely accepted that globalisation has altered the organisation of production on an international scale. Two general trends as a result of global restructuring have been the relocation of much labour-intensive production from the industrialised countries to export processing zones in the poor countries, and the restructuring of industries which remained in the industrialised countries. Fervent debate has centred on the question of precisely what has changed in the organisation of production and wider society, and how. The diversity of opinion converges around the idea that the dominance throughout the post-1945 boom of Fordism, or mass production, in the industrialised countries has waned since the 1970s. The main currents of the debate regarding the decline in dominance of Fordism can be grouped under the headings of flexible specialisation and regulation theory. Elements of both approaches provide a useful departure point for a consideration of the restructuring of the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji.

Flexible specialisation

The flexible specialisation approach stems from Piore and Sabel’s *The Second Industrial Divide* (1984), later defended by Hirst and Zeitlin (1991). Piore and Sabel postulate two “industrial divides”: in the first, mass production replaces craft production as the dominant form of industrial organisation; the second involves the present shift in the organisation of production away from Fordism and towards flexible specialisation. Flexible specialisation is said to denote the re-emergence of craft forms of production in the advanced industrial societies, and is characterised by small firms producing for niche markets, utilising high technology innovations, “multiskilled” labour, and employee involvement schemes.

Contrary to Braverman’s deskilling thesis, the innovations of flexible specialisation are regarded as beneficial for workers, because their roles will be “revitalised” as conception and execution are reunified due to the more highly skilled nature of the work. Firms, desirous of retaining their increasingly skilled workers, will offer them enhanced job security and improved labour relations. While small firms
predominate, large scale industry will implement similar changes as well, and employ “broadly skilled workers using capital equipment that can make various models” (Katz and Sabel 1985, qtd in Tomaney 1994:160). The implications of the changes in the organisation of production are not limited to the workplace. A balance of cooperation and competition will be required outside the workplace to address “the crucial micro-regulatory problem” of the provision of resources for industry (Hirst and Zeitlin 1991:3), thereby altering “the nature of markets, relations between firms and relations between industry and the state” (Tomaney 1994:159). The flexible specialisation thesis has been criticised on a variety of grounds – theoretical, methodological and empirical – and the work of Sayer, Tomaney, and Barlow and Winterton provides insightful critiques.

Sayer (1989) criticises flexible specialisation’s “binary history” approach that opposes Fordism to flexible specialisation. Sayer proposes that the dichotomy alleged between mass production and flexible specialisation is false on two counts. Firstly, mass production is not necessarily inflexible, and therefore it is wrong to conclude that mass production and flexible specialisation are alternatives to each other. Critics like Meegan argue that flexible specialisation merely coexists with Taylorist methods – it does not replace them. Both forms of production organisation can even coexist in one factory at the same time (Meegan 1988, ctd in Barlow and Winterton 1996:180).

Secondly, Sayer holds that the erroneous dichotomy between mass production and flexible specialisation resulted from drawing conclusions based on limited examples, and particularly from overlooking the case of Japan’s industrial approach. Sayer maintains that if western countries are experiencing a crisis in Fordism, the problems they face are due to competition from Japan and the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs). That is, where Fordism is experiencing a crisis, it is due to the success of mass production in Japan and the NICs. Sayer therefore finds it inaccurate to speak of Fordism overall being in crisis, and highlights the importance of looking to the wider context when theorising about industrial development.

At the same time, Sayer recommends further attention to the specific conditions of each locale. He argues that mass production has flourished in Japan because of circumstances particular to that location – not least of which is an extreme form of patriarchy which makes available a workforce “unusually differentiated along gender lines” (1989:690). Consequently, Sayer calls for research to look beyond production to the social institutions in each locale which enable the success of particular industrial strategies. Regarding the extent to which flexible technologies are being implemented in industry, Sayer cites Schonberger (1987) who wrote that the expense of implementing costly flexible technologies is only affordable for the largest firms.
Hence flexible specialisation theorists overstate the extent to which restructuring results in flexible specialisation.

Barlow and Winterton (1996) suggest that flexible specialisation exaggerates the dominance of Fordism during the post-war era. They argue that many industries were not based on mass production at all, and highlight Williams et al. (1987) who discuss Fordism as an "uninformative stereotype" which does not allow for differentiation within the organisation of mass production. While acknowledging that flexible specialisation is not economically deterministic in that flexible specialisation is proposed as "a rational choice to overcome deficiencies of mass production", Barlow and Winterton scorn the assumption of flexible specialisation that there is a unidirectional progression from mass production to flexible specialisation (1996:181).

Tomaney's criticism (1994) targets flexible specialisation's assumption that new technologies associated with the changes in production will be inherently good for the workforce. Tomaney maintains that where new flexible technology is implemented as part of restructuring, the implications for the workforce are quite different to what Piore and Sabel have suggested. Where Piore and Sabel assert, "The advent of the computer restores human control over the production process" (1984, qtd in Tomaney 1994:162), Tomaney counters that computer technology is more likely to be utilised to enhance managerial control and intensify work than to reunify conception and execution. His criticism is supported by discussion of interactive computing systems in Bobbin — the magazine of the international apparel industry. The following is a typical message of an interactive computing system that might be communicated to a machinist through headphones or as a message displayed on the computer screen:

Good morning Sylvia. Yesterday you worked 480 minutes and earned 528 minutes, making you 110 percent efficient. Today, you'll be "closing" again all day. When on "closing" several days in a row, your efficiency picks up, so today you should earn 561 minutes. This bundle should take you 21 minutes. Have a good day. If you need help on anything, remember to press the "help" key... and by the way, Sylvia, Happy Birthday. (Levine 1995:104)

Tomaney's criticisms with respect to the implications for the workforce of computerised technology are further supported by Rosen and Baroudi (1992:229) who argue that computer-based technology can be used as an invisible control mechanism for monitoring of the workforce. Reports on the latest technology verify their assertion: another computerised system calculates the machinist's production as she works, and displays coloured lights which signify to management that "the operator is working at 80 percent rather than the planned 110 percent" (Levine 1995:105). Thompson
(1989:109) notes the potential of computers to increase control over the workforce and to reduce skill levels of many workers. Computer Aided Design is discussed as deskilling the design function, resulting in a loss of job security for workers in that area (Cooley 1980, ctd in Thompson 1989:114). Thompson argues that the alleged "multiskilling" of workers still has Taylorist underpinnings (Thompson 1989:225). He interprets the changes in production as a form of "flexible Taylorism", and concludes, "no qualitative break has been made in the organisation of the capitalist labour process" (Thompson 1989:229).

Barlow and Winterton summarise the remaining criticisms of flexible specialisation. The first relates to flexible specialisation's inferential methodology which assumes the fragmentation of mass markets led to the crisis of Fordism, without explaining market fragmentation nor why this should result in flexible specialisation. Another problem with the inferential approach is that the move from the dominant paradigm of mass production to the dominant paradigm of flexible specialisation is postulated without explanation of what constitutes a dominant paradigm: "51 per cent of production (or employees?), or 90 per cent?" (Barlow and Winterton 1996:182). A further problem exists with the romanticisation of the skill and autonomy of craft work in the flexible specialisation hypothesis that a return to craft forms of production organisation will reunify conception and execution and enhance workers' control over their work.

The flexible specialisation approach and its critique serve as a reminder to query precisely what has changed and what has remained the same as firms restructure in pursuit of flexibility. The extent of technology innovations and their impact on the workforce are areas that must be problematised along with the supposed unity of conception and execution ascribed to a more craft-like organisation of production. The extent of multiskilling and workers' experiences of it must also be queried. These themes are dealt with in later chapters in relation to the decline of mass production in the New Zealand garment industry and its growth in Fiji.

**Regulation Theory**

Regulation theory, based on the idea that capitalism requires some form of regulation to manage its internal contradictions, grew from Aglietta's *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (1979), and Lipietz was a later key proponent (1982). The regulation approach offers a different conceptualisation of the changes in the organisation of production since the 1970s in terms of regimes of accumulation and their accompanying modes of regulation. Lipietz (1987, qtd in Roper 1991:54)
discusses these concepts as follows: a regime of accumulation is “a systematic and long-term allocation of the product in such a way as to ensure a certain adequation between transformations of conditions of production and transformations of conditions of consumption”; a mode of regulation is necessary “to bring the behaviours of all kinds of individuals – capitalists, workers, state employees, financiers, and all manner of other political-economic agents – into some kind of configuration that will keep the regime of accumulation functioning.”

Hirst and Zeitlin delineate the four major regimes of accumulation theorised by the regulationists: “extensive accumulation; intensive accumulation without mass consumption (Taylorist); intensive accumulation with mass consumption (Fordist); and an emergent post-Fordist accumulation regime whose contours have yet to be fully determined” (1991:19). The regulationists also identify four major modes of regulation: “old regime regulation...; competitive regulation; monopolistic regulation; and an emergent semi-flexible mode of regulation whose contours again remain to be determined” (Hirst and Zeitlin 1991:19). The regulationists hold that when a regime of accumulation occurs simultaneously with an appropriate mode of regulation, a long period of growth ensues.

Regulationists argue that the golden age of Fordism, marked by capital-labour accord and a boom period of sustained accumulation which lasted until the early 1970s, resulted from the introduction of new production technologies to intensify labour, combined with increased wages and the expansion of state-funded social programmes. A regime of accumulation developed, characterised by advances in productivity as well as increased working class consumption. A simplified explanation of the crisis of the intensive Fordist regime of accumulation is that the limits of the use of machinery to increase productivity were reached, higher wages therefore could not be maintained and the social consensus was undermined. The consequent decline in consumption impaired capital accumulation and in turn affected the fiscal crisis of the state (Roper 1991:54-5).

With respect to the emergent post-Fordist regime of accumulation, it remains to be seen whether an appropriate mode of regulation will enable another capitalist boom period. Aglietta (1979) coined the term “neo-Fordism” to denote that the changes occurring in production and society are not necessarily a radical break with the Fordist regime of accumulation and mode of regulation (Tomaney 1994:182). Lipietz (1982) proposes that what is in fact emerging is “global Fordism”. As the limits of the Fordist regime of accumulation were reached, unskilled labour intensive jobs were moved from the advanced industrialised countries to offshore sites in the poor countries to enable profitability to continue through exploitation of the abundance of low-waged labour. Fordism was extended to global proportions, and industrialisation expanded in the poor
countries. Lipietz differentiates among different types of Fordism in the periphery, which are distinct from Fordism in the core. “Peripheral Fordism” describes the Fordist regime of accumulation in poor countries where skilled jobs and engineering are absent from the production process, instead remaining in the core countries. “Sub-Fordism” denotes the regime of accumulation in countries where workers labour in a Fordist organisation of production and reap none of the benefits that characterise the Fordist regime in the core (Munck 1988:73).

Criticism of the regulation approach is as widespread as that of flexible specialisation. Brenner and Glick question regulation theory’s correspondence between mass production and mass consumption on the grounds that consumption prior to the Great Depression was not as limited as the regulationists imply, and consumption during Fordism’s zenith was also not markedly high in relation to output (Brenner and Glick 1991:84, 93-5). Other critics query regulation theory’s ideas about the nature of regulation, the relationship “between theoretical abstractions and empirical cases”, and the role that classes play in the regimes and in their crises (Hirst and Zeitlin 1991:21-2; see also Roper 1991:61-2). Strands of regulation theory that assume that a new regime of flexible accumulation will inevitably emerge from the current transitional period stand accused of technological determinism.

Despite the criticism, Lipietz’s approach proves useful in understanding trends in the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji. Fordism appears to be approaching its limits in New Zealand, an advanced industrialised country, if the downsizing of the garment industry is any indication. In order to continue to increase profitability, much of labour-intensive manufacturing has moved offshore to less developed nations like Fiji to take advantage of the low-wage labour. That the description of “sub-Fordism” suits the new industries in Fiji will be illustrated in the Fiji case study in chapter five. The regulation approach points out the importance of looking at the decline of mass production in New Zealand and its growth in Fiji as interrelated processes.

A final point of criticism of both the flexible specialisation and regulation approach comes from Bellamy Foster. Bellamy Foster’s (1988) elucidation of “The Fetish of Fordism” is instructive as the concept of Fordism is central to both flexible specialisation and regulation theory. Bellamy Foster proposes that attributing an explanation of “the entire history of the last half century or more” to Fordism is questionable because the whole concept of Fordism has shaky foundations (1988:15). Bellamy Foster maintains that the idea that Ford “sought to promote general prosperity by high wages and high consumption” is a myth that became firmly entrenched (1988:20). He counters that Ford paid high wages only in order to succeed in intensifying the labour process. When Ford first combined Taylorist deskillling methods
with his assembly line technique, he had to deal with an immediate labour crisis because many workers quit the factory. It was in this context that the $5 day was implemented, but Ford was made out to be a great friend of the workers as a result. Ford was then able to use the high wages for leverage with his workforce – and control mechanisms extended beyond production through a “Sociological Department” authorised to check that workers met Ford’s special conditions: they were married, lived in respectable homes, their wives did not work, they had no outside sources of income, and did not engage in excessive smoking or drinking (Bellamy Foster 1988:18).

Ford responded to the depression in the early 1920s with massive layoffs of staff and speed-up of production. The general population was unaware that the introduction of a five-day week was enabled by layoffs, speed-up and reduction of weekly earnings. The new “Service Department” became engaged primarily in anti-union activities (Bellamy Foster 1988:20). Despite violent tactics to repress clashes between workers and the police and Service Department, resulting in several deaths and injuries between 1932 and 1941, Ford retained the label of an “enlightened industrialist”. Bellamy Foster asserts that “New Era economists ... came to think of US capitalism as a qualitatively new, regulated system in which business had finally learned to provide, through higher wages to its workers, the basis for almost permanent prosperity” (1988:20). He maintains that the mythology of Fordism has had a lasting impact on theory due to acceptance of the ideology promoted by Ford’s public relations department as reality. Bellamy Foster further criticises the idea that “the golden age of Fordism is presumed to have rested primarily on fat pay checks, fringe benefits, easy credit, and the welfare state”, arguing instead that the Great Prosperity was linked to a permanent arms economy, and that the welfare state did not signal redistribution of wealth from capital to labour, but from “one part of the working class to another” (1988:27-8).

Bellamy Foster challenges the assumptions behind the concept of Fordism of both flexible specialisation and the regulation approach. However the significance of Fordism in capitalist development should not be dismissed. Gramsci emphasised that for the Fordist organisation of production to succeed in intensifying the labour process and increasing profitability, coercion had to be “ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent” (1971:310). High wages served to persuade workers, but social and political organisations outside the workplace were instrumental as well. Gramsci saw a causal relationship between Fordist organisation of production and what he labelled “Americanism” – puritan features of the superstructure such as the prohibition of alcohol and the regulation of sexuality. Gramsci proposed that industry had succeeded in the United States “...in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. Hegemony here is born in the factory…” (1971:285). The link between the
organisation of production and wider societal institutions that was underscored by Gramsci is the key lesson to take from a discussion of Fordism.

Without endorsing either the flexible specialisation or regulation approach, two useful points of departure can be identified from the preceding discussion to aid in considering the restructuring of the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji. First, the organisation of production is changing, although this does not necessarily represent a radical break with what existed previously. In order to comprehend the nature of the changes, an international perspective is necessary which encompasses both advanced industrialised and less developed countries. Mass production for mass markets, prominent over much of the twentieth century, is declining in the advanced industrialised countries — and at least some of it has been replaced by flexible production techniques for increasingly diversified markets. At the same time, mass production has expanded in other areas of the globe.

Second, the impact on workers of recent changes in the organisation of production can only be determined through empirical research, addressing the extent to which work is being deskill ed or reskilled or workers experience positive and negative aspects of the changes. The impact on workers can be expected to vary according to the position of their country in the global economy and the particular conditions in each locale. It can also be expected that their experiences are determined by the interplay of wider societal structures, ideologies, and particular industrial strategies. Participatory ethnographic research is the most appropriate method for studying women's experiences of the restructuring of their work, due to the need to consider the subjective and objective factors in women's working lives, both inside and outside the workplace. The chapter that follows looks more closely at the research methodology utilised for this thesis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the methodology of this thesis and to the variety of issues that had to be confronted in the research process. I begin with a synopsis of the trajectory that the research topic followed as it developed, the obstacles that were encountered and how these were overcome. My two study sites are then introduced, and I overview the pragmatic factors that resulted in their selection. Next, a summary of the literature informing my methodological approach provides a context for an exploration of my own endeavour to put these methods to work within the constraints posed by the two sites. I then review my approach to analysis of the empirical materials, and consider some of the issues involved in write-up and presentation of the research. The chapter closes with a discussion of my attempts to make the work reciprocal.

Research Design

In order to address the research design, an explanation of the evolution of the thesis topic is in order in response to Punch’s charge that “...often we are left in the dark as to the personal and intellectual path that led researchers to drop one line of inquiry or to pursue another topic” (1994:85). I will begin by briefly stating the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie the research. With respect to the ontology of the research, my position is aptly described by Denzin and Lincoln, who note that the Marxist and feminist frameworks which inform my study have in common “a materialist-realist ontology; that is, the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender” (1994:14). Additionally, I hold that the subjective and objective must be considered together. This ontological position has been best expressed by Freire:

For me, the concrete reality is something more than isolated facts. In my view, thinking dialectically, the concrete reality consists not only of
concrete facts and (physical) things, but also includes the ways in which
the people involved with these facts perceive them. Thus in the last
analysis, for me, the concrete reality is the connection between
subjectivity and objectivity, never objectivity isolated from subjectivity.

My epistemological assumptions about “the relationship between the inquirer and the
known” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:13) are related to my materialist-realist ontology. I
follow Reason’s assertion that “Knowledge arises in and for action” (1994:333). Based
on these positions, the research design was determined with the underlying aim of
contributing towards improvements in garment workers’ concrete circumstances. My
interest in this particular area stems from my master’s thesis research for the University
of Hawai’i on the experience of women garment factory workers in Fiji of global
restructuring. The experience of conducting that research motivated me to pursue
further study to contribute towards improving the situation of women garment workers
in general. As I sought funding for a PhD at Otago University, it was wise to propose a
topic related to New Zealand and the Dunedin community in particular. I was accepted
into the programme to pursue an ethnohistorical study of the experience of women in
New Zealand’s garment industry. Dunedin was an appropriate location for such a study
as it had been the historical centre of the garment industry in New Zealand. Due to
funding constraints, I intended to limit the study to New Zealand.

When funding was later secured for further research in Fiji as part of a team
project, “Work and Identity in Fiji,” I expanded my topic to a comparative study and
dropped my intended historical framework. By this time, I had read much of the core
literature on the labour process, and out of this background proposed to study the extent
of worker resistance to the introduction of computer-aided technology in New Zealand
and Fiji’s garment industries. I was particularly interested in how the culture of each
locale might determine the nature and extent of the resistance. I undertook participant
observation in an industrial garment training programme in Dunedin specifically to
learn about technology and the labour process in the industry, as well as to establish
contacts for interviews with garment workers. After completing the training
programme, I began my fieldwork in Fiji, hoping to locate the most computerised
factories through my contacts. Not long after beginning my inquiries down this track, I
realised that the computer-aided technology did not exist to any large extent in the labour process in Suva or Dunedin.

In light of this dilemma, I chose to alter my topic again rather than change case study sites, for the pragmatic reasons that I was living in Dunedin and had all my contacts in Suva due to my previous research there. My inquiries were refocused on the final topic of this thesis: the experience of garment factory workers in New Zealand and Fiji of the processes of industrial restructuring in the era of globalisation. I found my grounding in labour process theory still to be relevant to this topic, and I was able to draw on data from my fieldnotes that I had previously regarded as “surplus”, for the new consideration at hand.

Research Sites

Burawoy has called for comparative studies of the labour process across national borders (1979b:262-3), and Marcus also describes a new trend towards multi-sited ethnography (1995). Dunedin, New Zealand, and Suva, Fiji, were the sites of my comparative study, and my institutional background facilitated the process of gaining access in both places. In Dunedin, I gained support for my research from the head of the department that runs the garment training course where I subsequently did participant observation. Undoubtedly, my assurances that as a student of anthropology, I was bound to respect the ethical standards of the New Zealand Association of Social Anthropologists’ “Principles of Professional Responsibility and Ethical Conduct” (1987), played a large part in securing that support. The head of the department then backed my proposal and liaised with the course trainers to organise my participation.

I relied on my one-year Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship to finance my participation in the training course, as I would otherwise have had to pay unaffordable overseas student fees. Once I was enrolled in the course, my status as a course participant permitted me to visit Dunedin factories on tours arranged for the garment trainees as an introduction to their employment options. In Fiji, my association with Rotary proved instrumental once more. As an ambassadorial scholar, I was invited to give a short talk about my research at one of the Suva Rotary clubs. Some of the club members who were affiliated with the garment industry then assisted me in visiting
local factories. My institutional background thereby enabled me to complement interviews of trainees and garment workers with factory tours in both Dunedin and Suva. Another aspect of my institutional background was my participation in the Otago University team project, “Work and Identity in Fiji.” The team project was affiliated with the Department of Development Studies at the University of the South Pacific. I found that my status as a member of the team project facilitated the surmounting of bureaucratic obstacles such as my application for a research permit for Fiji.

I undertook participant observation in Dunedin between January and May 1996. Once I had completed the training course, I made the first of my three fieldwork trips to Fiji from May to July. Upon my return to Dunedin, I began to follow-up with the trainees from the course. Some were still involved in training, either through the course or through work-based training. Others had entered employment in the industry. In November 1996, I made my second fieldtrip to Fiji, where I did another round of factory visits and interviews, and collected more secondary materials. A third brief trip to Fiji was made in June 1997, where I focused my energies on updating my secondary materials. I continued follow-up with the Dunedin participants until the end of 1997.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this thesis has been most strongly influenced by Walby and Burawoy, while taking into account the postmodern feminist critique of Ong and Mohanty. I will begin by briefly engaging with the postmodern feminist critique as far as it contributes to the doing of critical ethnography. A discussion of Walby and Burawoy’s approaches then sets the scene for a consideration of my attempts to put their methods to work in the two research sites.

While the overall postmodern critique cannot be reconciled with transformative politics and must be rejected, postmodern feminists do offer some valid insights. Postmodernism’s potential to stymie political action is rooted in its denial of subjectivity and human agency – the ability to exert power or to act. While this thesis maintains that the relationship between subjective and objective, or agency and structure, is crucial for any analysis of women’s lives and for political action, postmodernists insist on the “death of the subject”. Feminists, in contrast, are
committed to the concept of women’s agency. Hutcheon warns: “Postmodernism has not theorized agency; it has no strategies of resistance that would correspond to the feminist ones” (1989, qtd in Parpart and Marchand 1995:6). Postmodern feminists do not go as far as denying subjectivity, recognising that women’s daily lives comprise choices and the confrontation of challenges – both involving agency.

The methodological approach I have utilised in this thesis focuses on the interplay of women’s agency and structural constraints in shaping the lives of third world women within the context of the global system. This approach has been informed by the work of Ong and Mohanty. Western feminist analyses which cast non-Western women as interchangeable cheap labour have been rejected by Ong (1988) in favour of emphasis on the specific historical and cultural contexts in which women work. Mohanty (1991) furthers Ong’s anti-essentialist critique, arguing that western feminist representations silence and homogenise third world women into an undifferentiated category. Parpart and Marchand explain, “women in the South have been represented as uniformly poor, powerless and vulnerable, while women in the North remain the referent point for modern, educated, sexually liberated womanhood” (1995:7). For Mohanty, such essentialist homogenising of third world women into impoverished victims of political economy is a colonising discourse that serves imperialist aims.

Ong and Mohanty’s perspectives are useful in problematising non-western women as an undifferentiated category – the “Other” of western feminists – and their critique has encouraged “an openness to difference and a reluctance to essentialize ‘woman’…” (Parpart and Marchand 1995:8). Their critique appropriately cautions analysts to remain “…wary of an unproblematic ‘Third World woman’, and acknowledge the need to adopt an approach that recognizes the multiple axes/identities which shape women’s lives, particularly race, class, age and culture” (Parpart and Marchand 1995:18). What should be taken from the postmodern feminist critique is its emphasis on “…the need to situate women’s voices/experiences in the specific, historical, spatial and social contexts within which women live and work” (Parpart and Marchand 1995:18).

This brief discussion of the postmodern feminist critique of Ong and Mohanty points to the importance of focusing on the relationship between the subjective and objective in any analysis of women’s lives. Research should focus neither on structural forces alone, nor on the specificity of women’s culturally and historically constituted
subjectivities in isolation from the wider context. Walby’s work best addresses this theme and her approach most contributed to the methodology of this thesis. Walby (1991) underscores the importance of considering subjective data alongside data on wider structural forces as determinants of women’s life situations.

Walby details how studies of women’s work have usually focused around domestic events to understand the constraints and opportunities women face in paid work. In contrast, studies of men’s work look at the nature of the labour market to explain men’s experiences in employment. Walby argues that both arenas need to be looked at to fully comprehend the working lives of women and men. Walby emphasises the contribution that life and work histories can make to the study of the limitations arising within the domestic realm on women’s work opportunities outside the home, such as their acquisition of lesser human capital than men because of their domestic responsibilities. The methodology of life and work histories is also useful to a limited extent in understanding how discrimination against women or other particular features of the labour market can limit the opportunities in paid work that are open to women. Walby asserts, “...life histories provide us with information, which is otherwise unobtainable, about the implications of structural change for individuals or specific social groups” (1991:169).

However, life and work histories on their own are not enough to understand the structural limitations on women’s work opportunities. For example, the domestic model alone is insufficient to explain why women predominate in part-time versus full-time sectors of the labour market (Walby 1991:181). Domestic demands are only one factor determining women’s work opportunities and experiences. Legal and political changes must be considered as well, such as legislation which requires fewer benefits for part-time workers than for full-time workers, leading to employers’ preference for part-time workers where possible (Walby 1991:184). While individual level data from work and life histories allows a consideration of the implications of structural constraints at the individual level, these empirical materials must be complemented by data on structural changes (Walby 1991:185).

In terms of carrying out the approach advocated by Walby, Burawoy (1991b) formulated an actual method for such an undertaking – the extended case method – which proved compatible with my ontological and epistemological assumptions. The extended case method holds that knowledge is acquired through experience, and
participant observation forms the basis of studies employing this approach. Inquiry focuses on macro-level contexts (political, economic, historical) and how they affect the micro-level case at hand: “participant observation can examine the macro world through the way the latter shapes and in turn is shaped and conditioned by the micro world, the everyday world of face-to-face interaction” (Burawoy 1991a:6). Because this approach seeks macro determinants of the micro-world, the extended case method lends itself to the study of domination and resistance (Burawoy 1991b:279). Participant observation is particularly suited to gaining an understanding of the subjective aspects of the labour process. As Thompson asserts:

The sphere of ideology and consent cannot be studied in a wholly external way. It is no accident that the best studies ... have included close observational methods, or ... the very sensitive use of informal interviewing techniques. (Thompson 1989:177-8)

The extended case method employs empirical data gained through participant observation towards the reconstruction of theory – particularly theories of advanced capitalism. For example, in chapter seven, I relate the findings of my research to the theoretical areas discussed in chapter two to determine what these approaches have to offer. Through the reconstruction of theory, this method allows the implications of a particular case to be generalised and applied more broadly (Burawoy 1991b:271). As Burawoy has written, “The importance of the single case lies in what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases” (1991b:281). The aim of the extended case method in the reconstruction of theory is to apply this theory to affect concrete changes in reality: “Once one highlights systemic forces and the way they create and sustain patterns of domination in the micro situation, the application of social theory turns to building social movements” (Burawoy 1991b:283).

At first glance, the extended case method is similar to the grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin 1994), but important distinctions must be made between the two approaches. The extended case method takes existing theory as the starting point for analysis. Based on participant observation in particular cases, the extended case method seeks to engage in a continual process of the rebuilding of theory. The purpose of improving theory is to apply it to transforming reality. The grounded theory method, in contrast, seeks to generalise new theory based on inductive reasoning about
commonalities in different social situations (Burawoy 1991a:5). The grounded theory method is based on systematic analysis of data gained through interviews and field observations rather than participant observation (Strauss and Corbin 1994:273-4). The grounded theory approach is limited because it treats the development of theory as an end in itself and the practical application of theory as an aside (Strauss and Corbin 1994:274, 281). The extended case method goes the next step in its explicit commitment to the application of theory to transforming reality, and was therefore preferred for the purposes of this thesis.

With the above insights from Walby and Burawoy, I approached the task of invoking their methodologies in my two sites. Although Marcus’s past writings with Fischer (1986 – *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*) have been harshly criticised for excluding the work of feminists, Marcus’s later work offers insights relevant to multi-sited ethnography. Marcus notes in relation to multi-sited ethnography that, “…not all sites are treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity. Multi-sited ethnographies inevitably are the product of knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities” (1995:100). My methodology did indeed differ in Dunedin and Suva. In Dunedin, participant observation was the basis of the method through which I established contacts with garment trainees and workers. Later interviews with them were a supplemental source of information. In contrast, informal interviews were my primary method in Fiji, supplemented by observation.

My particular styles of ethnography in the two sites are best described in Marcus’s work on multi-sited ethnography as the “Follow the People” and “Follow the Life or Biography” approaches. Willis’s study of working class school-boys and their entry into jobs is the best-known example of the approach I utilised in Dunedin (Marcus 1995:106). I relied on the “Follow the Biography” approach in Fiji. According to Marcus, this approach has only been implemented partially by Fischer and Abedi (1990) in their *Debating Muslims* (1995:109). Marcus describes this second approach as “developing more systematic analysis, generalized from the story of a particular individual’s life” (1995:109).

A variety of factors contributed to my utilisation of different methodologies in the two sites. First, I had already carried out a year of fieldwork in Fiji for my master’s degree thesis, and I had an established network of contacts to utilise there. I had not conducted previous research in New Zealand, and had to establish contacts from
Second, I had the opportunity to carry out participant observation in an industrial garment production training programme in Dunedin. The course instructors and the head of the department that runs the course were consulted and agreed to my participation. There was a vacancy in the course, which meant that I was not taking away a training opportunity from someone else. I wanted to participate in the course in Dunedin for two reasons: to learn about the labour process of industrial garment production, and to establish contacts with trainees who I could interview after they entered local factories. I opted to pursue participant observation in the Dunedin rather than the Suva training course because the longer Dunedin course allowed me the time to develop relationships with the course participants.

I was also interested in women’s transition between training and work in Fiji, but I did not have the resources to fund a long stay to “follow the people”. Also, research on the garment industry in Fiji is much more politicised than in New Zealand, and I was concerned about whether it would have been possible to protect women’s identities as my repeated visits to their homes would have been conspicuous. My selection of participants in Fiji was strongly influenced by the ethical concern of not bringing harm to them as a result of participation in my study. I was conscious of the potential for my research to cause garment workers to lose their jobs. I learned through the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, a group lobbying for improvements in women workers’ conditions, that job losses had resulted from careless research in the past once employers learned who had participated in an interview.

I participated in the Dunedin training course for twelve weeks full-time. My research was informed by the New Zealand Association of Social Anthropologists, “Principles of Professional Responsibility and Ethical Conduct” (1987). Aware of the ethical issues surrounding my study as discussed in the pamphlet, I resolved to inform the course participants of my study from day one in line with the idea of “fully informed consent”. During our self-introductions, I briefly explained to the other trainees that I was a student from the University doing the training course as part of my research on the lives of garment workers. It was only later that I learned that most of the women in the course had very limited English, and had not understood me at all, or else were aware I was doing some kind of study, but did not understand exactly what it was about. Over the following weeks, I made my research understood through one-to-one conversations with the trainees. I did not engage in any formal interviews throughout
the duration of the course. Instead, I gathered information through observation and informal conversations with the trainees, and recorded this in my fieldnotes. After the course ended, I maintained on-going social contact with some of the course participants, which enabled me to interview them about their experiences at work after they entered local factories.

Contacts with the Dunedin outworkers were arranged through the trainees who knew them, and one contact was made through a public talk that I gave about the garment industry, after which someone approached me to tell me about a family-member who was an outworker and might want to be interviewed. I welcomed the opportunity to establish contacts with the workers entirely separate from the industry. This helped allay workers’ concerns about being interviewed in cases where the women did not know me through the training course.

In Fiji, I conducted interviews with three different sets of workers. The first set were trainees interviewed at the national training centre for the industry. All contacts with trainees were established through the staff of the training centre. Many of the trainees had already worked in garment factories, but due to the deskilled nature of the labour process in Fiji, they had enrolled in the training centre to acquire further skills. These trainees were quite open about their experiences in their former factories as they did not intend to go back to those jobs.

The workers in the second set were the employees of two of the local factories. The first factory permitted me to interview several workers during two visits to the factory. The second factory – considered a showcase for the national industry – allowed me to visit the factory daily and interview any workers who were willing to spend their lunch-time with me. I was able to approach workers of both Fijian and Indo-Fijian ethnic backgrounds, and also through inquiries, I talked to women of varying marital statuses and employed in different parts of the production process. While the daily visits to the factory were useful in allowing me to observe production and the factory dynamics, I was aware that the quality of the interviews done on the factory premises may have been compromised due to workers’ possible association of me with the management despite my assertions to the contrary.

Because of this concern, contact was established with a third set of workers through a personal contact not related to the industry. These women worked in a variety of factories, and I visited them in the evening in their homes. All but one of the
interviews presented in the Fiji case study chapter came from this third set. The conditions of garment workers' lives in Fiji were a definite constraint on the interviews. The women work long hours at the factory, sometimes six days a week, and all their time outside factory hours is taken up getting to or from work, and carrying out their domestic responsibilities in the home or doing the shopping or banking for the household. Due to the lesser infrastructure, these responsibilities outside paid work take up more of workers' time in less developed countries such as Fiji. I had to work my visits to the women's homes around their busy schedules. The heavy burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities for women in Suva on top of their industrial work limited the possibility of participating in women's lives outside work and training. Because of the problems of a more participatory approach, I resorted to tape-recording interviews with the women during their lunch-time or while they were preparing dinner for their families.

Interview Techniques and Issues

In Dunedin and Suva, I interviewed fifty-one garment workers and trainees, either formally or informally. In Dunedin, discussions with fifteen women constituted the heart of the empirical materials. Seven of the women were or had been factory workers, five were trainees, and three were outworkers. In Suva, I interviewed thirty-six garment workers and trainees (twenty-one workers and fifteen trainees). In both places, additional discussions were carried out with garment industry officials (owners and managers), training centre staff, and others associated with the industry. Fourteen such interviews were conducted in Suva and eight in Dunedin. In Suva, I also met with government representatives from the Department of Women and Culture, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Fiji Trade and Investment Board, as well as spokespersons from the Fiji Trades Union Congress, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, and UNIFEM.

I began each interview with a reminder of the purpose of the research and what would be done with the results. I also promised the complete confidentiality of the information. I asked permission to tape record the interviews and the majority of the participants agreed. I took notes on the interviews where the participants did not want
to be taped. I administered and transcribed all of the interviews myself. All interviews were done in English, although when I interviewed some trainees in pairs, the one who spoke more English sometimes translated for the one who spoke less. I did not feel that it was necessary to interview the workers in their own languages, as many speak English in their everyday lives. Still, most learned English as a second language, and this should be kept in mind in reading the interviews in the case studies that follow. A small number of workers who I approached at the Suva factory were not comfortable speaking English and did not agree to be interviewed.

In Dunedin, I had the opportunity to speak to each participant several times. In Suva, my meetings with workers were limited to one or two visits. The information I sought in both places can be grouped into four general categories that constitute the heart of my research: work history, present job, future prospects, and personal background. In the area of work history, I sought information on the decision to enter the garment industry, number of years in the industry, how training had been conducted, the factories worked for, why the worker changed between factories, and how garment factory work compared to any other paid employment. I also inquired about their adjustment to the work: did they have experience sewing before entering the factory? What were their experiences learning to use the machines? With respect to the present position, I was interested in the work performed and how it fitted into the labour process, pay rate and pay system (piece-rate, hourly wage, or bonus system), whether a contract had been signed, control mechanisms at work, health and safety issues, and transport to and from work. I asked for workers' perceptions about their jobs, both positive and negative.

In terms of future plans, the interviews sought responses on how long the worker planned to stay in the industry, why she might leave, whether anything about working conditions needed to be improved, how such improvements should be affected, why she did or did not belong to the union, and what she would do without a garment factory job. Finally, discussion of the workers' personal backgrounds aimed to situate their employment in the context of family economic strategies and their domestic responsibilities. How had their decision to work in a garment factory coincided with the job prospects of other household members? What did workers do with their income? Had they saved any money? I inquired about the participant's age, educational background, marital status, children and dependents, and family living situation. What
were their domestic responsibilities, and who helped with those? What arrangements were made for childcare? Lastly, if they were migrants, why had they migrated?

The interviews were informal, and respondent-led as much as possible in terms of the topics discussed. As the women raised issues of particular importance to them, I pursued those issues. I hoped that participants would feel more comfortable with an informal discussion rather than following an interview schedule. This style of interviewing was chosen in order to use women’s perspectives of their situations as the starting point for the analysis, but at the expense of getting answers from all participants on the same topics. The participants tended to limit their discussion of their lives beyond employment and training. Their understanding of their employment experiences in the garment industry as the focus of my study likely contributed to this limitation. Additionally, the limited number of meetings with workers, particularly in Suva, did not allow trust to be developed for the women to discuss their private lives. When I visited workers’ homes, the cramped living conditions within the urban areas also did not afford privacy for the interviews and hindered my ability to supplement my data through observation of the social context in which they live. Instead, I had to rely on women’s recollections of family and community life. These limitations made gaining an in depth understanding of workers’ lives outside employment and training difficult. Taken together, however, the interviews complement each other.

A reading of the case studies in the chapters that follow will make clear that I did not try to remain objective in my interventions during the interviews. This aspect of my interview style was derived from Griffin, who points out, “It is seldom possible for a researcher to make a neutral intervention: Respondents will usually read positive or negative connotations into your words or actions” (1991:115). For Griffin, trying to remain silent and neutral in interview settings can portray agreement with the interviewee, and in this way, to remain silent is as much intervention as talking back (Griffin 1991:118). Griffin argues that as no style of interviewing can be completely neutral, some active intervention “in which the researchers talk back” is not uncalled for (1991:119). Additionally, the idea that the researcher’s interventions will unduly affect the interviewee’s views overestimates the respondent’s susceptibility to being influenced by the researcher’s opinions. There were clear cases in my experience where workers disagreed with what I had said. I do not mean to deny “the power differentials implicit (and often explicit) in the relationship between researcher and researched”
(Griffin 1991:110), and it is necessary to briefly engage with some of the issues surrounding the doing of ethnography.

The term “new ethnography” has been used to describe recent works that are marked by “identification of the fieldworker as an actor in the ethnographic situation” (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989:7). The reflexivity characterising the “new ethnography” aims to address the power relations that enable ethnographic research (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989:10). There are different varieties of reflexivity: postmodern works such as Clifford and Marcus’s (1986) *Writing Culture*, Marcus and Fischer’s (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, and Clifford’s (1988) *The Predicament of Culture* are concerned with the textual practices of writing ethnography. Another type of reflexivity involves the feminist practice of “positioning” which acknowledges “the situatedness and partiality of all claims to knowledge” (Marcus 1994:571). As Broch-Due has expressed about the “old” ethnography: “There is a denial by omission of the fact that the researcher has a gender, belongs to a certain race, social class, and culture, and that all these as social facts have some influence on her research” (1992:96).

Debate has revolved around the origin of the trend towards reflexivity, particularly whether it arises out of post-modernism or feminism. Mascia-Lees et al. (1989) argue that feminist writers have been advocating reflexivity for decades, and it is important to distinguish between these two varieties of reflexivity. The reflexivity of the “new ethnography” arises out of a postmodernist epistemology which holds that knowledge can be only partial because, “Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:12). While this sounds good on paper, the postmodern epistemological stance has proven problematic in its relationship to social change. In contrast, feminist reflexivity is premised on changing “the material conditions of women’s lives” (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989:23).

While Marcus charges that feminist positioning “all too often becomes a gesture that is enforced by politically correct convention” (1994:572), I find the practice of positioning essential for my own research, because of the ways in which my background clearly affected the research. I have already mentioned the effects of my institutional background on gaining access to both research sites. Another aspect of my personal background that has influenced the research relates to my constant renegotiation of my identity in the process of carrying out the research. Marcus notes
that within the changing locations of multi-sited ethnography, the ethnographer must constantly renegotiate their identity (1995:112-13), and this was a prominent part of my experience.

I alternatively cast myself as a garment trainee, PhD student, or anthropologist depending on who I was talking to. My goal was not to deceive, but to emphasise the aspects of my identity that made it easiest to relate to the different parties. On the one hand, with all the garment workers and trainees, I explained that I was a student from Otago University in New Zealand. I found that the workers and trainees were not intimidated to talk to me, perhaps because of my gender and my relatively young age. As Punch writes, “A young student... may be perceived as nonthreatening and may even elicit a considerable measure of sympathy from respondents” (Punch 1994:87). On the other hand, in order to get my research permit for Fiji and speak to garment industry officials, I had to cast myself as a serious anthropologist, worthy of doing research on the industry and taking up their time.

As well as emphasising different aspects of my identity, I also approached interviews with trainees and workers differently than with the employers. I was differentiated from the women by my class, ethnicity, nationality, age and educational background (Griffin 1991:112). I tried to establish common ground with the workers and trainees on the basis of my experience in the training course in Dunedin. Like Griffin, I attempted to set up an informal atmosphere with the trainees and workers I interviewed, laughing and smiling (1991:111). This method differed from my stance with the employers, with whom I adopted a more serious approach. I was not permitted to tape record any interviews with employers.

In addition to positioning, Williams (1993) points out other perspectives on reflexivity within feminist ethnography. The approach which proved particularly useful in my research involved the constant re-examination of “the work, the women and ... the theoretical perspective from which you are working” (Griffin 1980, qtd in Williams 1993:579). Another researcher, Griffiths, further developed this mindfulness into a habitual part of her daily research:

... reflexivity was not only taking place retrospectively as I recorded each day’s progress, but minute by minute as I carried out the research. This was particularly true during interviews, when I tried to respond to and follow up issues raised by the girls themselves, rather than simply
sticking to my own agenda ... I also tried to be aware of my own interviewing techniques as I went, for instance, changing my form of questioning. (1991, qtd in Williams 1993:579)

In my experience of interviewing the workers, I found that participants did not want to discuss certain areas with me, and I respected these boundaries where others might have pressed for sensitive information. Here I have followed Ramazanoglu’s position, that “feminists are committed to ways of knowing that avoid subordination” (1992, ctd in Williams 1993:581). I struggled to remain conscious of the power relations of doing the research throughout. Still, Burawoy underscores that sensitivity to the power relations of research does not remove the power relations: “…social science as we know it today rests on an irreducible level of domination” (Burawoy 1991a:5). The important thing is to be mindful of the power relations, but not paralysed by this mindfulness. As Griffin asserts: “The main message is to maintain a degree of reflexivity about the researcher’s role, and to pay attention to the power relations operating in each research situation, especially those around sex/gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and class and age” (Griffin 1991:119). As part of this reflexive exercise, I include some of my questions and responses in the case studies to keep the statements of the participants in the context of how I intervened.

Data Analysis and Presentation

My analysis of the empirical fieldwork materials began by reading through the fifty-one interviews with garment workers and trainees as well as the supplemental interviews with industry and government officials to identify the key themes emerging. I then selected interviews to use as case studies which would highlight the key themes. The analysis of the nine case studies presented was therefore informed by the insights gained from the wider body of empirical materials. The writing up was done in such a way as to give a sense of the women as whole people rather than “sound-bytes”. I used their perspectives of their situations as the starting point of my analysis. As I wrote-up the interviews, I reflected on the key themes emerging from them, and then reworked the interviews to underscore those points. In presenting the women’s stories, I highlight their agency and active choices in shaping their lives wherever possible. In discussion
sections, I relate their stories to structural forces – state, capital and patriarchy – which influence the parameters of their situations. I have developed my analysis through this process of moving from the specific to general and back to the specific.

An explanatory note is in order regarding my level of analysis in the case studies. I have explored each case in relation to the dialectic of domination and resistance, but I have focused my analysis on systemic processes. Still I have tried to keep an eye out for the contradictions within these processes. For example, Walby argues that patriarchy and capitalism have a contradictory relationship, with tensions between the two structures surrounding their conflict of interests (ctd in Williams and Lucas 1989:146-7). Marcus notes that the trend towards “decentering the resistance and accommodation framework” has been notable in multi-sited ethnography. As Marcus expresses, this decentering occurs:

… for the sake of a reconfigured space of multiple sites of cultural production in which questions of resistance, although not forgotten, are often subordinated to different sorts of questions about the shape of systemic processes themselves and complicities with these processes among variously positioned subjects. (1995:101)

Final issues with respect to presentation are those of representativeness, and the agenda behind what was included and what was left out. Griffin notes the frequent criticism of ethnographic research that the sample is not representative (1991:117). However, it was not my intention to present a representative sample, but rather to do in-depth analysis of a few cases. This is in line with Griffin’s assertion: “Field research is less obsessed with representativeness, and more concerned with examining the processes through which social and cultural dynamics operate” (Griffin 1991:117). The women in the case studies I present should not be regarded as “common denominator” people. “Ethnography-as-text” writers such as Clifford (1983, 1988) have criticised traditional ethnographers’ tendency to “structure entire texts for specific effects” and to describe “‘common denominator people,’ individuals who symbolize ‘normal’ understandings and actions among the ‘X’ ” (ctd in di Leonardo 1991:23). I have taken this critique as a reminder to highlight the contradictions in the experience of women garment factory workers in the writing of this thesis, not to construct a narrative portraying companies as all-evil and workers as all-exploited.
Because I wanted to use the women’s own perspectives as the starting point of my analysis, the case studies which I have included are based on interviews which went well – where I succeeded in eliciting the cooperation of the interviewee and established a kind of rapport. My ability to do this was limited by the conditions in which interviews were carried out, for example, whether on the factory floor or in the workers’ homes. I was not always successful in achieving the respondent’s cooperation, and when participants did not want to elaborate on their answers, I had to respect their privacy. In Fiji, it is likely that the interviews conducted in workers’ homes were more successful both because of the privacy compared to the factory environment, and because these contacts were established through a trusted friend of the garment workers. Where workers did open up to me, I still have had to present the information in ways that respect the privacy of the participants, and protect their identities. I have used pseudonyms, omitted the countries which they are from in the case of recent migrants, and have had to obscure other information which would make the women easily identifiable to people who know them.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, an underlying assumption of this research was the epistemological stance that knowledge arises in and for action. It is my desire that this research should contribute to improving the concrete reality of women garment workers. However, contributing to improvements in their conditions is a complex problem because of the globalised nature of the industry. Solutions to their low wages and poor conditions must occur on a level wider than their local situations. Thus, this thesis looks at the cases of Fiji and New Zealand as a case study of wider trends. If any lesson emerges from the study, it is that no solution restricted to the local level will be sufficient because of the global nature of their problems.

Because of this context, I found that I could make this research reciprocal only in insignificant ways for those specific individuals who assisted me with this study. In Dunedin, I was able to reciprocate in a small way through everyday actions because I had established friendships with the women through my participant observation. I did not have this kind of relationship with the workers in Fiji. In Dunedin, I helped the
trainees with their English on assignments for the training course, and gave them rides to and from the training centre when possible. I also tried to reciprocate by bringing some food item to trainees when I visited their homes, and I provided them with copies of photos that I had taken of them.

I have concentrated my efforts to make the work reciprocal on the more general level of advocacy work for the garment workers through public speaking opportunities, which I hope contribute to an understanding of their situation. I accepted an invitation from Otago Polytechnic to speak about the Fiji side of my research after I returned from my fieldwork. I gave a similar presentation on my Fiji research to a class of garment trainees. I have also spoken to various Rotary Clubs in New Zealand. In Fiji, I presented the findings of my research-in-progress to a conference on Women in Politics. I hoped that to educate women policy-makers about the nature of the problems of the garment workers would in some way percolate down to improvements in their conditions. I presented another paper in Fiji at the Pacific Science Inter-Congress to a group of scholars and policy-makers concerned with industrialisation. Copies of my work will also be provided to the appropriate government ministries in Fiji to fulfil that condition of my research permit. This thesis now turns to a consideration of women’s experiences of the restructuring of the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji.
CHAPTER 4: THE NEW ZEALAND GARMENT INDUSTRY – CASE STUDIES FROM DUNEDIN

Introduction

The garment industry in New Zealand has undergone profound changes over the past fifteen years. Trade liberalisation dramatically affected an industry that was once one of the most highly protected of all garment industries in the OECD countries. The government’s reforms since 1984 to open the economy to the forces of international competition necessitated radical restructuring of the industry, involving a number of parallel processes. The immediate response of large volume producers was to move production to offshore sites, particularly Fiji. It was widely held that the remaining garment industry in New Zealand was on its knees. In fact, the industry has sustained a recent recovery and export boom, based on the pursuit of flexibility for competition in terms of quality and service rather than price.

The restructuring of the industry remaining in New Zealand has involved varying strategies in the pursuit of flexibility. Large firms were more likely to opt for high technology innovations and downsizing of the workforce in order to achieve flexibility. Other firm strategies utilise the labour of “multiskilled” machinists who are able to carry out a variety of production tasks at a high standard of quality. Casualisation of work has been another prominent strategy for achieving flexibility. Many full-time factory jobs have been casualised and filled by part-time, temporary, or contract workers. The extensive use of outworkers further signifies the trend toward casualisation.

The chapter surveys the impact at the local level of the state’s free-market reform programme and resulting changes in garment firm strategy in New Zealand. A profile of the New Zealand garment industry serves to set the scene for an inquiry into the significance of restructuring for individuals who make up the workforce. Reform of the educational arena has been perceived by government and industry as crucial to

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1 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) consists of twenty-six member countries corresponding to the world’s wealthiest industrialised countries. The original members were from Europe and North America, and they were later joined by Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Finland. Mexico, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Korea are the newest members.
enhancing flexibility and productivity. A consideration of the transition in garment
training is therefore undertaken before case studies of three trainees are presented and
discussed. Finally, the cases of two outworkers are drawn upon to complement the
exploration of the experience of women in factory work. All of the case studies testify
to the constrained reality of women garment workers' experiences. Contrary to the
assertions of the flexible specialisation proponents, firm strategies of flexibility pose an
immediate constraint on women workers' experiences. On a more general level, the
women have to negotiate against the forces of capital, the state, and patriarchy in their
efforts to shape their current situations and future prospects.

Profile of the New Zealand Garment Industry

Decline of the Garment Industry Under the Shift from Protectionism to Free-Market
Reforms

New Zealand's garment industry produced almost entirely for the domestic
market until the 1970s when it began exporting to Australia (Kirk 1991:4). The
industry has traditionally been very highly protected. Protection took the form of
import licensing, import quotas, high tariffs on imports, and subsidies to garment
exports. New Zealand had some of the highest rates of protection of all the OECD
member countries (Harris and Daldy 1994:1). In the 1980s this protection was
organised under the government's Textile Industry Development Plan which was
intended "to achieve the gradual removal of import licensing and the reduction of tariff
levels in a manner which would enhance the competitiveness and exporting potential of
these industries" (Department of Statistics 1996). Under the Plan, the first liberalisation
of import licenses began in 1981. In 1983, the garment trade was further liberalised
with the signing of the bilateral Closer Economic Relations (CER) agreement with
Australia,2 and industry assistance was reduced (Lloyd 1990:15).

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2 New Zealand garments receive free access into the Australian market if they meet the CER 50
per cent content rules. These rules specify that: 1) "the process last performed in the manufacture of the
goods was performed in New Zealand"; and 2) "the expenditure in material of Australian or New Zealand
origin, in labour or factory overheads, or in inner containers, is not less than half of the factory or works
cost of the goods in their finished state" (Young 1994:14).
In 1984, the Labour Government started the economy down the path of free-market reforms. Radical free-market reforms opening the economy to international competition were a shock to an industry so accustomed to protection. The import licensing system in the garment industry was to be replaced entirely by tariffs by 1992, and the tariffs would be steadily reduced to bring New Zealand's industry into line with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Garment manufacturers resisted the liberalisation programmes, balking at the threat that lifting protections would pose to them. Despite their lobbying efforts, liberalisation proceeded and the years that followed were marked by plant closures, downsizing of firms remaining in New Zealand, and the accompanying labour redundancies (Brown 1986:14). Without protection on imports, and facing intensified competition from the Newly Industrialising Countries and China (Lloyd 1990:1), producers of any large volumes of products could not compete with imports from lower-cost producing nations. Large volume garment producers moved production offshore to places like Fiji (Legat 1997:77). The workforce of New Zealand firm Lane Walker Rudkin, for example, was reduced from 3000 to 2000 over a two year period, meanwhile increasing its presence in Fiji (Schearer 1989:31). In 1988, garment manufacturers made a submission to the government to plead for continued assistance to the industry, arguing that the industry was a significant source of employment for women who could not easily be absorbed into another industry. Employment in the garment industry had been falling even prior to the free-market reforms of 1984. Between 1974 and 1984, the jobs in the industry had declined from 21,000 to 18,000 according to the Department of Statistics (Brown 1986:1). From 1984 to 1989, employment declined further to 14,800 (New Zealand Business Patterns 1989, cited in Kirk 1991:5). As a result of the manufacturers' submission to the government, tariffs on garment imports were reduced more slowly than on other imports. Still, apparel imports soared from 1988's NZ$84 million to NZ$400 million in 1994 (Department of Statistics 1996:436).

Restructuring for Survival

Garment firms that remained in operation during the free-market reforms implemented a variety of changes to survive (Karl 1994:50-1). Because the largest market for New Zealand's garment industry was Australia, the nature of the competition
there had a significant impact on how the New Zealand garment industry restructured. New Zealand garment firms could not compete with the products plain-sewn by the large number of outworkers in the Australian industry. Australian outworkers were not covered by union contracts, which ensured Australian union garment workers high wages in comparison to New Zealand union garment workers. Hence New Zealand’s larger firms which could afford to do so moved into production of product lines requiring high technology that would be unavailable to the Australian outworkers (Lee 1990:59).

Technological advances in the industry most frequently involved introduction of Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) systems. CAD is an innovative drafting system where “... shape, colour and scale are changed at the touch of a light pen” (Karl 1994:55-6). CAM is designed to reap “... maximum benefits from the CAD system, such as adjustment to rapid changes in design specifications” (Karl 1994:55-6). CAD/CAM systems have radically altered the nature of design and pre-production work. The new technology has been discussed as signifying “the break between economies-of-scale and competitiveness” because it enables better production of short runs to target niche markets (Harris and Daldy 1994:60). Some of the impacts of the new technology are described here:

Advancements have come in the form of computer based pattern making and marking, computerised layout of pattern markers, automatic fabric layout, laser knives and other forms of computerised cutting equipment. Information systems have changed the administration functions and enhanced communication capabilities. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and bar codes have revolutionised inventory control, orders and delivery times. (Karl 1994:55)

By 1989, forty CAD/CAM systems were already in operation in New Zealand – “the fourth highest number per capita in the world” (Tripartite Working Party 1989:13). Concurrent with the technological innovations were the reorganisation of production and the introduction of new management techniques. The garment industry in New

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3 “Plain-sewing” is the most basic kind of sewing, using a single-needle “lockstitch” or “straight” sewing machine. The lockstitch is the most common stitch used in clothing production, particularly for short runs (Carr and Latham 1988:62).
Zealand had traditionally been organised in a Taylorist system of progressive bundle production:

Machinists operated in a conventional line system with a different part of the construction allocated to each person on the line. Individual machinists specialised in a particular sewing machine and operated that machine on the line to do their operation in the garment construction process. This system is termed ‘progressive’ as garment pieces were basically fed in at the beginning of the line and eventuated as finished garment at the end of the line, often days later. When complete each machinist would pass their ‘bundle’ to the next operator on the line. (Karl 1994:54-5)

Several garment firms now work on the “modular-manufacturing” system as opposed to a line production system. In modular-manufacturing, workers produce garments in modules or cells that contain whatever machinery is required for production. Workers operate more than one machine, and the modular manufacturing system is therefore said to increase the importance of training in machining and handling skills for a variety of machines (Hunt 1995:176).

Technological advances have often had the opposite effect – they have been utilised to push down labour costs by reducing the number of skilled workers that is required (Karl 1994:55). Investment in high technology has mainly affected the pre- and post-production and cutting stages of garment construction, and has enabled several jobs in the industry to be combined into one. One New Zealand manufacturer attested:

The manufacturing process is highly automated with cutting and pattern-making computerised. Technology helps ensure the best and most economical use of the fabric... As technology has changed so too have the skills required. Where we used to have seven cutters, this is now done by one person and a machine”. (Learn April/May 1994:28)

Laying-up and pressing have been affected by the introduction of computerised technology as well as cutting and pattern-making, and these areas are no longer solely the domain of skilled craftspeople.

Some machinist jobs have been deskillied by technological advances and the reorganisation of production, especially in large firms. Hunt remarked that, “while a deskillling of individual tasks has occurred, individual workers are often required to
carry out multiple tasks” (Hunt 1995:175). Technology enables the employment of machine “operators” as opposed to “machinists” by decreasing the skills necessary for garment production. Where machinists have significant skills in clothing construction, many operators only feed fabric into the machines, and possess little knowledge about actual garment construction. Barclay Knitwear exemplifies how technology enables downsizing: through investment in new technology, Barclay reduced its workforce from 200 to 34 (Export News [EN] 2.5.94). It has been noted that while employment in the New Zealand garment industry has declined with downsizing, the number of firms has remained fairly stable (Kirk 1991:5). Small firms that could not afford to implement high technology are instead competing based on a multiskilled workforce producing short runs for niche markets. The multiskilled workers in small firms possess high skill levels and make up garments almost from beginning to end. Their work is very different from that of so-called “multiskilled” workers in large firms who merely perform a broad range of deskilled tasks.

The Turn to Flexibility

The above changes were implemented because industry flexibility had taken on a new importance. In the newly opened economy, garment firms could not compete on the basis of low wages with imports from the developing countries. Also firms were affected by changes occurring in consumer demand, which was becoming more fragmented as opposed to the homogeneous preferences of the past (Harris and Daldy 1994:103). The result of the market changes is that production needs to be flexible to “produce short runs at short notice” (Karl 1994:50). Hence firms shifted their strategies to compete on the basis of design, quality and service which involved “quicker delivery times, shorter production runs and shorter turnaround times for producing new runs” (Karl 1994:51). The advances in technology discussed above have enabled implementation of:

... more flexible production methods which are suited to satisfying the changing nature of consumer demand. Thus mass production (ie. Fordism) where price competitiveness is more important is giving way to quality competitiveness, niche marketing and customized goods. Profitability no longer depends on producing a relatively homogenous
product in large quantities, in order to achieve cost-minimising economies of scale. (Harris and Daldy 1994:70)

The introduction of Just-in-Time (JIT) and Quick Response (QR) production were characteristic of the shift toward flexible production. Just-in-Time production aims to perfectly match production output to the marketplace: “the ideal is the establishment of perfect symmetry between demand and supply, within and without the factory…” (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992:278). This is to be achieved through the elimination of wasteful work practices and performance of each step of the production process “‘just in time’ for the next operation…” (Karl 1994:61). Through the introduction of these new production systems, factories were better able to respond to changes in consumer demand, for example, refilling orders for products sold-out by retailers. Finally, the changed production process required application of a different style of management, and Total Quality Management (TQM) was introduced. TQM promoted a change in workplace culture in order to make all employees responsible for quality (Karl 1994:61).

Flexibility was the aim of JIT, QR and TQM. Some of the desired aspects of flexibility were “... the ability of firms to increase or reduce employment or wage levels with ease; the ability to increase mobility; the ability to make more elastic use of skills; and the ability to introduce non-conventional working arrangements...” (Harris and Daldy 1994:18). However in the area of skills, it was found that workers lacked what has been described as “the generic skills needed to enhance productivity and flexibility in the workplace” (Harris and Daldy 1994:130). This is attributed to the historical high levels of protection of domestic industry, and the rigid wage structures in place which meant that there was “little premium being placed on skills” (OECD ctd in Harris and Daldy 1994:130). “Poaching” of trained workers, where large firms invest in their training and small firms court workers with higher wages, was also a disincentive to engaging in training (Hunt 1995:175).

In 1989, in the context of the contraction of the industry and employment decline under the lifting of protections, a report of the Tripartite Working Party On an Active Labour Market Policy for the Apparel Industry called for “a flexible, well-trained workforce, able to respond to new opportunities as they arise”. Without such a workforce, plant closures and job losses would continue “as uncompetitive parts of the
industry contract” (1989:7). The report therefore called on the government for an active labour market policy: education and training to increase skill and productivity for the needs of the new flexible production methods (1989:8-9).

*Educational Reform for the Needs of Flexibility*

The government was already heading in the direction of educational reform as part of its free-market package. The government placed increasing emphasis on vocational education and training because they were seen to be directly related to productivity and flexibility (Harris and Daldy 1994:128-9). Thus the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was formally established through the Education Amendment Act of 1990, replacing “the old confusing jumble of certificates and diplomas with an integrated approach covering just about every industry in New Zealand. This allows for qualifications to be cross-credited, and for all relevant skills and experience to be acknowledged…” (Apparel April 1997:8). The NZQA Framework was to be “a coherent framework for nationally recognised school, vocational and academic qualifications ... which intends to move the education system away from the academic/vocational division in school and society” (Harris and Daldy 1994:130).

Under the Framework, NZQA certifies and sets monitoring standards to award credentials in consultation with industry, and NZQA aims to incorporate all educational programmes (whether school, polytechnic or university) into the Framework to promote “multiskilling” and ensure qualifications are easily transferable. This will allow the educational system to channel trained workers right into the needs of the new “flexible” industries. Support for the flexible qualifications system, which came into effect in June 1995, has been growing among apparel and textile firms (Learn April 1995:27).

As part of the educational reforms, changes have also taken place within the area of training programmes with the introduction of the Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) and the Training Opportunities Programme (TOPs). Under the Industry Training Act, 1992, ITOs were formed to provide industry-led training programmes to give workers the skills needed by industry. The Apparel and Textile ITO works “with universities and technical institutes to exploit the knowledge available, and to prevent duplication of training initiatives. This board is helping many companies in the industry to provide more focused training” (Hunt 1995:175). ITO chief executive Don Fleming
stated, “Our message is ‘you must train to survive.’ Make a commitment as a team with no poaching and no shirkers” (Learn April 1995:27).

Another training initiative was the formation of the Training Opportunities Programme to provide training to those with low qualifications who have been registered unemployed (Harris and Dalady 1994:43). TOPs aims to channel “unqualified school leavers and the longer-term unemployed … within the new system of vocational training” (Harris and Dalady 1994:131). Finally, recent educational reforms have also targeted increased training of management, as opposed to recruiting management from the shop floor as in the pre-reform economy. Management is believed to “significantly reinforce the impact of further education and training of the workforce” (Harris and Dalady 1994:131).

*Industrial Relations Reform for the Needs of Flexibility*

The Employment Contracts Act (ECA) which went into effect in 1991 has, as intended, had a marked impact on the flexibility of garment firms. Harris and Dalady have explained how firms desire both functional and numerical flexibility:

... firms are now tending to operate a dual labour market, with internal functional flexibility for their ‘core’, full-time and skilled employees, and numerical flexibility in the employment of secondary, less skilled and often part-time, casual or temporary workers. Functional flexibility means that workers can be redeployed to different tasks to meet changes in market demand, and thus flexible work practices are important eg. multi-skilled, multi-task, and work group participation orientated... In contrast, numerical flexibility means being able to vary at short notice the size and composition of the workforce. Secondary workers are often part-time, casual or temporary and concentrate in jobs that require little firm-specific knowledge. (Harris and Dalady 1994:103)

The ECA has reduced union involvement in workplace negotiations by allowing firms to negotiate directly with employees, and in that respect is considered to have helped achieve the desired flexibility (Harris and Dalady 1994:22, 193). Prior to the Act, collective bargaining was backed by compulsory unionism and workers were covered by union awards that set penal rates for shift and nightwork. These can now be negotiated (Karl 1994:63). Ida Dix, Secretary of the North Island Clothing and Allied
Workers Union, has expressed concern over the industrial relations reforms because she contends that employers are more powerful than workers at the negotiating table. She has explained how some employers “played on the workers’ vulnerability…” under the ECA (qtd in Hunt 1995:177). This is a common concern regarding the Act, and another critic has written that firms have “…exploited their new freedoms under the Employment Contracts Act to take advantage of the ignorance of some workers with respect to their rights or to impose lower wages on less skilled workers whose alternative employment opportunities are few and far between” (Boxall 1993, qtd in Hunt 1995:177). Immigrant workers are especially prone to exploitation because they often have little knowledge of their rights. Murray Rae, Chief Executive of the Apparel and Textile Federation, has reported that the vulnerability of immigrants is exploited in what he terms “Asian sweatshops”. These factories have been set up in recent years to compete with cheap imported clothing, and Rae considers that their working conditions are “an exception to the standard levels of unionisation, contract type, and pay levels. Here employees work up to 15 hours a day, typically on a pure ‘piece-rate’ remuneration system” (Rae ctd in Hunt 1995:175).

According to OECD figures, the ECA is credited with bringing New Zealand’s manufacturing unit labour costs down significantly (Karl 1994:63). This, combined with firms’ ability to dispose of penal rates, has made New Zealand attractive enough that some of the firms that moved production offshore following liberalisation have shifted operations back to New Zealand (Parker 1993, ctd in Karl 1994:63).

Recovery: “A Massive Export Boom”

By 1992, garment manufacturers were undergoing a recovery, with exports up 34 per cent on the previous year, and much of this growth had to do with CER acting as a catalyst for growth in the Australian market. Between 1988 and 1995, garment exports to Australia under CER had grown from NZ$14.1 million to NZ$137.4 million (Legat 1997:76). New markets were being targeted, especially Japan and Canada, but others included Europe, the Pacific Rim and the Middle East (EN 4.4.94). In 1993, the New Zealand National Business Review announced that the industry considered “to be facing annihilation when stripped of its protection is undergoing a massive export boom” (Barber 1993:3).
Although the tide had turned, falling rates of profit and employment decline occurred again in 1995 and 1996, due to the unusual strength of the New Zealand dollar and tariff rates that continued to decline. Indeed, the New Zealand garment and textile industry has been called "the most unprotected garment and textile industry in the world" (Legat 1997:77). Under the 1994 "Bogor Declaration" of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) agreement, tariffs will be reduced to zero by 2010, and New Zealand firms will be competing "in an internationally open domestic market while enjoying liberalised access opportunities" to the markets of the eighteen APEC member countries (Department of Statistics 1996:434).

New Zealand's garment industry today is characterised by both a small number of large manufacturers and a proliferation of small firms. According to one report:

The size of companies varies greatly, from the few 'heavyweights' like Lane Walker Rudkin (LWR), admittedly made up of 15 subsidiary firms, who employ over 1,000 people around the country, down to tiny operations with less than 10 employees. These smaller companies make up the bulk of the 700-800 firms that Murray Rae estimates make up the industry. In February 1989, 91 percent of factories in the apparel industry employed less than 50 workers, with 48 percent of factories employing less than 10 … Many of the smaller firms are known as CMTs (Cut Make and Trim), and act purely as contractors to designers and other manufacturers. (Hunt 1995:171)

Another estimate in 1995 put the number of New Zealand garment companies at 1,415 (Learn April 1995:27). Over the past ten years, the proportion of small garment firms compared to the total number of garment firms has increased as companies downsized and "reorganised to specialise in their areas of competitive advantage… Most firms …

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4 Non-preferential tariff rates for garment imports are currently 30 per cent, down from 40 per cent in July 1993, and this rate will reduce to 15 per cent by 2000, compared to 5 per cent tariff rates on most other goods (Legat 1997:76; Department of Statistics 1996:435).

5 Lane Walker Rudkin and Ceramco (of which Bendon is a part) are together estimated to have accounted for 37 per cent of total garment exports to Australia in the year ending June 1993 (Yarwood 1994:68).

6 The discrepancy in firm numbers has to do with the obscurity of the available statistics. Rather than providing figures on the number of garment firms and employees, the New Zealand Official Yearbook lists "Activity Units" according to number of "Full Time Equivalents" ("the sum of full-time persons engaged plus half the part-time persons engaged"). The number of Activity Units employing 0-5 FTEs would include individual outworkers as well as firms. The discrepancy in firm numbers results in reliance on estimates since no distinction is made between firms and outworkers.
tend to specialise in one product line, or a small range of product lines in a general market area. Those product lines may be their own label, or a subcontracted label for say, a specific retail store” (Kirk 1991:5-7). As well as a larger proportion of small firms – in 1994, 85 per cent of firms employed less than twenty people (Yarwood 1994:66) – more firms are now concentrated in the cities instead of provincial centres (Legat 1997:77).

Changes in the structure of the retailing industry also affected production practices in the garment industry. The retailing industry has become more oligopolistic, with large discount firms such as K-Mart and the Warehouse having entered into the New Zealand market. Also Australian clothing chains – Katies, Just Jeans, Jacqui E, Sportsgirl, Portmans, Jay Jays, Cue and Country Road – are now competing with New Zealand retailing chains such as Glassons. New Zealand retailing chains, DFL, Heros and Paulls, collapsed in 1998 as a result of the competition, following Thornton Hall and Peppertree, Underground and Warehouse Clothing (NZH 2-3.5.98). Competition is stiff in the key market catering to low to middle income women, and independent retailers are disappearing as chains come to dominate (Gautier 1995:28). Murray Rae explained:

One of the outcomes of the arrival of large chain stores is becoming very clear… There’s pressure coming on the privately owned store. Those stores traditionally represent a significant client base for our boutique manufacturers. They are now suffering badly. As a result, they have been forced to completely rethink their strategy and refocus their product on niches where competition is not so tough. (Rae, chief executive of the Apparel and Textile Federation, qtd in Young 1994:16)

The concentration of the retailing industry looks set to intensify as New Zealand has been deemed to be “under-malled”, and it is predicted that retailers will soon find “the might of mall culture” a force to be reckoned with. Where mall retail sales in Australia account for 30 per cent of all retail sales, and 50 per cent in the United States, malls account for only 17 per cent of retail sales in New Zealand, and this may be an area of expansion in the near future (Legat 1997:79-80). The concentration of the retailing sector accelerates the trend toward production for niche markets among New Zealand garment manufacturers. The retail chains require long production runs that are less costly to contract to manufacturers offshore. Independent retailers cannot compete with
the large retailing chains, and offer short runs of customised goods instead. Local manufacturers increasingly produce for these market niches.

The most recent employment figure for the industry is 11,470 (for 1996), down 3,330 from 1989 (Legat 1997:76). A prominent feature of the garment industry in New Zealand is the extensive use of outworkers, who have no union protection and for whom enforcement of labour regulations is extremely difficult (Fidler 1991:14-15). The latest quantitative assessment of the gender breakdown of the workforce was in 1989, when 86.1 per cent of garment workers were recorded as female (Tripartite Working Party 1989). Most likely, the figure is roughly the same today, and another characteristic of the workforce is that a high percentage of workers are Pacific Islanders, especially in Auckland. Though union membership has dropped since the onset of the reforms, a large proportion of workers are still said to be unionised, and collective contracts are common in large firms. The North Island Clothing Workers' Union represents about 60 per cent of workers in the garment industry (Legat 1997:76). The Secretary of the Union estimated that about 75 per cent of the Union's members are working under collective contracts (Dix, ctd in Hunt 1995:177). Individual contracts predominate in smaller firms (Hunt 1995:174). Pay levels are reportedly “reasonably uniform across the industry” (Hunt 1995:174). As of 1994, rates were around NZ$8.50 per hour compared to NZ$13.50 per hour in Australia (Yarwood 1994:67). Workers usually earn a base wage plus a productivity bonus for exceeding their targets by a certain percentage. With regard to skill levels, Hunt reports that skilled workers are still required by the industry despite the implementation of technology innovations (Hunt 1995:175). Many firms are operating teamwork or module production, such as Bendon’s Kamo and Te Rapa plants where each operator is responsible for approximately 2.5 machines (Yarwood 1994:69). The Kamo plant, however, was scheduled to close by the end of 1997, as Bendon begins “a shift in focus from a manufacturing company to a global marketing business” (Otago Daily Times [ODT] 1.11.97).

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7 The employment of outworkers is discussed in detail in the last section of this chapter.

8 Minimum wage in 1998 in New Zealand is $7.00 per hour.
The Industry Today: Marketing New Zealand’s Image

While Australia is still the main market, the industry has diversified its exports, especially into Asia. Since 1990, a joint Apparel, Textile and Footwear action group under TRADENZ has coordinated a strategy for the industry to promote export success (Department of Statistics 1996:436). As of 1994 the group consisted of seventy-four companies which were responsible for over half of the sector’s total exports (Yarwood 1994:66). In 1995, the joint action group was given a new identity and is now known as “Style EX”. Style EX engages in “study missions to new markets, attendance at trade fairs, and a long-term commitment to add value to manufacturers’ branding and marketing efforts” (McVey 1996:47). The group has launched “Operation Testarossa” to market New Zealand’s “clean-green” image. Operation Testarossa will involve a number of companies working together to market their products overseas by “promoting the healthy, sporty lifestyle of New Zealanders in advertising imagery” (McVey 1996:47). The group wants to promote an image of New Zealand that includes “values such as contemporary lifestyle, naturalness and our unique Pacific heritage” (Bruce Draper, Executive Director of Style EX, qtd in McVey 1996:47).

Exports have climbed from NZ$30 million in 1988, to NZ$78.7 million in 1990, to NZ$258 million in 1993 (Young 1994:20), and finally to NZ$315 million in 1996, although this last figure includes footwear (McVey 1996:47). Most of the increase is due to the opening up of the Australian market through CER, which has acted as a catalyst to garment exports (Department of Statistics 1996:434). CER’s rules of origin are currently being negotiated, with discussion concentrating on whether to change the 50 per cent local content rule by substituting “substantial transformation” (Department of Statistics 1996:434).9

In general a mood of optimism prevails among those garment manufacturers who have survived the restructuring (Hunt 1995:172). Liberalisation is considered a fait accompli and garment manufacturers are strategising how to succeed in the globalised

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9 New Zealand garment manufacturers argue that the 50 per cent local content rule encourages inefficiency because to meet the rules, local firms “have to either hold back on introducing more efficiencies, and/or hold down material costs so as to ensure they retain sufficient New Zealand content to qualify for duty-free access to Australia” (Murray Rae qtd in Young 1994:19).
economy. The mood is not so optimistic among representatives of the workers. The North Island Clothing Workers’ Union representative stated:

I don’t think it’s exaggerating the situation to say the industry is on its knees, or in its death throes... Big or small, apparel manufacturers are suffering. As a union, we have done all we can. We have gone out marching on the streets, we have written to the ministers, and what we always get back is the usual open-market theory. The industry will decline further. We continue to have redundancies or staff reduction through natural attrition and companies cutting back to four-day working weeks rather than having redundancies. I can’t see there’s any place for optimism. (Joyce Hawe qtd in Legat 1997:77)

In sum, while garment firms speak positively of the “massive export boom”, labour is not optimistic, having felt the impact of restructuring and consequent downsizing. It is to a consideration of the impact of restructuring on the workforce that we now turn, beginning with a discussion of the training of garment workers, and then taking the Dunedin industry as a case study.

New Zealand Garment Training in Transition

The training in industrial garment production that is required to find employment in the Dunedin industry is discussed here in some detail as background for the case studies which follow. All but one of the five women in the case studies completed extensive industrial garment production training before entering the workforce. This discussion of the training programme and its transitions under recent reforms in the educational arena demonstrates shifting priorities in the industry – towards the multiskilling of workers and the fostering of self-management. These changing priorities have become crystallised at the national level in the implementation of the NZQA Framework, with its goals of upskilling the population and creating an “enterprise culture”. The significance of the NZQA-related changes lies in the contrast to the deskilled nature of the industry in Fiji, and this point will be taken up in the comparison in chapter six. The information presented in this section was gathered during participant observation in the training programme in 1996.
The content of the Dunedin garment training programme prior to the advent of NZQA was largely determined by a survey of local garment manufacturers’ training needs in 1992. Twenty apparel firms were in existence at the time of the survey, together employing approximately 600 workers. Fourteen of the firms were clothing manufacturers – six utilising knitwear and eleven, woven fabric – and the others made apparel from leather, skin or fur, or manufactured footwear. The survey pointed out that the central feature of the Dunedin industry which shaped the manufacturers’ training requirements was the focus on production for upper end market niches, and the absence of mass production in the Dunedin industry:

Following the restructuring that has occurred in the industry in the last decade, local manufacturers have positioned themselves at the upper end of the market and are, for the most part, no longer involved in mass production for the lower end of the market. (University of Otago Consulting Group 1992:4)

Because production for niche markets entails short runs where workers make up almost the entire garment, employers found that entrants to the industry possessed inadequate skills:

Several manufacturers... commented that workers who were formerly employed in mass production operations (Sew Hoys was often cited as an example) have obtained basic operator skills but lack experience in producing whole garments for the upper end of the market where the local industry has repositioned itself. As one manufacturer put it “too many [applicants] are not machinists – just operators. They are not versatile enough. New Zealand manufacturers are small, operate in niche markets. They need high quality, high skill workers – not mass production, basic skills.” (University of Otago Consulting Group 1992:7)

Local manufacturers wanted entrants to the industry to possess two kinds of attributes:

1. A sound skill base that ensures workers have the flexibility to undertake a variety of tasks. Because the local industry is focussed on top end niche markets, production runs tend to be short and the skill level required high. Workers, therefore must be able to switch from task to task as the types of garments produced change to meet market demand.
2. Good work habits. (University of Otago Consulting Group 1992:13)

The training programme that was instituted in response offered the Apparel and Textile Training Board (ATTB) Certificate of Apparel Construction, and also developed instruction in other areas to meet the needs of the local industries as identified in the survey. The ATTB Certificate involved twenty-four weeks of training. The first twelve weeks, or Stage 1, imparted skills to trainees which were put to work in the second twelve weeks (Stage 2), when trainees engaged in production experience on actual contracts secured by the training centre. A discussion of Stage 1 of the training towards an ATTB Certificate of Apparel Construction serves to provide a comparison to the NZQA system which is now in place.

The ATTB training consisted of three parts: timed performance tests, exercise pieces, and sample pieces. The timed performance tests are detailed in the following table.

**ATTB performance tests** (sewing tests on fabric 20cm x 30cm except where indicated):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>TIME LIMIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needle change</td>
<td>20 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete machine threading</td>
<td>90 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight sewing – four straight lines 6mm from guidelines.</td>
<td>60 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight sewing – four straight lines 10mm from guidelines.</td>
<td>60 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing to a given point – four straight lines 10mm from guidelines,</td>
<td>70 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stopping on a diagonal line drawn across fabric.</td>
<td>33 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle stitch – sew six-stitch castles down centre of fabric, castles</td>
<td>4 minutes manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straight with 90 degree corners.</td>
<td>2 min 20 sec automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow curves – four smooth curves 10mm from guidelines, backtacking.</td>
<td>85 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp curves – sew two rows on specially-cut sharp curve test pieces,</td>
<td>80 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first row 10mm from fabric edge, second row 6mm from first, backtacking.</td>
<td>65 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long seam – match up two pieces of fabric (60cm x 10cm), sew 10mm</td>
<td>35 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seam down length of fabric, backtacking.</td>
<td>33 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bag out rectangle bag (30cm x 15cm) – match up two pieces of fabric,</td>
<td>60 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sew 10mm seam along three sides, backtacking. Trim corners, turn bag</td>
<td>55 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through to right side with corners fully poked out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topstitch rectangle bag – sew two rows on bagged out rectangle bag,</td>
<td>90 seconds manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first row edge stitch along three sides, second row 6mm from first.</td>
<td>85 seconds automatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Compiled from course handouts, Community Studies Department, Otago Polytechnic 1996)

Trainees prepared for the performance tests by timing themselves with a stopwatch. The tests were then administered by the instructor, who timed the trainees and checked
that the they did not use the machine’s hand-wheel, as they were meant to develop the skill to control the needle’s movements with the treadle. Because each sewing test repeated the same task four times, efficiency in moving between tasks was as crucial to passing the test within the time limit as performing the actual tasks. The sewing tests were performed with a pair of snips in hand throughout, and trimming of the threads hanging off the fabric also had to be completed within the time allotted.

The tests reflect the real application of the stopwatch to garment production, and prepared trainees well to work in production lines, executing repetitive tasks at maximum speed. Exercise pieces designed to develop eye judgement and machining skills constituted the second part of the ATTB training. The exercise pieces involved sewing 6mm and 10mm from guidelines of varying shapes, and could be completed at the trainees’ own pace, although use of the hand-wheel was again not permitted. The third component of the ATTB training was the completion of sample pieces. The ATTB sample pieces incorporated operations integral to clothing production:

- Pockets
- Darts
- Gathering
- Pleats
- Labels
- Matching plaids
- Fly
- Zips
- Topstitching
- Waistbands
- Belt loops
- Buttons
- Collars
- Binding
- Plackets
- Pintucks
- Epaulettes
- Button holes

The exercise and sample pieces were compiled in each trainee’s folder. This folder would be presented to a prospective employer at a job interview.

Through the three parts of the ATTB training, trainees developed their machining and handling skills. Trainees also gained an understanding of the mechanics of garment production: they learned about the anatomy of the needle, needle installation, and how to know when the needle needs changing (a good machinist hears when the needle needs to be changed). They learned the anatomy of straight sewing machine, how stitches are formed, the uses of different types of stitches, and the uses of various attachments. They became experienced in complete threading, use and cleaning of the straight sewing machine, button machine, buttonholer, bartacker, and overlocker, and were introduced to use of the automatic plain sewer, safety stitcher, and twin needle machine.
To cater to the needs of the local industry, instruction separate from the ATTB training was offered in pattern-making and design, and professional development. In pattern-making and design, trainees practised reading commercial and domestic pattern symbols, and learned methods of laying up fabric correctly and marking the pattern on the fabric, including an introduction to computer markers generated through a Computer Aided Design system jointly owned by one of the local factories and the Polytechnic – the only CAD system in Dunedin at the time. Trainees learned to cut out garment pieces with shears, and then constructed a carry bag, skirt, shorts, shirt, and specialty fabrics dress, learning numerous parts of garment production in the process. Pressing and finishing of garments and aspects of quality control were incorporated into this part of the course as well. The assessment for pattern-making and design was based on the completed garments, which had to be presented not later than the production deadlines, and on the specifications sheet which trainees wrote detailing each step of production for the garment.

Professional development was offered to meet local manufacturers’ call for training providers to “... do more to teach self motivation and good work habits to their trainees” (University of Otago Consulting Group 1992:7). Professional development consisted of training in a variety of areas. A very strong emphasis was placed on health and safety from day one, which began with a fire drill so that trainees would know how to exit the building and what procedures to follow in the event of an emergency. The more formal instruction related to trainees’ responsibilities under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. These responsibilities were spelled out in an Occupational Safety and Health pamphlet distributed to the trainees:

You are expected to take all practicable steps to ensure you are not harmed at work, and that you do not harm any one else by either your actions or your failure to take action at work. In addition, if you own or have possession of tools, appliances, etc. that you use at work, you must take all practicable steps to ensure that people in or near your place of work are not harmed by these items. (OSH 1993)

The causes, prevention and symptoms of Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) were also stressed. Trainees were taught correct posture for working at the machines, and proper positioning of their chairs. Exercises were done two times a day to prevent or reduce the risk of OOS. Additionally, trainees were educated about the safety
equipment involved in production. Once in a job, it would be the employee’s responsibility to use all safety equipment, and to have all the safety equipment required, that is, it would be their responsibility to ask the employer for the safety equipment necessary for that operation.

Time management skills were also emphasised in professional development, and trainees engaged in exercises focused on organisational skills, and efficiency with use of time. Trainees had to learn to set both short and long-term goals, prioritise tasks, and to delegate. A guest lecture by a manager from one of the local factories encouraged trainees to conceptualise themselves as heads of their own enterprises – such as “Carol, Incorporated” – who contract out their labour. The manager stressed that if they had contracted themselves to work for a full day, then that meant working 480 minutes per day and not less. Based on this outlook, the manager’s factory worked on a bonus system where an employee would be rewarded for producing above and beyond what was expected of her in the 480 minutes. According to the manager, the top machinist earns NZ$18 per hour on the bonus system.

Education with reference to terms of employment came from a representative of the Labour Department, who informed trainees about their minimal rights under the Employment Contracts Act – with respect to wages, equal pay, holiday pay, statutory holidays, special and parental leave, and wages protection – and grievance procedures. Visits to the Careers Office and to local factories were undertaken to increase awareness about job prospects in the industry. All trainees had to prepare a curriculum vitae in order to sell themselves to prospective employers. They were coached as to how to conduct themselves in interviews, and engaged in practice interviews to further prepare. Finally, trainees were tutored about the possibilities for starting a small business, and were introduced to financial and time management skills towards that end.

The phasing in of the NZQA system was observed during participant observation in 1996 as the training programme made a transition from the old ATTB system to the new units-based assessment system. The implementation of the NZQA system has involved a number of changes to meet the requirements of the unit standards determined at the national level by the Apparel and Textile ITO – Clothing Advisory Group. The changes point to a shift of the New Zealand garment industry toward niche market production and competition based on quality and service, rather than mass
production based on price competition. The changes and their significance will be
detailed below.

The first notable change is the extension of the hours of the training programme,
indicating a trend for firms to require increased skill levels among entrants to the
industry. The training programme has remained twenty-four weeks in length, but the
hours of training have been extended under NZQA to more closely match the working
hours of the actual factories. Stage 1 and Stage 2 are now known as Level 2 and Level
3, corresponding to the levels on the Framework at which training is received. The
Level 2 training is twelve weeks of instruction on apparel cutting, sewing, and basic
machining skills. Once the Level 2 certificate is achieved, students can proceed on to
Level 3 – twelve weeks of production experience. The training can be undertaken
through a Polytechnic training course or in a factory so long as there is an NZQA-
accredited assessor.

The second change in the training programme – the move away from the
stopwatch, which characterised mass production – indicates a shift in the industry from
mass production to flexible production methods. The advent of the units-based
assessment saw the end of the ATTB timed performance tests. NZQA units
assessments are based on demonstrating a degree of proficiency in a certain task – tasks
must be performed repeatedly to the standard specified, and assessments are not timed.

Thirdly, the formal incorporation of non-production skills into the training
programme, to engender self-regulation among trainees, indicates a new approach to
management control. Instruction with respect to the skills of self-management was
present in the training programme prior to NZQA, but only at the local level in response
to the survey of industry needs. Under the ATTB system, assessment of qualities
outside the arena of production skills, such as personal skills and time management, was
done informally. Students were evaluated on an informal basis according to their basic
work habits (independence, following instructions, use and care of equipment, and
attitude and ability to learn) and their personal skills (cooperation, communication,
punctuality, relations with co-workers, and maintenance of work station). Under
NZQA, the extension of assessment beyond the mere execution of tasks has been
formalised. The Level 2 National Certificate requires completion of forty credits.
Thirty credits must be earned in industry specific skills, and an additional ten
“complementary” credits are required in the domains\(^\text{10}\) of business administration, service sector skills, interpersonal communication, and writing skills. The training course offers both the industry-specific unit standards and the complementary standards so that trainees can complete the full National Certificates in Clothing Manufacture on Levels 2 and 3 of the Framework.

The formal extension of training beyond the execution of tasks is demonstrated by a look at the units on the National Qualifications Framework offered to Level 2 trainees when the new system came into effect in 1996. It is clear from the last six units in the following table, detailing the unit standards offered to trainees, that a key emphasis of the units-based system is on generic industrial skills in the form of “complementary” units to prepare trainees for self-management and to sell themselves in the labour market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NZQA Unit Standards Offered in Level 2</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Credit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut Single Ply Material by Shears</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up, adjust and use an Industrial Lockstitch Machine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an Industrial Lockstitch Machine to Join 2 Materials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up, adjust and use an Industrial Overlock Machine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an Industrial Overlock Machine to Join 2 Materials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate Knowledge of Industrial Apparel Cutting and Sewing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operate a Fixed Cycle Semi Automatic Sewing Machine to Manufacture Garments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect Health and Safety in the Workplace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce a CV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a predictable One to One Interview</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce a Career Plan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Use of Time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Basic Employment Rights and Responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(compiled from Community Studies Department, Otago Polytechnic 1996)

That fully one quarter of the units necessary for the Level 2 Certificate are to be “complementary” demonstrates the value placed on these non-production skills. Trainees who go on to achieve the Level 3 Certificate based on twenty-seven more industry-specific, and ten more “complementary” credits, will be prepared for employment in the apparel industry as machinists or outworkers, or they can pursue self-employment.

\(^{10}\) A domain is a classification grouping on the National Qualifications Framework. Domains are categories within sub-fields, and sub-fields are within fields which are the broadest classification grouping. For example, the domain “Clothing Manufacture” is located within the “Manufacturing” sub-field, which lies within the field “Arts and Crafts”.

A closer look at one of the unit standards in detail reveals a fourth significant change in the emphasis of garment training under NZQA: the focus on both understanding of the production process as well as execution of production tasks. The former ATTB assessments did not require any explanation on the part of the trainee of the production tasks. According to the labour process literature, deskilling involves the separation of conception and execution in order to remove worker control over the labour process. The NZQA changes indicate a trend towards the reunification of conception and execution, implying an “upskilling” of the garment industry in New Zealand. In the following table, the emphasis in the unit on explanation of terminology and equipment, and reasons for procedures, clearly demonstrates that trainees who earn a Level 2 Certificate are meant to be well-versed in the execution of production tasks as well as in the conception behind them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element 1: Demonstrate Knowledge of Industrial Apparel Cutting and Sewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Apparel cutting terminology is identified and explained in relation to specific industrial purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Cutting equipment is identified and explained in relation to specific industrial purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Marker terminology and marker types are explained in relation to specific industrial purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Laying up terminology and equipment is identified and explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Bundling and/or pre-production terminology and procedures are identified and explained in relation to specific apparel production systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element 2: Demonstrate Knowledge of Fabric and Interlining Equipment and Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Reasons and purposes for fusing on apparel components are explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Fusing equipment and procedures are explained in terms of suitability for production and product requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Purposes of interlinings in apparel products are explained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element 3: Demonstrate Knowledge of Stitch Types and Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Machine stitch structures are recognised from given illustrations. (compiled from Community Studies Department, Otago Polytechnic 1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarise, four key changes have accompanied the implementation of NZQA into the training programme:

- lengthening of the hours of the training programme,
- a move away from the stopwatch,
• formal incorporation of non-production skills – including both preparation for self-management and for the sale of one’s labour in the market – into the requirements of the NZQA Certificates, and
• an attempt to reunify the conception and execution of production reflected in the unit standards.

The transition in garment training supports elements of the flexible specialisation approach to industrial restructuring because it indicates the changing requirements of industry for an upskilled, self-regulating workforce to meet the needs of flexible production. However the regulation approach is most illuminating in considering the transition in garment training because it underscores the role of wider societal institutions – the educational arena in particular in this case – in creating the conditions for capital accumulation. In New Zealand, educational reform is a central plank of the government’s free-market programme to achieve international competitiveness based on flexible production. In 1987, Treasury issued a two volume brief to the government entitled Government Management. Volume II was entirely devoted to reform of the educational arena (Olssen 1996:2). One of the arguments was that “education should be more responsive to business interests and to the needs of the economy (p. 27)” (ctd in Olssen 1996:3). This argument has since escalated: “Education in New Zealand is now explained as primarily an economic device for the augmentation of the skill formation of individuals to compete in the world marketplace” (Fitzsimons 1997:ii).

The push for educational reforms came primarily from the Business Roundtable and the Treasury as they sought to gear the “human capital” resources of the population to the needs of industry (Codd 1993:84). A key tenet of the Business Roundtable’s approach to educational reform is the development of an enterprise culture, as discussed in the 1993 document Towards an Enterprise Culture (Olssen 1996:5). The qualities associated with an enterprise culture include: “self-help, self-reliance, initiative, energy, independence, boldness, a willingness to take risks, and to accept responsibility for one’s actions and so on” (Olssen 1996:22).

The Business Roundtable was formally set up in 1984, and membership is by invitation only. According to Kelsey, “In 1995 the Roundtable comprised 57 chief executives from the country’s largest companies, and four associate members” (1995:75). The Roundtable’s influence as a lobby group is noted by Kelsey in the “striking similarities between many Roundtable proposals and the policies of both Labour and National governments” (1995:76).
culture is hoped to create productive citizens for the needs of international competitiveness by generating entrepreneurial individuals who see work as a way to self-fulfilment:

For the entrepreneurial self, work is no longer a constraint upon the freedom of the individual to fulfill his or her potential through strivings for autonomy, creativity and responsibility. Work is an essential element in the path to self-realization. (Miller and Rose 1990:27)

By harnessing workers' "self-fulfilling impulses", an enterprise culture aims to contribute toward company productivity and profitability, "aligning personal desires with the objectives of the firm" (Miller and Rose 1990:26). An enterprise culture construes the individual as an entrepreneur of the self, possessing self-discipline before entering the workplace (Grey 1994:480-2). Grey underscores the desirability of self-discipline in terms of cost-savings - it is a "more productive and economical form of management control than disciplinary power, with its costs and unintended consequences, could ever be" (1994:495).

The formal incorporation of the skills of self-management into garment training under NZQA signifies the shift towards an enterprise culture. NZQA is a key component of the state's strategy to engineer an enterprise culture. NZQA utilises industry-determined unit standards to align workers' desires with industry needs: "By breaking down the traditional barriers between 'us' and 'them', both employee and manager work more closely together ... we all succeed together or we all lose together" (NZQA 1992; 1993, qtd in McKenzie 1997:58). The Apparel and Textile ITO chief executive explained, "We have worked closely with colleagues from all levels and sectors of the industry in devising qualifications and standards which fully meet the needs of today's employers and the career requirements of employees" (Deryk Thompson qtd in Apparel April 1997:8).

The importance of this discussion lies in pointing out the changing priorities in the industry since it is industry which sets the educational standards under NZQA. The changes outlined above suggest a shift in industry strategy away from Taylorist organisation of production characterised by the deskilling of tasks and the application of the stopwatch to production, and towards flexible production. The discontent with the "upskilled" content of the industrial training programmes among some manufacturers in
New Zealand indicates that not all firms have made this shift. Speaking of the increasing numbers of people becoming "multiskilled" through polytechnics, Ashton Dempsey, head of department of Transport and Technology at Unitec in Auckland, stated, "Employers don’t necessarily want someone who can do almost anything… They are looking for a cost-effective way to get the job done. Paying for skills that don’t get used is a waste of money." He added that "overtraining" also led to high turnover as people were not satisfied with the industries they entered (Sunday Star Times [SST]12.10.97). While, in theory, the standards-setting body represents the interests of the garment manufacturers as a group, in practice, what constitutes their interests is not uniform, and standards set for training favour particular sectors of the industry.

The linkages between changes in the educational arena, firm strategies, and the state’s pursuit of international competitiveness have been demonstrated through this discussion of the transitions in garment production training. This chapter now turns to case studies to shed light on how the restructuring of the industry and the new aims of garment production training affect members of the workforce in practice. The case studies allow an exploration of workers’ experience of skill and control to determine whether multiskilling actually results in enhanced control for workers in the labour process, and whether firms base their approach on flexible technology innovations or more traditional methods in their pursuit of profitability.

Factory Work Case Studies

Introduction

The case studies presented here consider the experiences of three women who went through the garment training programme in Dunedin and on to work-based training or employment in the industry. They are all recent migrants to New Zealand, and had been in the country less than three years at the time of the research. They represent the majority of women in the training programme at that time: of the eleven trainees enrolled, seven were recent migrants from Asia, Latin America and the Middle
East, and four were Pakeha. Of the three women in the case studies, all are married, and by coincidence, all are mothers of two children.

Case studies of Pakeha women have not been included because of those enrolled in the course, two dropped out and the others did not go on to employment. Only brief mention will be made of their circumstances here. One woman sought a job at all of the local factories without success and was undertaking training in hope that she could find a job afterwards. Two were young women: one needing the course as a prerequisite to study Fashion and Design as she had not completed Form 6; the other had lost her footwear job when the factory she worked for closed, and she was retraining in hope of getting a garment factory job. She was not ultimately hired because she had OOS in her wrist that she had developed in her former job. The fourth Pakeha woman hoped to secure employment in the industry. She had worked for a garment factory before but only on the button machine. She hoped to learn how to sew to find a job as a machinist.

The case studies that follow are based on informal discussions with the women during participant observation in the training programme and in social settings outside the programme, plus informal tape-recorded interviews with each of the women. Details that would reveal the identity of the women have been changed, although this was done in such a way as to try to preserve the meaning of what they have said and experienced. Protection of their identities has necessitated that the details of their workplaces have been withheld as well. The aspects of the women’s experiences presented address the themes of why they entered into the garment industry, the positive and negative aspects to their work, their attempts to negotiate their realities, the intersection of their home and working lives, and their future prospects.

Daria

Daria is a recent migrant from Asia and is in her early forties, and mother to two children. She came to New Zealand because her husband received a scholarship to study at Otago University. Daria learned about the garment training programme at the Polytechnic through a friend, and decided to enrol to see what she could learn, and

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12 While the origin of this term is contested, “Pakeha” is widely used to refer to New Zealanders of European ancestry.
hopefully find a job afterwards. Daria had worked as a kindergarten teacher in her country. She did not think she would be able to find a teaching job in New Zealand:

CH: And why did you choose to go into the garment industry?

Daria: Actually before I think I can’t find job.

CH: Why?

Daria: Language. But sewing, I can do this.

Daria had experience sewing on a domestic machine at home in her country. Daria found the industrial machines much faster than the domestic machine that she was used to:

CH: When you came to the training centre, was it easy to learn because you already had experience from home?

Daria: Sewing is easy, but control machine is... that need time – machine control. [...] But another thing, when teacher show me, I just look and I can understand.

Because she does not speak much English, Daria relied on watching the demonstrations to learn what she was meant to do. Her limited English speaking ability made passing the assessments a challenge. Daria was in the first group of trainees who did not do the ATTB assessments at all. Instead she worked on her assessments for the National Certificate. She did well producing the garments, but needed guidance to pass the oral assessment:

CH: So what do you think of that kind of assessment?

Daria: Actually easy, but I have problem. Language problem. When they did lecture, at that time I can’t understand. But oral assessment easy. I can understand, and at that time I think very, very easy. [...] All assessment about sewing, so I know. [...] My teacher gave me one material with sewing, and she said “Not good, the stitches not perfect.” Okay. Then she asked me, “This stitch is wrong – something wrong.” And she said, “Which one wrong? You tell me.” This is not hard for me because before I saw this and I changed something on the machine. So I said, “Yeah, you turn that tension. The tension
loose" - that was the first question. And another question, tension too tight. [...] Yeah, and at that time she said to me, "Which one?" and I said "Tension too tight." And she said to me, "Tension okay. No, here in the bobbin – something with the cotton ...". Okay. Very easy. That one time if she tell me, that time after I can always understand.

After finishing twenty-four weeks in the training course, Daria did work-based training at two local factories. Daria did not expect to be hired by the first because she was aware of other trainees who were led to believe they would be hired there after completing the training period, but were not. She thought the first factory was good in terms of lighting and the working environment, and she also liked the machine she was working on, but she felt that the personal relations were not good, and she did not enjoy working there. The second factory makes and alters expensive clothing. Daria had to follow detailed instructions written on spec sheets. She had hoped to be hired there as a permanent employee, but because of her language difficulty, she was constantly having to ask the supervisor whether she had understood the instructions correctly. The supervisor eventually told her that she did not have the time to work like that, and recommended that Daria look for work elsewhere. When Daria finished her work-based training there, she went back to staying at home.

Several weeks later, one of the instructors from the training course rang Daria and asked if she still wanted a job. Daria said yes, and was given an address of a school uniform manufacturer where they were looking to hire someone. Daria was taken on for two months as a paid trainee. The boss told her that if she was happy with her work, she would hire her as a permanent staff member after that. Daria has now been there for three months, and is no longer on probation. The factory is very small – it employs less than ten people, and the boss sews the uniforms along with the rest of the employees. Daria’s boss is a Pakeha woman, as are all the other employees except Daria. Everyone does the same work that Daria is doing – both hand and machine sewing. Daria had done some hand sewing in her country, but found the hand sewing she does for her new job completely different. While Daria gets along with the other employees, she finds it hard to understand them:

Daria: Sometimes they can talk, but actually I can’t understand every time. [...] Sometimes I can and sometimes I cannot because I’m
not too much talk. Sometimes they ask me and I can't reply these things.

Daria is working on both the straight sewer and the overlock as well as hand-sewing. Daria is pushing herself to get up to the speed of the other employees who have been there longer than her.

CH: And what about the speed, do you have to work fast, or...?

Daria: Oh, there it's different. Sometimes machine and sometimes hand sewing. I can fast on the machine, actually. But hand sewing – that I don't know. I think that if I can use machine, I can tell I'm satisfied. I can fast. But hand sewing, maybe I'm not like them. I'm still learning. [...] I like machine sewing. One day my boss said, "You like machine sewing." Yeah! Because when I go to machine, then I can fast and I can do this easily. [...] One day I asked my boss, "How much time uniform need?" And she said two hours – they can finish two hours. So I like to finish two hours. I am trying, I am trying, but I can't. Fifteen minutes, twenty minutes more need. But before I said to my boss, "Maybe I am not fast enough." She said, "No, no, it's okay now. After you get fast." [...] I said, "Okay I am trying." And actually I'm new, and sometimes different kinds of uniforms, and so before I didn't know sometimes how to do this, before I had to ask her. [...] Now I know so I can do very quickly.

Daria welcomes the opportunity to learn new skills, and she commented, "Here is lots of things I learn from my boss." Daria likes the boss's approach to running the factory:

Daria: She likes this factory very... because one day I ask her, "You need more people? More machinist?" Then she said, "No, Daria, because I like here very quality, nice, and good staff. Not too many..." She is very good, actually. She is very good. She likes not too many people.

Daria felt that the quality of the clothing made in New Zealand, such as the garments she makes, is superior to the quality of clothing made in her own country and in places like China. She observed that New Zealanders buy the cheaper imported clothing rather than locally-made goods because they are not aware of what real quality is. Daria
enjoys her job, and her boss’s emphasis on quality in particular. She even prefers it to her former occupation:

CH: And how do you like this job compared to teaching?

Daria: I like sewing job. That one different. But in our country sewing job not too much pay. [laughs] Money is very, very small. [laughs]

Daria currently earns $8 per hour, which she noted is a very high sum if she could spend it in her home country, but it is not enough for living in New Zealand. She thought the work was underpaid in relation to the amount of training and skill involved. Daria noted that in her country, garment factory work is not considered respectable, but “Here is no problem. Respect. Any job respected job.” Daria has not signed a contract, and she is unclear about the terms of her employment. She said that her husband knows about all that. Daria’s rent is $150 for a two bedroom flat where the family of four lives. Daria has decorated the flat with runners and a table cloth which she made out of scraps of fabric brought to her by a friend who works in another factory. Daria and her husband do not have a car, and depend on the bus for transport. Daria is working part time, which she likes as it enables her to pick up her children when they finish school. Daria relies on her neighbour to help out with childcare since she is now working. As their children go to the same school, they take turns picking them up in the afternoon.

Kirin

Kirin is a machinist at a home furnishings factory in the Dunedin area. She is in her early fifties. Originally from the Middle East, she is now a New Zealand citizen. Kirin came to New Zealand several years ago following her husband who had migrated because of his work as an architect. He had brought their two daughters with him so they could study in New Zealand’s school system. When Kirin came to join them, she was very frustrated because she was homesick and could not speak English. She decided to return to her country alone, but eventually came back to New Zealand, only to find that her husband had to shift to Australia for his work soon afterwards. Kirin remained with the children in New Zealand for two years, still upset and crying
frequently due to her loneliness and frustration. When it was time for her daughters to enter Otago University, the three of them shifted to Dunedin. After two months of being depressed and not knowing anyone in her new home, Kirin decided to enter the garment training programme and was able to do so as a TOPs student. She had no experience sewing, but felt that garment work would be a good job, and she did not want to continue staying at home being unhappy:

Kirin: If I just stay home, sometimes homesick, sometimes upset...

Kirin joined the garment training programme at the time that it was switching to the units system. Kirin’s training focused on earning credits towards her National Certificate, and she was assessed based on her completion of sample garments – two jackets and a waistcoat – and her specification sheets detailing the steps of production. Because of her difficulty speaking English, Kirin found the oral assessment for the units – where she had to explain terminology and the purposes of the equipment – to be quite intimidating. She eventually passed with some coaching from the instructors despite being reduced to tears in the process. While Kirin was in Level 3, she spent most of her time working for the production contract, and she had to fit her assessments for the Level 3 National Certificate around her work on the contract. After completing both National Certificates, she returned to the training centre for a third term to help out with the production contracts. In total Kirin spent nine months at the training centre. Kirin became a citizen during that time, and she was very pleased because she would soon be able to visit her husband in Australia.

Kirin eventually found her present job through the work-based training programme which organised five weeks of on-the-job training for her in the home furnishings factory, after which she was hired. She had hoped for a job making clothing as that was what she had been trained to do, but she found that her skills were suited to curtain-making as well. Kirin was surprised that the boss never asked to see her National Certificates, instead relying on the word of the work-based training coordinator that Kirin did quality work. Kirin is the only non-Pakeha working in the factory, where work is divided according to gender. The workforce comprises eight female machinists and fifteen men who engage in other tasks such as making carpet and curtain rods, and cutting fabric. Once the curtains are cut, Kirin makes them up from
start to finish. She receives bundles from the cutting section which contain all the
pieces she needs to make the curtains. She then uses the straight sewer, overlocker, and
blind hemming machine, and also does hand sewing and pressing. Kirin said it takes
quite a lot of time to make the curtains, because of all the operations involved:

Kirin: Need overlocking, press, hem, fold, press, hook... I do six
curtains one hour.

Kirin is paid $7.50 per hour, just higher than the legal minimum of $7.00. She
expects to begin receiving benefits like holiday pay next year. She has not signed a
contract – rather she has a verbal agreement with the employer that her work will be
permanent. Kirin works part-time, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day, and her boss keeps
track of her hours:

Kirin: [The boss] is writing down. 9 o’clock coming, 3 o’clock
leaving. They know because they see.

Her breaks consist of morning tea and a half-hour lunch break. She takes her lunch
from home and eats with all the other employees in the lunch room. There is no
afternoon tea:

Kirin: No, because we leave at that time. [...] Machinists – all are part
time.

CH: Why is that?

Kirin: Maybe not much work.

CH: What about the men? Are they part time?

Kirin: No, full time. All men full time, but women part time.

At the time of the interview, Kirin had only formally been employed by the
factory for a month. Kirin did not have any complaints about physical pain due to the
work. The machinists in Kirin’s factory do not do OOS prevention exercises. Kirin felt
that the rotation between machining and pressing is enough variation, and that they do
not need to exercise because they are: “Not every time sitting just doing sewing.” Kirin likes the factory where she works:

Kirin: Very nice. Big. Very clean, very, very clean. The people very good.

Her short-term plan is to continue working for the factory as long as there is enough work to do. Her boss told her that sometimes there might not be much work, and she might not be needed everyday:

CH: And how long do you want to keep working there?
Kirin: I don’t know. [...] Lots of work, okay. Not too much, I won’t work.

CH: So if they don’t have any orders then you won’t be working those days.
Kirin: Yeah.

CH: Right. So they just ring you and say you don’t need to come today?
Kirin: Yes, yes.

CH: And that’s okay for you?
Kirin: Yes. Because this month – enough work. But Friday my boss said – Monday you work, maybe Thursday not too much work.

Kirin has not seen her husband in two years although they talk on the phone frequently. Her husband was unable to leave Australia because he was trying to get citizenship, which he just received a week before the interview, and Kirin could not leave New Zealand for the same reason. Kirin was nervous about telling him about her new job, because she had never worked outside of the home before, and he had not reacted well to her joining the training programme:

CH: When you were in [your country], was your husband working?
Kirin: Yes, but I was staying at home.
CH: But now here you’re working.

Kirin: [laughing] Yes.

CH: Did you tell your husband you have the job?

Kirin: No I didn’t [laughing]. [...] Before when I was training, he said, “No Kirin, you need to stay home to look after the girls.” Cooking, anything. My boss rang me and say come to job, and I not tell husband about my job.

Kirin’s long-term plan is to migrate to Australia to join her husband once her daughters finish their studies at the University. It is not the custom in Kirin’s country for young women to go flatting, and hence Kirin is staying with them until they finish, which is going to take quite a while:

CH: So how many years left?

Kirin: Ah, my oldest has two years left, and my youngest daughter – I don’t know. Maybe four years.

Kirin’s rent is $150 per week for a two bedroom flat that she shares with her daughters. If she were working forty hours per week, rent alone would consume half of her income. However she is only working part time, and has the additional expense of bus fare to and from work each day. Even though the benefit she was receiving prior to her acceptance of the job has been reduced, she depends on that money to supplement her inadequate wages.

Kirin: I told [Income Support] I am working – my benefit is cut. [...]

CH: But you still have some benefit?

Kirin: Very small benefit.

Income Support told Kirin that she can ring if the factory does not have enough work for her and they will increase her benefit during that time. Shortly after the interview, Kirin had no work at all for two weeks as she was not needed at the factory, and she relied on her benefit from income support. Kirin’s home country has no social welfare system. She said her country is rich from oil, and blames the poverty that exists there
on corruption in the government. Kirin has not been back in six years, but plans to go with her daughters in 1998. A small number of people from her country live in Dunedin, but all of them are young people who are studying at the University. Because she does not have friends in Dunedin who are her own age and from her country, the contacts she has established through the garment training programme have been instrumental for her happiness. She now has a group of women friends who she met through the training programme with whom she socialises. They are themselves migrants from a wide range of countries, and despite their limited English-speaking abilities, they manage to communicate within the group. The development of this social network, and the skills she has learned are the two things that Kirin most appreciates about her entry into the garment industry.

Ruby

Ruby is a thirty-seven year old woman who recently arrived in New Zealand from her country in Asia. Ruby and her husband wanted to leave their country to provide a better life for their children. They made the decision to bring their two daughters to New Zealand after missing out on the lottery for residency in the United States. After an initial year in Auckland, they shifted to Dunedin when Ruby’s husband gained entrance to study science at Otago University. Two weeks later, Ruby entered into the garment training programme as a TOPs student to prepare herself to find a job in the industry. She did not have experience sewing. Although Ruby holds a bachelor’s degree and worked for the government in her country, she chose to become trained for garment factory work rather than looking for work related to her qualifications:

Ruby: Oh, everybody told me because of communication problem, our English is not good, maybe we don’t get job – any good job here. So I think if I do sewing course, I can get job. Because here communication is not main thing.

Ruby explained that garment work was not an acceptable occupation for educated women in her country, who still had to be the primary caregiver of the family:
Ruby: Everybody will say, “Oh, that man’s wife is a garment worker – maybe he will be neglected!” And he never allow his wife to work in a garment factory.

In New Zealand, Ruby had learned that garment workers are paid around $8 per hour, which at first seemed like a tremendous amount of money to her because it is more than the highest government ministers in her country earn. She imagined that her choice to pursue a job in the garment industry may have been influenced by stories she had heard when she was younger about women getting rich in the garment industry overseas:

Ruby: In my country, lots of women went overseas like England, Australia, America, and we have heard they are working at home and they just sew the buttons and they earn lots of money. So in my country lots of people think, oh my God, I’ll go America, I’ll go England and I will be a factory or outworker like this. Because it doesn’t need any academic qualifications. All the people think like that. So when I was little, I think one day go to States and I’ll be a garment worker – I’ll sew the buttons and I’ll earn lots of money.

Ruby began training at the garment training centre, conscious that if her friends back home could see her working in there, they would not believe their eyes, because that type of work is done only by the poorest people in her country who have no option other than to work in the factories springing up there. Ruby noted that it took a while to feel comfortable operating the industrial machine. She frequently complained at the beginning of the course, “I can’t control my feet.” Ruby eventually progressed and passed all of her ATTB tests. When she began Level 3, the training programme changed focus towards the new units assessments. She felt that the new system was much easier than the ATTB:

Ruby: ATTB is harder. [...] Yeah, assessment [NZQA] is very good, because, you know [Trainee 1] did two times to pass the ATTB. Two times. And [Trainee 2] did not pass ATTB. Never. [Trainee 3] did not pass ATTB. Two times she tried. But assessment – they all passed. Assessment is like this – they did one jeans, and they assessed this. You know, quality, like this. And there is some oral – they have to ask... You know, [Trainee 4] passed – they all passed. And, if you don’t pass one time, they will give you second time, third time.
After completing Level 2 and 3, Ruby left the training centre to start work-based training. Ruby’s opinion of the factory where she was placed to work on the overlocker is summarised by her statement, “That place is not good – like a prison.” Her primary complaint was that the factory was using her. After the initial two weeks of learning the operations, she believed she was doing much the same work as everyone else, only for free, and she was expected to carry on for free for ten more weeks. The outworkers who made the same shorts that Ruby was producing were paid $4 for each pair. Ruby had received nothing for 120 pairs she had sewn for the factory. Furthermore, Ruby was told that she would receive a training benefit from Income Support, but when she went to sign up, she was informed she was ineligible because of her husband’s scholarship.

Ruby was under the impression she would be hired by the factory once she finished the work-based training. Ruby wanted to know what kind of pay system the factory employed to determine whether she would be happy there if she were offered a job. She was aware that some factories operated on a bonus system, but her request for clarification about that factory’s system was not well received:

Ruby: You know, they said they will give me job. So one day I just asked, “When I was in Polytech, I visited some factories. I heard they will give me some work to do, and if I do 100 per cent this very good, and 60 per cent okay, but if I do less than 60 per cent, I will lose my job.” You know? So, I just asked her what happens here, what happens here if I do 60 per cent? If I get job so what happens? She said, “This is not Polytech. This is not other factory. You have to do 100 per cent.” So if I ask anything, they are not happy.

Ruby was finally advised by one of the permanent staff that she would probably not be offered a job. The staff member asked her, “Has he told you he’s giving you a job?” She replied that he had. The woman just shook her head to indicate it would not happen, and explained that a lot of work-based trainees had been through the factory and few had been hired. The boss was just taking advantage of their free labour.

Ruby was very dissatisfied about the personal relations in the factory. She was unable to do her OOS prevention exercises because the worker behind her told her not to. The same worker chastised Ruby for turning her machine off five minutes before afternoon tea time the first day. Ruby had not realised that a bell would ring when it
was tea time. She was adamant that this occurred only once, and resented being questioned a few days later by the supervisor:

Ruby: Just one day I did that, and this is the last time. I never do it again. But after two days, supervisor called me and she said, “Most of the time, you turn off the machine five minutes ago, and you turn around like that. If you do that you don’t get job here.” And her attitude was threatening, like threatening. [...] I said, “No, I did it just one day.” She said, “No, sometimes you do, you off machine and turn around.” What is this? So at that time I say, “Okay, okay, tell me everything. If I want to go toilet, I have to, who am I to tell?” But she said, “No, no if you go toilet you don’t have to tell. They’re not going to punish you.”

Ruby was further dissatisfied because she believed the supervisor had lied to her about the target for the t-shirts she was sewing:

Ruby: I said, “How many t-shirt I have to make in a day?” She said thirty-four, but one day I finish twenty-three, and I thought I worked my best. But then I saw their sheet, they finished twenty! I finished twenty-three. They said supervisor tell me lie.

While Ruby was training at the factory, she experienced much physical discomfort because of the repetitive nature of the work. This later developed into a debilitating case of OOS. Her requests to have a change of task were ignored:

Ruby: Most of the time I just made shorts. And that shorts is a little bit not easy for me – I have to pull the elastic. When I did the elastic my pain worse. I just request the supervisor, “Could you please consider me, because five weeks I just sew shorts everyday.” [...] Different colours, yeah, but same shorts. Elastic is five stitch, so five times I have to pull the elastic for one shorts. It was pain for me, I just tried to stand it, but I asked, “Could you please consider me and please give me another thing to sew? After one week I will sew shorts again. Just can you give me break for one week?” And they are not happy – their attitudes are very, very rough. Then [work-based training coordinator] came and I told him, “I’m just sewing shorts. I feel some pain so I don’t want to sew.” But then he said, “Oh they are not happy with you. You are arguing.” [...]

And that day I so tired I don’t want to work here, because anything I told them, they took that different way.

It did not take Ruby long to realise that she did not want a job in that factory even if she were offered one because of the way she was being treated. Ruby requested that the coordinator of the work-based training programme move her to another factory to finish her work-based training. Much to her surprise, the first factory went out of business a few months after she left. Ruby first asserted that the reason they had to close down was, “Because God does not like cheaters!” On a more serious note, she explained that it was probably due to the pressures of competition from countries such as China. The boss once mentioned to Ruby that he had been to her part of the world and was considering importing garments from there.

Ruby found the personal relations at the second factory to be much improved, but the workplace was darker and hard on her eyes. Ruby appreciated that she was given information about the employment contract from day one, although she did not understand much of it. According to the information, she would earn $7.50 per hour once she was hired, but would potentially earn more later on when the factory planned to switch to a bonus system. The factory employed less than twenty workers, two thirds of whom were Pakeha women, and one third were women from other countries. Ruby continued working on the overlocker.

In the second factory, Ruby and the other workers were required to do OOS prevention exercises twice a day. By the time Ruby began training at the second factory, she had developed painful OOS in her back. Once she told the supervisor about her OOS, she was allowed to exercise after every hour of work. Her new boss also permitted her to leave early every afternoon to go to her physiotherapist for treatment. Ruby was warned by a friend from the training centre who had found employment in another factory not to mention her back pain if she had a job interview somewhere else because she would not be hired. Eventually Ruby’s OOS became so painful that, after wavering over the decision, she decided to leave the factory temporarily to recover from her OOS. Around that time, Ruby’s husband asked her why she was doing garment training for six months, and then three months of work-based training, when she was going to get a job paying $7.50 per hour and could work in a supermarket without any training and earn $10 per hour. Ruby started thinking about leaving the industry
altogether, and began investigating her options to continue her studies toward a different qualification. Ruby decided not to return to the factory, instead planning to enrol in a different programme at the Polytechnic with the intention of finding a job in that area after she finished.

Ruby dreaded telling the boss that she was leaving the job because she had found the boss very accommodating of her needs and a good employer. She was also ashamed of what the instructors at the Polytechnic would think about her leaving the garment industry after they had helped her so much:

Ruby: Yes. I am a bit shy for that. What can I do, you know, my health and safety first. I need a good health. I don’t like to live as a sick woman. [laughs] Because my pain I’m not happy, my husband is not happy, my daughters is not happy. My daughters say, “Mom, why you are angry all the time?” [...] I think I got very bad at that time.

As a result of the OOS, Ruby was having difficulty carrying anything in her hands, cooking, and even helping her youngest daughter to shower:

Ruby: I have to fix my problem. It ruined my life, my family life, my personal life. You know, in our country, women have to do all the homework, honest to God. So I can’t do it when I get home – hurting. You know, it’s a shame to me.

She had even resorted to cooking with flaked onion, garlic and potatoes to avoid having to chop the vegetables. She was also buying meat that was already chopped in pieces. Ruby had first noticed some physical discomfort during the training programme, and she blamed herself for later developing OOS:

Ruby: That’s why I think, how I can talk to [the instructors]? Because some people they have no problem. But always I have problem. Maybe it’s my bad luck.

CH: I don’t think so. Probably there is a certain way you should be sitting or something, and you weren’t told the right way.

Ruby: I got my pain first after finish the ATTB. You know I heard [Trainee 1] pass ATTB second time, [Trainee 2] pass ATTB second time, and all the time I had no idea how to sit – I had no
idea. But when I finish Level 2, one day I came to [another trainee’s] house and I can’t stand – I just lie flat on the floor. I tell her I am dying. Terrible pain – I can’t move my back. After that was three week term break, and at that time I go and read all the instruction about health and safety. And I think maybe my sitting was not right.

Throughout her training course and work-based training, Ruby had relied on a friend from her country for childcare when the children were not at school. Ruby’s family lives in a two-bedroom flat in a complex of flats where two other families from her country reside. There has been some tension between Ruby and her upstairs neighbours regarding noise which can be heard easily through the ceiling. Her husband instructed her not to complain to the neighbour about the noise, because submissiveness is good according to their Muslim beliefs. Ruby hoped that the family could migrate to Australia when her husband finishes his studies, but if he receives a postdoctoral fellowship, the family will remain in Dunedin.

Case Studies Discussed

The case studies indicate that Daria, Kirin and Ruby sought employment in the garment industry because of their status as migrant women. Their husbands were also migrants, but had professional opportunities in New Zealand, whether to work or study. The women did not, even though Daria and Ruby had previously worked in paid employment – as a kindergarten teacher, and government official respectively. Only Kirin had never worked outside the home. They all entered the garment training programme because they felt that their job prospects in New Zealand were constrained by their limited English speaking abilities, and that they would not be able to find a different job. Two of the women did not even have experience sewing. Their experiences are similar to those of university-educated women migrants to New Zealand discussed by Leckie, whose backgrounds “...did not necessarily lead to commensurate employment... Accounts from women of several ethnic groups express the limited opportunities for women and how they have had to accept work they would not have undertaken in their home countries, such as waitressing and cleaning” (1995:63). Daria and Ruby’s entry to the industry was motivated by the need for an income, as they were
disqualified from receiving any money from Income Support because of their husbands’ scholarships. Kirin appreciated having an income once she was working, but she initially entered the training programme because of her desire to get out of the home, meet people and acquire skills.

Despite lengthy training through the Polytechnic, all of the women found that with twenty-four weeks of full-time training behind them, they were not considered skilled enough to be hired by a local factory. They had to continue with unpaid work-based training before they could secure employment. Daria and Kirin completed their work-based training and went into part-time jobs: one making school uniforms and the other sewing curtains because no garment factory jobs were available at that time. Daria and Kirin’s work involved executing various aspects of the production process, and they constructed nearly the entire product made in their workplaces, whether uniforms or curtains. Both of their workplaces are small factories producing for niche markets, and Kirin and Daria are employed as multiskilled workers. In contrast, Ruby, who developed OOS, trained in two local factories where production was organised according to Taylorist principles, and she repeated a small number of steps of production throughout her work-based training. She never entered paid employment.

The extensive training, both at the Polytechnic and work-based, which was necessary for the three women before they could secure factory work indicates the high level of skill required by the local industry. In this respect, the case studies reveal consistencies with the flexible specialisation thesis on industrial restructuring: the industry consists primarily of small firms engaging in niche market production, requiring multiskilled workers capable of performing a variety of tasks at a high standard of quality. Here the applicability of the flexible specialisation approach stops. High technology innovations have not constituted the basis of the shift from mass production to production for niche markets in small firms. Rather, this shift has hinged on utilisation of multiskilled workers who, despite being specifically trained to perform a variety of tasks in Dunedin’s flexible industry, are remunerated at wage levels just above the minimum of $7 per hour. Daria received $8 per hour, Kirin, $7.50, and Ruby would have received $7.50 as well if she had continued working for the second factory, although the employer had future plans to shift to a bonus system. While having an income was a positive aspect to the women’s work, its benefits were constrained by the low wages.
Ruby became conscientised to the low wages and poor conditions in the industry through her experience in work-based training, and eventually left the industry as a result of this and her OOS. She felt she was used as slave labour during her training, and developed doubts about working in such a low-waged industry when she could do unskilled supermarket work for $10 per hour. Ruby’s complaints aside, it is significant that the other women did not identify their low pay as a major concern. For them, the opportunity to work and earn even low wages was an improvement over their former circumstances in their home countries. Their survival was not at stake as their husbands already brought significant income into the family, and Kirin received a benefit from Income Support as well. Thus their quiescence in relation to their low wages is unsurprising. This finding is echoed in Larner’s study of Samoan women in New Zealand. Larner found that recent migrants did not criticise their jobs, focusing instead on the positive aspects, especially the income and the social life at work. In contrast, New Zealand born Samoans openly criticised the monotony of their employment (1990:28).

Control of garment production in Dunedin is organised both on the factory floor and beyond it. Local manufacturers had expressed their desire to hire self-motivated workers for the industry, as employers have to spend fewer resources controlling workers whose self-regulation is organised outside the workplace. The enterprise culture fostered through NZQA and the garment training programme aims to engender this self-regulation. Whether it can be attributed to their professional development training or not, Daria and Ruby proved to be self-motivated in their approaches to their work. Daria was pushing herself to get up to the speed of the other workers, and Ruby had asked to be able to write down her production so she could see whether her speed was improving. This is a good example of Grey’s point that among self-regulating workers, control mechanisms can come to be understood “…as an almost benevolent means for individuals to realise their own projects and aspirations…” (1994:488). Additional control mechanisms were employed in the factory, including direct supervision and bonus systems, to back up the self-motivation organised beyond the factory floor.

Ruby’s self-motivation seems to have backfired, as her factory was still doing relatively long runs and was organised for deskilled production – at odds with the shift in industry strategy towards niche market production. The ATTB preparation Ruby
received practising for timed performance tests was the best preparation for the type of work she ended up doing at the first factory – repetitive sewing of elastic waistbands on shorts of varying sizes and colours. The repetitive nature of the work exacerbated Ruby’s OOS, which proved to be a real constraint on the positive aspects of garment work for her. Ruby was stopped from doing OOS prevention exercises by a co-worker at the first factory. In contrast, her boss in the second factory required exercises of all the employees, but this change came too late for Ruby. OOS was not a constraint for Kirin and Daria. Both Kirin and Daria’s work involved significant variety of tasks, hence OOS prevention exercises were not necessary, as a change of task is as good as a rest in prevention of OOS.

In contrast, making up their respective products from beginning to end is a positive aspect of the work for Kirin and Daria. They regard the use of a wide range of their skills as far superior to the boredom of repetitive work. Kirin’s experience was constrained in a different way though: by her employer’s strategy of numerical flexibility. Kirin and Daria are part-time employees. Daria’s work has been consistent thus far, while Kirin has not been so fortunate. She bears the brunt of her employer’s desire to vary the size of the workforce according to the orders to fill. For Kirin, flexibility means that she has to be multiskilled, and able to accept reduced hours of work, and reduced pay, without complaining. She has sometimes had to endure having no work and no pay for weeks on end. Kirin knew of another graduate of the training programme working for a different factory who faced a similar problem – she had been hired to work forty hours per week, but sometimes worked as little as twenty-four hours. Other Dunedin workers are hired in the summer – the time of peak demand – and then laid off when the demand slackens.

While the women’s migration to New Zealand appears as the product of their family-level strategies, Morokvasic asserts the “...need to establish the link between the individual migrant and the migratory process...” (1983:26). The women’s choices must be viewed in light of the structural conditions in the sites of both emigration and immigration constraining the available options. Sassen (1988) argues that the trend in emigration from the developing to the developed countries is a result not only of the push factors of poverty and lack of opportunity vis-à-vis the developed countries, but also of the extensive foreign direct investment and rapid industrialisation in the developing countries. The latter processes contribute to the emergence of emigration as
an option in a variety of ways, including the establishment of objective and ideological linkages between the investing and receiving countries (Sassen 1988:21).

Once in New Zealand, women migrants commonly find employment opportunities in manufacturing industries, and industrial restructuring has contributed to this trend. As New Zealand companies increasingly produce customised products for niche markets, small-scale, labour-intensive production is the preferred way of organising the work process. Sassen notes that this organisation of production promotes casualisation of work, and "...can easily lead to a demand for immigrant workers" (Sassen 1988:24). Employers, who are "concerned not just with a logic of surplus extraction but with an assertion of command", prefer immigrants because they are not only cheap but powerless relative to national workers (Phillips and Taylor 1980, qtd in Phizacklea 1983:5). Immigrant workers bear a subordinate status:

Their status as foreigners (often as temporary labor), their lack of familiarity with union politics, and their frequent segregation from native workers on the job and in neighborhoods, all combine to make immigrants unusually dependent on their employers and difficult to recruit to working-class struggles according to some analysts. (Castles and Kosack 1973, ctd in Sassen 1988:40)

Immigrant labour allows firms to reduce costs by utilising direct control based on workers' powerlessness in place of structural controls (Sassen 1988:37). Immigrants are preferred in firms where: "Control is not structural, but immediate and personal. Employers can respond to workers' dissatisfaction, complaints, and rebellion by firing them" (Sassen 1988:42). The importance of control over the labour process should not be underestimated as it affects profitability as much as wages in some industries.

Immigrant labour also contributes to profitability by undercutting organised labour: "The availability of immigrant labor reduces the pressure on backward sectors of the economy to change techniques of production or to improve working conditions unacceptable to national workers" (Sassen 1988:40). Through their relative powerlessness and willingness to take the poorest jobs, immigrants supply the flexibility capitalist production requires. Thus, "...we see a labor market dynamic that thrives on the incorporation of newcomers, 'outsiders,' temporary and parttime [sic] workers,

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13 For a full discussion, see Sassen 1988.
unlike what was the case, for instance, in the large unionized Fordist factory” (Sassen 1996). This use of a casualised workforce, entailing increased insecurity for workers, constitutes another basis of the industry’s shift from mass production to the targeting of niche markets. Again, this contradicts the flexible specialisation thesis wherein workers share in the benefits of industrial restructuring.

The restructuring of the industry has not altered the patriarchal division of labour that has historically characterised the garment industry. By virtue of being women, Daria, Kirin and Ruby found themselves limited in terms of job placement in the factory. This was most clear in Kirin’s factory with its acute gender division of labour: all the machinists were women and worked part-time. All the men were involved in other aspects of production and were full-time employees, receiving the benefits that accompany full-time work. Patriarchy restricted women’s employment prospects on a more general level as well, determining that the women had lesser opportunities in their new country than their husbands. Larner notes that with the decline in employment opportunities in New Zealand, the job market offers women a disproportionate number of “poorly paid, undesirable jobs” (1990:30). Almost all of the migrant trainees in the course had come to New Zealand because their husbands were taking up some kind of professional opportunity in the country: either working in, or pursuing studies in the areas of medicine, pharmacy, science, architecture and art. The only trainee who had not migrated because of her husband’s opportunities had instead come because of her father who had secured work as an engineer. In this way, Ruby, Daria and Kirin were typical of the others. Ruby left her government job and migrated to New Zealand because of her husband’s opportunity to study. Daria’s situation was similar – her husband had received a scholarship to study at the university. Kirin migrated following her husband initially, then had to remain behind to look after her daughters when her husband left to continue his work as an architect in Australia.

For Daria, Kirin and Ruby, caring for the children and the domestic responsibilities of cooking and cleaning were primarily their responsibility. Ruby mentioned the perception in her country that a man will be neglected if his wife is a garment worker as women in her country have to do all the housework. Kirin’s case illustrates that she was expected to be first and foremost the caregiver of the family, and she was therefore afraid to tell her husband that she was working out of the home for the first time. Daria and Ruby also had to fit picking up their children from school around
their work or training schedules, and relied on the help of female friends to do so. In New Zealand, the women did not have their extended families to assist with the domestic and childcare responsibilities, but household appliances they had not had in their home countries made domestic work easier. For Kirin, this was her first experience having two jobs – the domestic responsibilities plus her factory work, and she was glad to be working only part time.

Immigrant women in New Zealand, especially recent migrants, have commonly taken up employment in manufacturing industries. According to Leckie, “Among recent female immigrants in paid work, 46 per cent of Cambodians, 20 per cent of Vietnamese and 17 per cent of other South-East Asians were machine operators, compared to only four per cent of the wider female population” (1995:64). Immigrant women’s prominence in the manufacturing sector is related to the availability of shift work. Shift work enables the combination of waged work with domestic and childcare responsibilities, which were often shared amongst extended-family members in the country of emigration (Leckie 1995:64; Larner 1990:23, 26). Additionally, as Leach argues, “…the kinds of paid work they do are constrained by the ideology which gives primacy to their roles as housewives who do not work in the paid labour force” (1995:149). It is not unusual that Kirin and Daria are part-time employees, as women have generally been overrepresented in this area, and in another low-waged area – temporary work (Kelsey 1995:286). This is precisely due to patriarchal expectations that they be the primary caretaker of the home and family (Phizacklea 1983:2). The low wages women receive regardless of their high skill levels can also be attributed to patriarchal justifications – that women are supplementary earners or only work for “lipstick money”, for example – although the underlying motive is profit maximisation (Phizacklea 1983:2).

The state has had a marked effect on the experience of the three trainees particularly through its educational arm, NZQA, and its legislative arm. With respect to NZQA, Dunedin garment training was formerly determined through consultation between the Polytechnic and the local members of industry, but now has adapted to fit NZQA’s agenda for a nationally centralised education system. NZQA aims to reform educational programmes across all sectors and industries to create an enterprise culture and better meet the needs of industries, thereby enhancing their capital accumulation and the state’s international competitiveness. If workers should lose their jobs as the
flexible industries pack up and move elsewhere, the government would have them “re-skill and relocate in a new growth industry” (Kelsey 1995:178). According to the Ministry of Education, “…people are going to have to retrain several times during their working lives. If change is constant, education and training must be too” (1993, qtd in Fitzsimons 1997:118).

In addition to NZQA, the state’s legislative arm has affected the experience of women in the garment industry, and in a very contradictory manner. The state’s immigration policy allegedly protects national workers by distinguishing between legal and illegal workers. The effect of this division combined with selective enforcement of immigration policy is to facilitate a supply of cheap labour to industry, because the relatively powerless immigrants undermine organised labour (Sassen 1988:42). While on the one hand the state is regulating the supply of labour through the “legal subordination” of some immigrant groups (Phizacklea 1983:2), on the other hand it is espousing deregulation of the labour market through measures such as the Employment Contracts Act 1991. The ECA is the most significant piece of legislation affecting garment workers’ opportunities, and was designed to increase flexibility and efficiency for industry, to assist capital accumulation and enhance the nation’s international competitiveness. The reality of international competitiveness is that it requires low wages and minimal regulatory restraints on industry. The ECA has effectively pushed wages down in New Zealand’s industries and eliminated penal rates, on which women’s part-time incomes have traditionally relied (Kelsey 1995:286). The ECA has also suppressed the union movement, creating a more docile labour supply for industry.

Daria, Kirin and Ruby labour in a deregulated market without union protection although the ECA was allegedly implemented so workers would be free to choose who they wanted to represent them in negotiations. In fact, the three women in the case studies did not negotiate anything with their employers. Kirin and Daria had not signed employment contracts and were unsure what benefits they would be receiving. Lack of a written contract is not unusual, according to Colmar Brunton’s 1997 “Survey of Labour Market Adjustment Under the Employment Contracts Act”. The survey found that the majority of workers in small firms of less than 100 employees are covered by individual employment contracts. Of all employees surveyed, 21 per cent were covered by unwritten individual employment contracts. A higher than average incidence of unwritten individual employment contracts was noted among casual employees, and
Kirin and Daria fall into this category as they work only part-time. Following the trend that half of all individual employment contracts do not specify a term of employment, Kirin and Daria were not aware of any details about the term of their employment, other than that they were considered to be permanent staff. In contracts that do specify a term of employment, the most common length is one year, with 29 per cent of all contracts specifying this.

The ECA further constrains women’s opportunities in the garment industry by weakening their bargaining position, because no worker or their representative has a right to know what any other worker has negotiated with the employer – that is, if they negotiated at all. The ECA has remained in effect despite being charged by the Council of Trade Unions with breaching International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98 (collective bargaining and right to organise) (Kelsey 1995:195). Under the ECA, strikes are legal “only in connection with negotiations for a collective contract”, hence this avenue to work for change was not open to the women in the case studies who were covered by unwritten individual employment contracts (Kelsey 1995:182).

Daria, Ruby and Kirin were not involved in any organised efforts to improve their wages or working conditions. Only Ruby strongly felt that her working conditions were inadequate. Her response to her poor treatment in her first factory was to move to a different factory. Ruby very much appreciated that here, her employer supplied her with information detailing her rights and obligations. She had been denied any such information at her former factory, even concerning how much she would earn as an employee. None of the three women knew anything about a union for garment workers in Dunedin, although the South Island Clothing Trades Union advertises in the local newspaper to attract members.

In terms of unorganised resistance, the three women recounted no signs of the individual acts of resistance that are common in everyday factory work. On the contrary, they pushed themselves to improve their speed. While Daria and Ruby were of the opinion that the wages in the industry were low in relation to their skill levels, they showed no intention of doing anything about it. The difficulty of finding jobs made it is unlikely that they would risk agitating for improvements in their wages or conditions because they could end up out of a job altogether. Daria and Kirin’s
attempts to negotiate the reality of their employment situations were limited – they tried to do well in their work in order to retain jobs they considered comparatively good.

Ruby felt fortunate that she had not been offered a job at the first factory, since it subsequently went out of business. All three women had sought employment around the time of local factory closures, and were very aware of the insecurity of working in the garment industry. Kirin and Daria do not have a written guarantee of their job security – not even the one year guarantee that is most often stipulated in individual employment contracts to give them some sort of short-term security. Daria and Ruby understood the international context of the pressure placed on the garment industry by the low wages in countries such as theirs. For Kirin, the continual erosion of the welfare state will have an immediate impact if the benefit on which she depends when she is not needed at the factory is further reduced. The ongoing cuts to the welfare system will also affect Daria and Ruby, although in a more indirect manner. Because of their financial situations, they depend on state services such as the public health system because they cannot afford private care.

Morokvasic noted in her study of Yugoslav migrants in Europe that “migration appears as a substitute for a struggle for better conditions and against oppression” (1983:27). In addition to their subordinate status as foreigners, Morokvasic’s work may offer a partial explanation for the women’s lack of resistance to the constraints on them at work. All of the women had intentions to leave Dunedin in the future. Daria planned to continue working in her factory as long as her husband was studying. After he finished his programme, the family would move depending on where he could find work. Kirin’s future was dependent on her daughters. Once they completed their studies, she would move to Australia to join her husband. Ruby had been fortunate to be able to leave the industry and return to studying in another area. Ruby also hoped to move to Australia, but had to see whether her husband received a post-doctoral fellowship, in which case the family would remain in Dunedin.

The lack of resistance to the constraints in the workplace that was encountered during the research should not be taken to indicate that the women are “passive victims”. Larner asserts that in understanding why some migrant women form “a pliant and flexible work force”, analysis must look beyond their marginalisation in terms of gender, ethnicity and class, to the intersection of structural limitations on women’s opportunities with women’s ideologies and choices about the best way to meet their
extended families’ needs (1990:31). Both Larner and Leckie’s work on immigrant women in New Zealand underscores that women are not passive in response to their life situations: “...migrant women are active subjects who utilise diverse resources to resist, and thereby subvert, the complex matrix of power relations that structure their lives” (Larner 1990:20). Leckie stresses migrants’ active reproduction of their ethnic identities, and their formation of new identities and social networks to shape or cope with their situations (1995:53, 71).

The case studies from the New Zealand garment industry reveal parallels with Larner and Leckie’s themes with respect to women migrants’ active use of the resources available to them. Leckie identifies religious fellowships as a key area for developing further networks (Leckie 1995:71). Of the migrant garment trainees, the majority actively participate in some type of religious association: attending meetings, and engaging in fundraising activities such as selling pies to their fellow trainees. Some of the women send their children to weekend classes organised by their religious associations. The women have also established support networks in their neighbourhoods that helped them with their childcare responsibilities in the absence of their extended families. The women’s agency is further illustrated in their active efforts to learn English in order to cope with the loneliness and isolation experienced due to language difficulties. Also, their pursuit of employment, sometimes even in the face of resistance from their husbands, enables them to build up relationships with other immigrants and local residents (Leckie 1995:66). The issue of their lack of resistance in the workplace must be seen in the context of their garment work as part of their strategies of meeting the family’s needs, and developing social networks to counter both their isolation as immigrants and the constraints of patriarchal ideologies about women’s proper role in society.

**Outwork Case Studies**

The case studies of migrant women in the Dunedin garment industry indicate that the restructuring of the industry has brought firm strategies of flexibility to the fore. Firms in the case studies did not use flexible technology innovations in pursuit of
profitability. Rather they utilised more traditional forms of pursuit of profitability. Particularly in small firms, the strategies in pursuit of flexibility rely on multiskilled workers and the casualisation of the employment relation. The casualisation of factory work occurs through the substitution of part-time and temporary work for full-time unionised jobs. It also involves the employment of immigrant labour, which facilitates the continued use of traditional means in the pursuit of profit. Casualisation reduces costs for employers by reducing benefits for employees and through numerical flexibility. Another form of casualisation of the employment relation – outwork – is widespread in the New Zealand garment industry and merits closer attention.

The profile of the New Zealand garment industry highlighted that part of the impetus behind large New Zealand garment firms’ implementation of high-technology innovations was the need to compete on the basis of technology inaccessible to Australian and New Zealand outworkers (also referred to as “homeworkers”). The extensive employment of outworkers has emerged as a key feature of restructuring of the garment industry in high-wage countries in recent years. The trend in Australia is paralleled in the United Kingdom. According to a survey by Handsworth Technical College in the 1980s, there are two outworkers for every factory-based worker in the garment industry in the United Kingdom (ctd in Ram 1996:166). Given the international trend, the extensive employment of outworkers in New Zealand’s garment industry comes as no surprise.

The compilation of data regarding the number of outworkers is nearly impossible, primarily due to the unregistered status of many who may not hold work permits, or are working unofficially to supplement benefits or to avoid paying taxes. This problem has been noted worldwide by researchers investigating the area of outwork. Additionally, as Rowbotham (1993:18) comments, outwork “is invisible partly because it is customary to see the home as a private place quite separate from the world of paid employment. Consequently there is a lack of the most basic information”. While the exact proportion is not known, outworkers do make up a large percentage of the garment industry workforce in New Zealand, and one garment employer has stated:

Increasingly in New Zealand, clothing manufacturers are engaging the services of outworkers. This is essentially how most Auckland manufacturers operate. That is where most clothing in New Zealand is
made and is the main source of competition for other manufacturers in New Zealand. (McCory, 1986, qtd in Armstrong 1992a:246)

Given the significance of outworkers in New Zealand’s garment industry, it is timely to attempt to shed light on the hidden arena of outwork. Ethnographic research is instrumental in enabling such an exploration. The case studies which follow provide a glimpse into the experiences of two present day outworkers in Dunedin. The first outworker was not comfortable being tape recorded, and therefore the case study is based on notes taken during and immediately after the interview. The second interview was tape recorded and transcribed. The key issues raised by the two women’s circumstances are considered in the discussion.

Helen

Helen, a Pakeha New Zealander, has worked for six different Dunedin garment factories over the past eight years, and is now doing outwork for a seventh. When her first employer went out of business, Helen and many of the laid off workers were absorbed by other garment and footwear factories. Helen lasted only two days at her first new factory, but was not hired as a permanent staff member because she lacked the speed that they wanted. Helen managed to find work in another local factory, which subsequently went out of business as well. She secured work in yet another factory, and remarked that her time there was “Fine until the boss’s wife came back from overseas”.

Helen’s first complaint was that the boss’s wife, now her supervisor, did not know much about garment production. Once, Helen was unable to sew a garment because it had not been cut properly, and the new supervisor blamed Helen for the mistake. Helen commented how she resented being ordered around by “these farmers” who just decided to open a knitwear company and did not know anything about garment production. Helen had difficulty tolerating the authoritarian style of her supervisor throughout her time at the company. Helen described the final incident that occurred shortly before she left the factory. The supervisor had told one worker to sew a particular garment again and again, and was repeatedly criticising the worker for not getting it right. Finally, the supervisor said to Helen, “Helen, she isn’t getting it right – you try it”. Helen explained that at the time, she and the other woman had already been
given one week's notice of the termination of their jobs because work had slacked off. It was common practice at this factory to layoff workers during slack periods. With her pending unemployment in mind, Helen said back to the supervisor, "If she can't get it right, I'm sure I'm not going to do any better". Helen described her satisfaction at being able to talk back to the supervisor, explaining that since they had already been given notice, it did not matter what she said, and she would not bow to the supervisor's wishes anymore. She decided to leave the factory that day and not return.

Helen was happy that the next job she found was with a good employer, one she considered very quality-oriented. While she liked the emphasis on quality, she said that the quality check was quite difficult. Sometimes the next worker in the line would notice a mistake and return the garment to Helen to be unpicked and resewn. Sometimes mistakes were not noticed until the final quality check, when garments are thoroughly inspected inside and out, and returned to the machinist responsible for any mistakes. While Helen was employed in this factory, the Employment Contracts legislation came into effect, and Helen eventually left the company because she felt she could not make the times required under the new contract system. Additionally, she noted that the work in the factory was too hard on her hands, because the machinists worked with heavy fabrics for coats and outdoor wear. Helen reiterated several times that her hands could not handle the speed of the work.

Helen's next employer was a small children's-wear company, where outworkers outnumbered the factory workers. Again, she was unhappy there because of conflicts with the owner-manager. She mentioned how irritated she and the other workers used to get with him for his snide comments about their work. She recounted the story of a fellow worker who had been working very hard throughout the day, and was then criticised by the owner-manager for how little she had supposedly accomplished. Helen felt that if she stayed at this factory any longer, she would have had to say something back to him. Instead, Helen opted to undertake outwork at home for another children's-wear company.

To begin doing outwork, Helen had to purchase her own industrial sewing machine and overlocker. She was able to buy them second hand through her contacts with the mechanics in the factories. The overlocker alone still cost more than $2000. Helen also has a domestic sewing machine which she uses for the twin-needle operations. When something goes wrong with the machines, Helen has to finance any
maintenance and repairs herself. Helen has her own workroom, and on her way to show it to me she asked, "Did my husband warn you about my workroom?" He had not, but apparently has a habit of telling people what a mess it is, much to her dislike. Helen’s husband has a well-paid job directing a local computer company.

Helen has done outwork for the same company for two years now. The company has a showroom where the pre-production work is done, but outworkers do all the machining – there is no actual factory. Helen is meant to go to the showroom once a week to pick up and drop off work, but lately the company has been asking her to get the work in earlier than usual, so Helen has been making the trip more than once a week. She picks up the bundles of garments, which include all the cut pieces needed to complete the garment, the elastic and labels to sew in, and the cottons. Helen must supply her own equipment such as scissors and snips. Helen said that sometimes the garments are not cut exactly right, and it makes it difficult to sew them and she has to spend some time juggling the material. Recently she had trouble doing twin needle sewing on her domestic machine on one of the sweatshirts because the machine could not cope with the thickness of the seams. She dropped off the batch of sweatshirts at the showroom, but thinks they may be returned to her to be sewn again. In the meantime, Helen bought a new foot for her machine to deal with the problem in the future.

Helen explained how she is paid. She has to commit herself to a certain number of hours of work per week. When she goes to collect the work, she is given a “spec sheet” which indicates how much time is allocated for each garment and the specifics of how the work is to be done. The amount of work she picks up times the rate per piece is meant to add up to $10 per hour. Helen said it regularly takes her longer to finish the garments than the time allocated. While she actually can sew the garment in the allocated time, she needs additional time between garments to prepare them. She said she does not work as fast as she would in a factory setting. She partly attributes her slowness to her limited training. She has had only four weeks of formal training, and while she is fine on straight sewing, she slows down on pockets and more difficult pieces.

Helen does not receive the salary, annual leave or holiday pay that are standard for factory work. She does not consider this to be a problem because of her husband’s high salary. Over Christmas, Helen noted that she is going to have three weeks of no
work and no pay, but says she looks forward to this time to catch up on other things. In contrast, she observed that in a factory during the holidays, the workload might lighten up, but the machinists would still be working and getting paid. Helen felt that her rate of $10 per hour is fair for the work that she is doing, and especially since when she left her last factory job two years ago she was only earning $9 per hour. She qualified this by saying that one could not support children on her wages, and would have to take on more hours of work in order to do so. Helen said that she and the other outworkers do not belong to a union. She had belonged to a union previously, and had to pay $3 to $4 per week to the union. Helen did not think that she had benefited in any way from belonging to the union.

Helen likes working at home, primarily because she is making up entire garments where in a factory she only did certain parts. Making up entire garments, especially children’s wear, is what she had originally been interested in when she entered into the garment industry. Helen’s interest in sewing was first sparked when her grandmother helped her sew doll’s clothes when she was young. Her interest in making clothing developed further when she was taught sewing in high school. Another aspect of working at home that Helen likes is that she can be her own boss, and she does not have someone pressuring her if she stops working. Helen also likes having control over the type of music she listens to – she likes country music – rather than having to listen to whatever is on the radio in the factory.

Helen says that she missed the social contact with other machinists for a while after she left the factory. At one of her previous workplaces, a group of women had eaten lunch and joked around together, and Helen enjoyed the interaction. However she does not miss the interaction at her last workplace, where most of the others smoked cigarettes, and the break room was poorly ventilated. Helen usually drove her car somewhere to eat her lunch rather than be with them. In general, Helen does not think of herself as the type of person who mixes much with other people. Now, Helen occasionally runs into other outworkers when she is at the showroom, but she only knows one of them well, who happens to be a neighbour.

Helen focuses on the positive aspects of being an outworker: outwork means she can do the other things that she likes to be involved in. Helen enjoys spending time at home every week caring for her two year old grandson. Outwork also means she decides when she wants to work. She determines her own schedule, for example, she
has set aside Tuesday mornings for an embroidery class. She can also work when she pleases. Since her husband was not home the night before the interview, Helen stayed up until midnight to finish some sewing. Overall, she considers her situation quite good in comparison to what she has heard about the poor conditions in the garment industry in Fiji, particularly the toilets being locked in the factories, and workers being harassed by supervisors for going to the toilet.

Paula

Paula is a woman of Asian ethnicity who came to New Zealand with her family so that her children could live in Dunedin and study. Her husband intended to find work in his field – he is a chemist. Because he was unable to find employment, he had to return to Asia to work there and send remittances to the family, and Paula has remained in Dunedin to look after the children. Her older children are at university, and her youngest is still in school. In her country, Paula worked as a tailor for twenty years, running her own business. As sewing is her hobby, Paula decided to enrol in the garment training programme jointly run by the local garment industry and the Polytechnic. Paula talked about why she entered the training programme:

CH: So you have experience sewing in your country?

Paula: Twenty years. [...] I had my own, I mean, I was self-employed, you know. So I had two helpers to help me.

CH: And was that like you would measure the customers and make things for them...

Paula: Yes, yes. We don’t use the commercial patterns at all. We measure from – only body measurements, so we have to make our own patterns.

CH: So why did you do the training programme then if you already had all that experience? You should be teaching the training programme!

Paula: Oh, no. Because it’s different. [...] It’s different skill, you see? Mine, I mean, from my country, we use body measurement. We don’t use commercial pattern. And then, another thing, is because when I first came, I had nothing to do and I was quite
bored. So I thought, maybe I could learn different skills, you see. Skill from New Zealand, just compare and see any difference. I think not much difference. But I learned something too. I learned quite a lot.

Following the training programme in which she gained the National Certificate in Apparel Construction, Paula tried to find work in a factory. Although promised a job at one factory, she was not hired because several Dunedin garment factories had just closed down, and their laid off workers were given priority by the factory she had applied to.

Paula: [...] when I completed Level 3 the factory next to – I’m not going to mention the name of the factory... [...] he promised my boss, I mean, my lecturer, they would take me in. But the last minute when I rang to the factory, they tell me no, you see. They calling to the manager there because several factories closed down. So they have to take in those workers from the factories, because they are more experienced, I suppose. [...]  

CH: So even with all your experience...

Paula: Yeah.

CH: ... they wouldn’t take you.

Paula: No, because there are so many workers, machinists from other factories who are jobless. So, they have to take them first.

None of Paula’s classmates in the training programme had been able to find work either. Paula was aware that the pressures put on Dunedin factories by cheap wages overseas were a factor in their predicament:

CH: So do you know why those factories closed? Did you hear anything [...]?

Paula: No. I didn’t.

CH: I was just wondering what happened to those people working there. Like, some of them got jobs in the other factories, but there were a lot of outworkers working for them, and I don’t know what happened – if they still have work or...?
Paula: A lot of people they are unemployed. They are jobless. [...] I, I think, probably it is because they cannot cover the costs, you know?

CH: The companies?

Paula: Yeah. I mean, the wages are just quite high. I mean, compared to Fiji and China.

CH: Even though for here it is not enough to live on.

Paula: Yes. Because the cost of living is very high. [...] And what’s the cost of living like in your country? Is it difficult to...

Paula: No, no, it’s lower than here. I noticed New Zealand is very high. Even though, just like, factory worker, if you depend on one person who work in a factory full time, I don’t think you can cover the cost of living. No, I don’t think so. Unless you own your own house, you don’t have to pay rent. Otherwise I don’t think so.

In light of the very limited job opportunities (despite her twenty years of experience and the certificate she gained through the garment training programme), Paula was fortunate to eventually find outwork through a personal contact with one of the training programme instructors. Paula does outwork for two different employers – both are small up-market shops in Dunedin. For the first, Paula finishes jerseys (attaching collars, for example). She receives the jerseys after they have been constructed by machinists at a local factory. Paula gets paid $4 to $5 per jersey finished, and the jerseys sell for not less than $150 per garment. It takes her about one hour per jersey, so she is earning less than the minimum wage. Paula noted that the work for that employer is very inconsistent: sometimes she has work and sometimes she does not. She also sews men’s dress shirts for a second employer. On Fridays, she picks up two shirts and sews them for $20 a piece. She likes the consistency of this work: everytime she drops off the two finished shirts, she gets two more. Sometimes the boss drops them off at her house if he needs them urgently.

For her outwork for both employers, Paula has to provide all her own equipment – her employers provide only the material and cottons. Paula has higher power bills because she is using the machine at home. Because of the costs associated with doing
outwork, Paula says it is not worth it to do it for the money. Paula feels fortunate that she is primarily doing the outwork because it is her hobby and she wants to occupy her time. She sees her wages as subsidising the money her husband sends, but views him as the primary breadwinner:

CH: But is it enough money if you just work part time, like to support your children?

Paula: Definitely no, because I have to get money from my husband. My husband is in [her country]. [...] Because if I survive on just what I got, no, the wages are not very attractive.

In addition to the low wages, Paula thinks the inconsistency of the work would make it unsuitable for someone trying to support a family. Her work is not at all regular:

CH: So they have enough work, like to keep giving you jerseys to sew?

Paula: Yes, but it’s inconsistent. They are not consistent at all. [...] Sometimes you have a lot, and sometimes you have a break, which is good also. [laughing]

Paula works unofficially and thereby avoids paying taxes. While this is a positive aspect of her work from her point of view, it is accompanied by negative elements that accrue to casualised forms of work such as outwork. Paula is not guaranteed any minimum hourly rate – she is only paid per piece that she sews. Paula discussed her payment per piece which results in rates lower than factory-based work:

Paula: It’s... they pay by the garment – per piece. [...] If there is more work you do more, sometime maybe you have no work for one week. It depends.

CH: So it’s not good if you really depend on the money.

Paula: No, definitely not. It’s just, I mean, my interest and my hobby, you see. I guess I just want to occupy my time when my children are at school. Otherwise I would be alone at home – quite boring. So I can drop my daughter, so I can just, the same time normally I drop her before 9 o’clock, and I pick her up 3 o’clock. Between that time I can just find something to do. When I come back home I have to cook. [laughs] [...]
CH: Do you think you make more money per hour doing piece work?

Paula: No, no, it’s very little. Lower than factory work.

CH: Oh, okay. So why is that? Why don’t they pay the right rate?

Paula: I don’t know [laughing]. You have to ask the boss.

CH: So when you took the job, you couldn’t negotiate a better...

Paula: I didn’t. I just took it and then I just continue on. It’s up to them to decide how much they want to pay me.

CH: Ah hah. And did they ever give you an increase?

Paula: No.

CH: Just the same rates?

Paula: The same.

Paula’s work is paid at a lower rate than jobs which require no formal training, such as stocking the shelves in K-Mart.

Paula: K-Mart, my friend she is working there, $9 something.

CH: Yeah, and it’s not any skill...

Paula: Yeah.

CH: ... not like garment production...

Paula: Yeah.

CH: ... it’s a lot of skill in there.

Paula: Yeah. It’s a lot of skill, and then you do anything wrong you have to unpick, you know? Quite stressful sometimes.

In addition to the stress, other negative aspects of outwork are that Paula receives no benefits such as sick leave or holiday pay, and has not signed a contract. Paula’s employer is clearly capitalising on Paula’s abilities: a recent newspaper article about the employer mentioned that each of her garments is “hand-crafted”, and the jerseys for the
upcoming season are to carry a prestigious label signifying top quality. Still, Paula feels unable to demand the wage appropriate to her skill-level and experience.

Despite the poor remuneration and inconsistency of her work, Paula definitely values aspects of outwork in comparison to factory employment – the variety of work, the ability to fit her paid work around her caregiving responsibilities, and controlling her own work-pace and hours of work:

Paula: Yeah, I think it’s good to work part time, the outworkers, our own time, it’s more flexible. [...] Full time, you have to work from morning to night – it’s fixed time. You can’t do anything else. And your children – you have to cook, and housework. [...] 

CH: But you find it interesting, not too boring?

Paula: Yeah, because, I find interesting, it’s because you can try any different design, different styles. [...] Not like what you see when you work in the factory it’s every day the same thing. [...] I like something different, you see?

CH: Yeah, and in the factory also, you have someone watching you all the time.

Paula: Yeah, and then you have to work fast, fast, fast, fast, fast.

CH: But at home, you can just decide...

Paula: Yes, I can, I can, at home, outworker you can work even daytime, night-time, anytime as long as I can finish the work on time, that’s okay. [...] You want to hurry, you go faster. You just take your own sweet time, it’s okay. It’s up to, I mean, it’s up to myself.

The part-time outwork Paula has secured was the only work available, hence she focuses on those positive aspects since she has little negotiating power in a climate of unemployment to do anything about the negative elements. Paula is acutely aware, because of her own family’s experience, that job opportunities in other industries in Dunedin are also very limited at present, similar to her own industry:

Paula: I think still job opportunities very poor here. Auckland, Auckland is better. I think it’s because due to the population. Dunedin too little. Not many factories, too. [...] Difficult to get
job. If my husband could get a job here, he is willing to stay here. He tried. He came and he couldn’t find job, so... […]

CH: So he went back and he is working there?

Paula: Yeah. He has to work to support us. [laughing]

CH: To pay the fees...

Paula: Because also spending money [laughs]. So now I am worried my eldest daughter, she is graduating this year and then she has to look for job, I mean, one year internship for a year pharmacy... [...] But right now, until now, she still has no job offer yet.

CH: Yeah, I think it is getting really difficult right now in almost every industry. Like in banking they are losing lots of jobs because lots of banks are closing. And the factories are closing...

Paula: Even hospitals as well. [...] Cutting down 100 staff – I heard from my friends.

With such poor opportunities in the formal sector, Paula is fortunate to have work at all. Paula said if she were staying in New Zealand for the long-term, she would consider setting up her own business. Because she will return to her country soon, Paula thinks this option is too costly in terms of purchasing the machines and establishing a workplace. One other option that Paula was exploring at the time of the interview was the possibility of helping the Polytechnic training programme finish a contract for baby clothes. Only one student was enrolled in Level 3 this term, and the instructor was concerned about not being able to finish the contract she had secured from a local garment firm to give the student the required production experience. If the training programme were unable to finish the contract on time, it would affect their prospects of securing contracts for future Level 3 students. Paula may go to assist with the contract two or three days a week for the remaining month of the term. While the trainees enrolled in the course do not get paid for the work, Paula would earn minimum wage of $7.00 per hour before tax.
Case Studies Discussed

Helen and Paula’s situations raise two key issues that are echoed in the literature on outwork both in New Zealand and abroad: why women engage in outwork, and who benefits from this organisation of the labour process. With respect to the first issue, patriarchy is one of the most significant determinants of the decision to work at home. Because women’s “biological function as child bearers is transformed into the social function of child rearing”, women are most often the primary caregiver for their children (Andrews 1987:18). Internationally, childcare responsibilities are a very common reason why women resort to outwork. This was a factor in both Paula and Helen’s experiences. Paula was the primary caregiver for her children, while her husband was the principal income earner, sending remittances from overseas to finance the family’s living expenses. Helen began outwork two years ago, and because she works at home, she has been able to provide childcare for her grandson, now two years old, since that time.

The international context provides other clues to why women engage in outwork. Some women take jobs at home to avoid trouble from their husbands or fathers for being away from the home and being perceived as neglecting their duties there, or for bringing attention to the insufficiency of the husband’s wages to support the family. A general lack of demand for women in the formal sector in some countries complicates the issue, resulting in an absence of choice for many women about what jobs are available. This was Paula’s experience seeking employment at a time when the labour market was flooded with skilled garment workers. Racism also restricts the employment prospects of women of particular ethnic groups, and again means that some women have no choice other than to take jobs at home. Physical disability is another factor, and some women choose to work from home because of the difficulties of transportation, or other complications (Rowbotham 1993:29-30). Clearly, a variety of specific circumstances can lead women to accept outwork, for example, Armstrong (1992b:138) cites the case of a several Vietnamese families who set up their own subcontracting workshop in Australia. When questioned by a union official regarding their low earnings and poor conditions, they insisted that they preferred working in that manner to employment in an Anglo-run shop. The families found their low wages and poor conditions significantly better than what they had encountered in their home

Rowbotham maintains, “The connection between work and home is a key element in the homeworkers’ predicament, which has both disadvantages and advantages” (1993:15). Some of the advantages of outwork for women include the ability to stay home while the children are young, and to have flexibility in combining paid work with family responsibilities. This was illustrated in both Helen and Paula’s cases. Outworkers are also able to decide when they want to work in a way that factory workers cannot – this is known as “time sovereignty” (Rowbotham 1993:31) and is a key aspect of their work appreciated by Helen and Paula in the case studies above. Furthermore, outwork is an opportunity to earn much-needed income for women who are prevented from doing so in the formal sector because of their legal circumstances. Pursuant to this, it is an area to maximise earnings through tax avoidance. Lastly, some outworkers actually earn more than their factory-based counterparts (Rowbotham 1993:38).

The advantages of outwork for the women workers must also be seen in light of its negative aspects. The ability to be flexible in combining paid work with family responsibilities can also be viewed as the “conflicting pull of work and family” (Rowbotham 1993:41). Because they work at home, outworkers’ services as full-time domestic workers are often still expected by their families (Armstrong 1992a:250). This expectation can result in even longer hours of work for women outworkers than if they worked in a factory setting. For the few who earn more than factory workers, their income has to be viewed in the context of their expenses in terms of power, equipment, and transportation to pick up and drop off work, and that they are denied the benefits that factory-based workers would receive. Regardless, most outworkers earn less than factory-based workers for the same work (Rowbotham 1993:33). Lack of a written contract opens the way for outworkers to be abused, and sometimes they are given rush jobs that require weekend and night work (Rowbotham 1993:39). Their “time sovereignty” can be overshadowed by the stress of having to meet employer-set deadlines. Occupational overuse syndrome can occur just as in a factory setting, however with no recourse to the law in cases where workers are somehow working illegally because of the element of fear. The uncertainty of the employer having control
over how much work is to be done and the deadlines is also a negative aspect of outwork.

Although some women find concrete advantages to outwork, the disadvantages weigh heavily against these, and the real benefits of the flexibility of outwork appear to go to garment firms. Outwork enhances firms’ numerical flexibility (although at the cost of workers’ security). As discussed by Atkinson, “…firms are reducing their ‘core’ workforce of full-time permanent employees who offer functional flexibility in favour of expanding use of ‘peripheral’ (or non-core) workers who offer numerical flexibility…” (1984, ctd in Hakim 1988:609). Because firms are producing short runs for niche markets, they are subject to variations in the workload. Keeping a full-time workforce through the slack periods becomes costly. Outwork enables firms to vary employment levels with ease, for example, in slack periods. Outwork makes a quick increase in production possible without technological innovations or efficiency gains (Ram 1996:169).

Additionally, outwork “…effectively casualises the relationship between the supplier of work and the home worker” (Armstrong 1992b:30). Outworkers are not considered by the firm they work for to be employees, but are treated as self-employed or as independent sub-contractors (Armstrong 1992b:32-3). Because the relationship between the worker and the person for whom they do the work is not an employment relationship, the firm can avoid its legal responsibilities to employees. The worker has no recourse to national employment laws with respect to her rights because she is not an employee. The casualisation of the employment relation allows firms to externalise costs and keep wages low. They externalise costs because outworkers such as Helen and Paula supply their own machines and maintain them, provide their own work spaces, pay their own electricity and transportation costs, and are not paid any type of benefits such as holiday pay, redundancy pay, sick leave or superannuation. Because neither Helen nor Paula’s employers have an actual factory, the employers also save on the expense of heating the work space during the winter.

Another area where employers reduce costs through utilisation of outworkers is accident compensation (ACC). According to the Accident Rehabilitation and Compensation Insurance Act 1992, employers and employees are both required to pay ACC premiums which are used for the compensation for costs incurred due to injury. The employee premium is paid through a 0.7 per cent debit of workers’ earnings as part
of their PAYE (Pay As You Earn) deductions. The amount of the employer premium varies between $1.20 and $10 per $100 of payroll, according to the risk of injury involved in that workplace, and the employer’s work injury record. If outworkers are formally recorded as employees, then there is no cost savings to the employer. However, the employer would not pay any premium for those working unofficially. Outworkers who are formally registered as self-employed, and receive work from garment firms as subcontractors, must pay their own ACC premiums – the garment firm is required to pay nothing on their behalf. Hence garment firms save on ACC premiums for all self-employed and unofficial outworkers. The expense of ACC is quite significant for employers. Lee has referred to ACC as “the most significant ‘hidden’ cost of employing people” (Lee 1996:12). Premiums are not the only expense associated with ACC. Work injury claims can also cost the employer, and it is the costs in this area in particular that Lee (1996:12) explains “…have been eroding profits for 22 years” – since ACC’s inception in 1974.

Garment firms reduce their wage costs by shifting production onto outworkers whose isolation and sometimes dubious legal status are unlikely to see them agitate for increases in wages through unions or other types of organisation. While Helen knew one other outworker, Paula did not know of anyone else doing outwork even if she had wanted to participate in some kind of organising process. Paula would have been unlikely to want to agitate for any improvement in her conditions, both because she is only working in New Zealand temporarily, and because of her sense of loyalty to the instructor who arranged the job through her personal contacts. The relative powerlessness of outworkers further reduces wage costs for employers because outworkers undermine the position of formal sector workers, who must go along with the employers’ requirements in order to preserve their jobs. It is for this reason that the trade union movement has historically campaigned to bring an end to the practice of outwork (Hakim 1988:626).

Piece rates are utilised to assist in keeping wages low. Employers set rates per garment or part of garment finished according to the time estimated to do the task. For example, Paula is paid $10 per shirt, which is estimated to take one hour to finish, resulting in an hourly rate of $10 minus expenses. When it takes Paula more than one hour to complete the job, her hourly rate decreases (Armstrong 1992a:249). If the garment actually can be completed in the allocated time, Helen noted that she needs
additional time between garments. Piece rates also serve to externalise the cost of production glitches at the outworker’s, rather than the employer’s, expense. When the bundles Helen picked up had been miscut, it was Helen who had to spend extra time correcting the mistake, and she still received the same payment per garment even though she could not complete them in the time allocated. When other garments she was working on were too thick for her machine, she had to invest in a new foot, at her own expense and on her own time, to enable her to sew the material. If the garments are returned to her for errors to be corrected, she is paid nothing to compensate her for the time this takes.

The state ensures that garment firms profit from the flexibility of outwork. Through the state’s legislative arm, most aspects of outwork are legally subject to regulation, for example, minimum wages, health and safety, taxes, accident compensation, employment contracts, and work permits. These regulations are commonly not enforced as the state turns a blind eye to employers’ use of outworkers who work illegally. For these workers, the legislation which makes them illegal at the same time ensures their vulnerability to exploitation by their employers. The workers’ illegality prevents them from benefiting from the laws in place to protect them from abuses. As a result, abuses are rife, with outworkers commonly earning piece rates that amount to less than the minimum wage, and bearing all the production costs normally born by the employer. Employers may also manipulate the vulnerability of outworkers, which results from the state’s policies and selective enforcement, to enhance profitability by undermining organised labour.

Helen and Paula’s case studies illustrate how the scarcity of employment opportunities results in insecurity and resignation to the conditions of whatever work one can get. Helen’s reluctance to even speak back to her former supervisors is a case in point. It was only once she knew that she had already lost her job that she was able to make a smart comment to her supervisor. Armstrong discusses how insecurity contributes to the acceptance of wages and conditions reminiscent of the nineteenth century (1992a:247). Outworkers’ conditions in the 1890s in Dunedin were made public through the “Sweating Agitation” – a controversy sparked by a series of sermons on the “Sin of Cheapness” (Andrews 1987:4). The conditions publicised indeed bear many similarities with outworkers’ conditions in the 1990s. Both periods have been characterised by:
low piece rates which make survival precarious
• inconsistency of work – long slack periods with no income
• isolation of women in their homes and consequent lack of organisation
• resignation of outworkers to their plight.

It is not the similarities but the difference between the 1890s and the 1990s that is the most noteworthy. Where in the 1890s, outwork was condemned, today it is celebrated as a “flexible and desirable work practice for women” (Armstrong 1992a:240)! This change in the perception of outwork has only recently occurred. Until then, outwork was perceived as a practice to be regulated and hopefully abolished, and this perception was paralleled overseas, where outwork has been opposed as a throwback to the poor working conditions of the Victorian era:

... [outwork] is seen as an anachronism of the bad old days of the sweating system, an “historical residue”, which is “peripheral to the economies of advanced industrial societies and of marginal importance as a source of livelihood”. (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987, qtd in Armstrong 1992a:241)

As in New Zealand, opposition to outwork in countries around the world usually did not arise out of concern for the welfare of the outworkers. Such opposition often came first from trade unionists, who feared that the existence of low-paid outwork would undercut their unionised factory jobs (Rowbotham 1993:45-6). As late as 1993, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union in the United States supported a legal ban on outworking (Rowbotham 1993:60). Liberals perceived outworkers as victims of exploitation, and also opposed outwork, campaigning for an end to it, thereby ignoring the constraints that force women to engage in outwork in the first place, namely their childcare responsibilities (Rowbotham 1993:47).

The global resurgence in the use of outwork in recent years indicates that the view of outwork as a remnant of times past has been altered dramatically. Rowbotham documents not only “the extraordinary spread of homework in many Third World countries”, but in Europe, Australia, Canada, the United States, and Japan as well (1993:23-5). In New Zealand, outwork has undergone a resurgence since 1981, when
the Factories Act of 1946 which contained legislation to prevent sweating was rescinded. The Department of Labour argued that the restrictive legislation was too difficult to enforce (Andrews 1987:19). As in the 1890s, contemporary legislative changes continue to have the interests of companies and factory workers, rather than the outworkers, at heart. Outwork has now extended so much that some factories, such as Helen’s current employer in the case study above, employ outworkers exclusively.

Armstrong (1992b:31-2) asserts that the prevalence of outworking in New Zealand’s garment industry in recent times is part of the same process which has seen much of garment production move offshore – that is, the restructuring of the industry to enhance flexibility. Factory relocations to offshore sites in pursuit of flexibility leave unemployment in their wake, making it possible to once again use outwork as a part of the “prevailing way of organising production” (Rowbotham 1993:32). Much of remaining domestic garment production is relocated onto outworkers, enhancing firms’ flexibility, by externalising costs and keeping wages low. Flexibility is not pursued for its own sake, but rather, to ensure that the making of profits – the accumulation of capital – will continue.

The reorganisation of production in this manner demands legitimation in light of the increasing job insecurity and eroding wages and conditions that outworkers face, with less and less of a safety net to fall back on provided by the government. The government plays a large part in the legitimation process, as is illustrated by this argument put forth by a Member of Parliament (Mr Bell) in a 1980 Parliamentary Debate which culminated in the removal of legislation to restrict outwork:

It suits them to work in their own homes … Because they are directly involved, most of them have the ability and the interest to complete their own working negotiations. Most of them are contractors rather than employees … To impose legislative restraints upon them would involve a breakdown in what, in most cases, must be a pleasant, enjoyable and satisfactory relationship between the employer and the homeworker. (in Andrews 1986, ctd in Armstrong 1992a:252)

While outwork has spelled flexibility and profitability for garment firms, Armstrong points out that the myth of the “autonomous home-based worker” has been invoked to argue that it is the women workers who reap the benefits of flexibility. This myth is based on the idea that the home, the private realm, is the arena of “autonomy and
freedom from the demands of the public world of paid work” (Armstrong 1992a:240). The myth serves to mask the controlling mechanisms that function through outwork, such as the piece rate system which determines the intensity of the work, and the need to complete work by the deadlines set by the employer (Armstrong 1992a:248-9).

In their research on outwork, Huws, Hurstfield, and Holtmaat have drawn attention to the association of flexibility with individual freedom and choice (1989 ctd in Rowbotham 1993:36). Because outwork supposedly provides more flexibility for women workers, any government intervention is considered to inhibit citizens’ rights to freely choose where they want to work, and to freely negotiate the conditions of their work with their employer. The casualisation of work which has rapidly eroded job security and constricted workers’ choices is hereby celebrated through the buzzwords of flexibility, freedom and choice. While it has been argued that it suits women outworkers to work in their homes, quite often the decision to do outwork at home rather than take a factory job is determined by the responsibilities of childcare or other caregiving work. As Armstrong has documented, many outworkers would prefer to work in factories than at home, but are prevented from doing so by such caregiving responsibilities, or the expense of paying for childcare. At the same time, outworkers report finding it difficult to give their children proper care because of the demands of their outwork (Armstrong 1992a:248-51). Also with respect to choice, an increasing lack of choice has resulted as labour market conditions worsen. In the second case study above, Paula “chose” outwork because not enough factory placements were available for the machinists seeking employment. If Paula wanted a garment industry position, she had little choice other than to take up outwork.

The conditions of outwork internationally prompted Mitter to posit that outwork’s expansion indicates the creation of a third world workforce within the first world (Mitter ctd in Rowbotham 1993:1). Similarly, Armstrong has expressed that “...a significant proportion of the homeworking workforce in New Zealand, mirror characteristics of ‘developing’ world workforces...” (1992b:31). The resurgence of outwork reiterates the continuity of traditional strategies of pursuing profitability alongside the new in the industrial restructuring occurring in the New Zealand garment industry within the current climate of globalisation.
Conclusion

The pressures of globalisation have caused the New Zealand garment industry to restructure. Large firms were more likely to opt for the implementation of technology innovations and new ways of organising the labour process, such as teamwork. Downsizing of the workforce has commonly accompanied the technology innovations, along with a growing number of unskilled "operator" positions. Small firms have preferred a strategy of production of short runs for niche markets based on the labour of multiskilled and flexible workers. The case study women were self-regulating, multiskilled workers whose labour is a key basis of the reorganisation of production for flexibility. Their cases demonstrate that an equally important basis of flexibility is the casualisation of work. These findings refute the flexible specialisation thesis regarding the revitalisation of work. While garment factories were targeting niche markets, the reorganisation of production in small firms has occurred through more traditional means of maximising profitability rather than technology innovations. Factories increasingly utilise immigrant workers and outworkers, groups traditionally employed to increase profitability due to their relative powerlessness.

The case studies of five multiskilled and flexible workers demonstrate the contradictory aspects of garment work within the climate of globalisation and industrial restructuring. With respect to the positive aspects, the women are able to bring in an income, albeit a small one; their skill levels increased, enabling them to engage in short runs which they prefer to repetitive work; and the factory workers developed social networks through their training and work that are important for their emotional well-being. On the negative side, the factory and outworkers share a reality constrained by capital, the state, and patriarchy. Firstly, they labour in a production process that continues to be marked by a traditional gender division of labour despite restructuring. The deregulated labour market enabled by the state supposedly granted them the freedom to negotiate the terms of their employment and their wages with their employers. The context of recent factory closures left them little bargaining power to negotiate, and hence they are paid wages just above the legal minimum despite their high skill levels. High skill levels do not lead to control over their work despite the more unified conception and execution that accompanies multiskilling. Control over the labour process is organised in part through workers' self-regulation, and through
direct control, piece rates, or bonus systems as well. Women end up in poorly paid garment factory work or outwork because of the constraints of the labour market and patriarchy, the latter working within the family in terms of gender ideologies about women’s roles. Most of the women were only part-time workers, partly because of their need to fit paid work around the traditional responsibilities dictated to women by patriarchy, and partly because employers prefer the flexibility and reduced benefits associated with a part-time workforce. The women experienced job insecurity due to the firm strategy of numerical flexibility, which could see them out of work for extended periods.

This chapter has shown that the impact on workers of the state’s free-market reform programme and firm restructuring at the local level is the casualisation of work, with workers absorbing the costs of flexibility. Sassen suggests that the expansion of low-wage jobs, and the prominence of traditional ways of maximising profitability such as outwork and reliance on immigrant labour indicate the “downgrading of manufacturing”. This process has seen full-time, unionised jobs replaced by part-time, temporary, and sub-contract work, and is occurring in both declining and growth sectors. Sassen calls into question the usual dichotomy of traditional versus modern forms of work organisation. So-called “backward” sectors like outwork are not necessarily a remnant of earlier industrialisation: “they may well represent a downgrading of work connecting to the dynamics of growth in leading sectors of the economy” (Sassen 1996). Sassen argues the conceptual division between traditional and modern forms of work organisation obscures effective analysis as so-called “backward” forms of work organisation play a key role in contemporary production. Sassen notes:

...the growth of labor-intensive manufacturing in the Third World countries with rapid industrialization as well as the growing use of sweatshops and homework in highly industrialized countries, all point to the viability of these forms in ‘modern’ or ‘modernizing’ contexts. (Sassen 1988:110-11)

Armstrong also emphasises that the increasing use of outworkers and the relocation of manufacturing to developing countries to take advantage of women’s cheap labour are parallel processes (1992b:31). This chapter has explored the downgrading of
manufacturing in New Zealand, and the chapter which follows considers its counterpart: the expansion of labour-intensive manufacturing in Fiji.
CHAPTER 5: THE FIJI GARMENT INDUSTRY – CASE STUDIES FROM SUVA

Introduction

In contrast to the downsizing and restructuring of the New Zealand garment industry, the Fiji garment industry has boomed since 1988 in response to the interim government’s reform programme to attract foreign investment in the wake of the coups. The restructuring of the Fiji economy aimed to achieve international competitiveness on the basis of low labour costs. The devaluation of the currency and the host of incentives offered to investors, including the Tax Free Factories Scheme, succeeded in attracting significant overseas investment. This chapter surveys the local impact at the level of the workforce of the state’s reform programme and the resulting boom in the garment industry.

A consideration of trends in Fiji’s garment industry serves as a useful comparison to the New Zealand case study for two reasons. Firstly, a large amount of investment into Fiji after 1988 came from New Zealand because Fiji’s reforms coincided with the opening of the New Zealand economy to cheap imports from overseas. The New Zealand garment industry was forced into restructuring, and many large volume producers chose to relocate the labour intensive aspects of their production to Fiji to take advantage of the incentives being offered, namely the cheaper labour costs. Secondly, in contrast to the New Zealand case, the Fiji case suggests how the implementation of free-market reforms varies in a low-wage economy: how differences in the state’s reform programme in pursuit of international competitiveness affect firm strategy, and ultimately how these forces percolate down to the level of the workforce.

This chapter begins with a profile of the Fiji garment industry. Contrary to the assertions of flexible specialisation proponents, mass production is expanding in areas of the globe such as Fiji. New firms continue to employ traditional methods in pursuit of profitability: a Taylorist labour process is still the norm, accompanied by authoritarian control. The profile of the industry provides a context for an inquiry into the experiences of Fiji’s women garment workers whose low-wage labour is the basis of the industry’s international competitiveness. Case studies of four garment workers are presented and discussed to illustrate the impact of the state’s free-market reform
programme at the local level. Women's lives are shaped through the process of negotiating the influences of capital, the state and patriarchy in attempting to realise their current and future goals. All of the case studies reveal the vulnerability of Fiji's women garment workers within the context of globalisation. The issues raised by the case studies will be taken up again in chapter six and examined in contrast to the issues that emerged from the New Zealand case study.

Profile of the Fiji Garment Industry

Growth of the Garment Industry Under the Shift from Protectionism to Free-Market Reforms

A very brief introduction to the historical context of economic development in Fiji serves as a useful starting point for a profile of the garment industry. From the 1880s to the 1990s, the economy of Fiji – former seat of the British colonial empire in the Pacific region – revolved around sugarcane production. Fiji's present day population reflects that history, with approximately half being indigenous Fijians, and the second half descended from the indentured Indian labourers who worked the sugar plantations. While sugar retains its importance, industrialisation took on a more significant role in the development of the Fiji economy after independence in 1970. Manufacturing boomed most dramatically following economic reforms in the wake of the two military coups in 1987. The Fiji coups were carried out in the name of indigenous Fijian paramountcy after the election of a multi-ethnic coalition government said to be “Indian-dominated”. The coups threw the economy into crisis, and large numbers of Indo-Fijians emigrated. The interim government reacted quickly to deal with the economic crisis resulting from the flight of capital and skilled workers, shifting to an export-oriented industrialisation approach.

The economic reforms that were implemented by the interim government aimed to attract foreign investment, and the devaluation of the currency by a total of 33 per cent was one of the principal reforms. Secondly, liberalisation of import licenses went forward, involving the replacement of licenses by tariffs and then embarking on a tariff
reduction programme.\textsuperscript{1} Thirdly, the Tax Free Factories (TFF) scheme was implemented, granting a thirteen year tax holiday and other benefits such as the freedom to repatriate profits to companies exporting 95 per cent or more of their output. To compensate for lost revenue from the taxation of industry, a Value Added Tax was imposed on all basic consumer items. Fourthly, the Fiji Trade and Investment Bureau was set up to process investment applications and administer the TFF scheme. By 1989, the government’s crisis management strategies were formalised into a comprehensive structural adjustment programme, which had as its key element a shift in policy away from import-substitution and towards export-promotion. This shift occurred as the government chose to follow the example of the Newly Industrialising Countries in Asia under the influence of advice from the World Bank (World Bank 1987; Chandra 1996:47, 50).

Prior to 1987, the garment industry in Fiji was highly protected under the government’s import-substitution policies, which included assistance to local industries and licenses and high tariffs on imports. After the coups and the subsequent economic reforms, many existing locally-owned garment companies restructured to meet the conditions of the TFF scheme, and joint ventures were also formed with overseas investors. A large number of overseas garment companies shifted their production to Fiji, attracted by the low-wage economy created by the currency devaluations, the other TFF incentives, and the preferential access given to manufacturers located in Fiji into the Australian and New Zealand markets under the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA) (Grynberg 1996a:i). Firms also relocated from Asia to take advantage of Fiji’s garment quota awarded by the United States government under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA).\textsuperscript{2} As the garment industry boomed, exports of garments from Fiji increased from F$2 million in 1985 to F$185 million in 1995 (Forsyth 1996:4; AusAID 1995:44). Large numbers of women entered into the industrial labour force for the first time to work in the rapidly expanding industry. Where women garment workers had been primarily Indo-Fijian

\textsuperscript{1} In 1989, the Fiji government reduced most tariffs to 50 per cent, and in 1995 further reduced them to 22.5 per cent. Licenses have been almost entirely done away with (World Trade Organisation [WTO] 1997:1).

\textsuperscript{2} As of 1 January 1995, under direction of the WTO, the MFA was superseded by the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing.
prior to the coups, women of both ethnic groups took the jobs offered in the new TFFs from 1988 onwards. Most are paid hourly wages, and some receive a productivity-related bonus.

**Technology and the Labour Process**

The implementation of technology has been affected by SPARTECA’s rules of origin which require 50 per cent local content. The rules of origin allow materials purchased in Australia, New Zealand, and other Forum Island Countries to contribute to the 50 per cent local content. In order to maintain their preferential access under SPARTECA, firms have had to purchase new technology from Australia and New Zealand rather than from cheaper available sources to avoid disqualifying under the rules of origin (World Bank 1995:41). Garment manufacturers have therefore argued that SPARTECA’s rules of origin have acted as a disincentive to investing in high technology.

Most garment factories do not engage in design or marketing of their products. Rather, Fiji’s garment industry serves as a Cut, Make and Trim industry producing mostly “low-grade” garments, and with their main competition being price competition from Asia (Grynberg 1996a:28). Most factories employ a Taylorist labour process of progressive bundle production. In some large factories, the introduction of a rail system, characterising a Taylorist labour process, has only been an innovation of late. The majority of workers perform just a minute part of the garment production, although a small number of factories which have recently begun working on the modular manufacturing system employ multiskilled machinists.

**Labour Market Reforms for Flexibility**

In its quest for economic growth, the Fiji government considered reform of the labour market to be an essential plank of its adjustment programme (WTO 1997:10). The centralised wage bargaining system, functioning through a Tripartite Forum, which existed in Fiji up until 1991 was deemed to make the labour market inflexible and uncompetitive. That year, the government implemented a number of so-called “labour reforms” to move towards enterprise bargaining, in order to increase the desired
flexibility (AusAID 1995:7, 44). The Trade Union Act, Trade Disputes Act, Industrial Associations Act, and Trade Union (Recognition) Act were all targeted for reform (Leckie 1992:7-8). The reforms were implemented in the name of the right of workers to choose which union they want to belong to (World Bank 1995:23). However, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) charged that the reforms "comprised a series of measures designed to weaken trade unions" (1997). Statutory wage guidelines, which had previously been determined by changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), were abolished so employers could make wages productivity-related. The delinking of wages from the CPI combined with prior currency devaluations brought the costs of labour down.

According to AusAID, "The reforms were designed to provide employers and trade unions with the freedom to negotiate wages and other terms and conditions of employment" (AusAID 1995:7). Under the reforms, government intervention in union affairs increased, with government administering strike ballot procedures and regulating industrial actions. The government determines when workers can go on strike, and those who do not comply can be held responsible for losses to industry during industrial actions. The 1991 reforms also withdrew workers' rights to check-off procedures, making collection of union dues a more complex and expensive process (Akram-Lodhi 1996:271; ICFTU 1997). As Akram-Lodhi put it: "The effect of these changes was to make it less likely that the 80 per cent of the formally employed labor force that belonged to trade unions, professional associations, or other similar organizations would assert their right to withdraw their labor" (Akram-Lodhi 1996:271).

The reforms to increase flexibility in the labour market have been accompanied by the government’s backing of Total Quality Management for industry in Fiji, exemplified in Rabuka’s closing speech at the 1993 Asia Pacific Foundation Forum:

Rabuka said he had learnt that TQM involved teams of employees continuously working together on improving processes and being empowered to institute changes which will bring about better customer service and greater customer satisfaction. "‘Working together’, ‘cakacakavata’ or ‘mil-jul ke kaam kar’ has been part of the cultures of the country’s major communities.” He told delegates that total quality management could be extremely valuable among other things, in eliminating the negative, costly and unproductive effects of industrial confrontations. (Review June 1993:49)
The government has also encouraged industry to implement the ISO 9000 accreditation system of quality control in its pursuit of flexibility and an internationally competitive labour market (WTO 1997:7).

**Loss of Preferential Market Access**

As noted above, one of the primary attractions of Fiji as a location for foreign garment manufacturers was the preferential access to the Australian, New Zealand and United States' markets. As governments bring their economic policies in line with the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the value of manufacturers’ preferential access from Fiji has begun to erode. Problems associated with loss of that preferential access began in 1992. That year, the Fiji garment industry underwent a temporary contraction related to the loss of the New Zealand market as the New Zealand government lifted tariffs as part of its free-market reform programme. Garment manufacturers in Fiji had benefited from free access to the New Zealand market since 1988 (Grynberg 1996b:26).

Where 55 per cent of Fiji's garment exports went to New Zealand as of 1989, by 1994 this figure had dropped to only 8 per cent (Chandra 1996:56). As a result, the United States' market became increasingly important. According to the World Bank (1995:41), by 1995, 43 per cent of garment exports went to Australia, and 41 per cent to the United States. The value of the preferential access under SPARTECA to the Australian market will be short-lived for Fiji's exporters as Australia reduces tariffs on other developing countries to zero by 2010 under the Bogor Declaration of APEC (Grynberg and Osei 1996:27). For the Asian-owned companies in Fiji that have taken advantage of a garment quota into the United States market under the MFA, the phase-out of the quota system and the loss of preferential access to the United States market will also hit soon (Grynberg 1996b:3; World Bank 1995:41).

The loss of the New Zealand market under the country’s trade liberalisation programme foreshadows the problems that face the Fiji garment industry because of its dependence on preferential access (Grynberg 1996b:21). Without preferential access, manufacturers in Fiji will be unable to compete in terms of price with products from lower-cost producing nations such as China because wages are relatively higher in Fiji. Despite a drop in real wages by 20 per cent between 1987 and 1993 as a result of the
currency devaluations (World Bank 1995:22), Chandra explains that, “Fiji is still a high wage country among developing countries” (Chandra 1996:58). Real wages in Fiji as of 1995 were reported to be “… several times higher than in Indonesia and 50 per cent higher than in Thailand in 1990” (AusAID 1995:61). Compounding the “high-wage” problem is the fact that productivity is considered to be low in Fiji. According to the World Bank, “Fijian labor productivity is relatively low because of high turnover and absenteeism, limited utilization of computerized design and cutting equipment, and the lack of specialized workers in design, pattern-cutting, and marketing” (World Bank 1995:42).

 Calls for Educational Reforms for Productivity

The lack of specialised workers has to do with industry pressure on Fiji’s national garment training centre, Garments Fiji Limited (GFL), to teach only the basics so trainees could be employed in the industry as soon as possible. GFL was instituted following advice from the World Bank (1987:86) to set up vocational training programmes to provide skilled workers for industry. The Fiji government is the sole shareholder of GFL (Jones 1994:46). Under pressure from the industry, the training programme was reduced to just three weeks of basic training. Grynberg’s recent survey of several garment manufacturers revealed that while some report the training to be adequate and others are indifferent to the programme, others find the training inadequate and favour in-house training to shape the skills of workers to their firm-specific needs (Grynberg 1996a:17). A general shortage of trained machinists has been a problem noted in the industry as contributing to low productivity (Fiji Times [FT] 3.6.95).

Firms surveyed in Grynberg’s research extended the blame for low productivity beyond lack of training to failure to inculcate a work ethic from primary school onwards (Grynberg 1996a:11). Chandra also criticised the overall educational system, “…the educational system is not tightly linked to the current and future needs of the economy…” (1996:60). The World Bank recommended that the government place a high priority on educational system reform and policy changes to stimulate training and boost productivity in industry (World Bank 1995:42, 53). A 1995 publication, “Human Resource Development: small Pacific island countries”, also asserted the link between
“education and training, social cohesion and sustained economic activity and growth” (Rawlinson 1996:95). Similar calls have come out of the National Economic Summit in Fiji, which “recommended reform of the education system to provide skills that are more relevant to employment opportunities” (AusAID 1995:18). Despite the calls for educational reform from various quarters, little has changed in practice, and the educational system in Fiji is not centralised to channel students through the schools and into the needs of industry.

The Industry Today

At the time of Grynberg’s survey of the garment industry, manufacturers who participated were for the most part optimistic about their short-term prospects. In order of importance, those surveyed listed the following as the most serious challenges confronting the garment industry: absenteeism, productivity, rules of origin, availability of workers, and finally, demand for product (Grynberg 1996a:ii). The manufacturers were aware of the looming loss of preferential access to the major markets, but hoped to successfully lobby the government through the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council, to push for changes in the rules of origin of SPARTECA which would allow them time to adjust to the free-market future of the industry. The lobby group wanted to substitute substantial transformation in four-digit Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) classification for the existing 50 per cent local content rule. Lobbying had successfully achieved a relaxation of the TFF rules through the 1996 Budget which granted tax-free status to factories exporting at least 80 per cent of their production, as opposed to the original 95 per cent (Vunibobo ctd in Chandra 1996:50). Most firms in Grynberg’s survey were even anticipating increases in production, and some planned to invest further in buildings and machinery (Grynberg 1996a:28, 30).

Despite new minimum wage regulations which came into effect in February 1997, bringing wages up from F$.72 per hour to F$.90 per hour for trainees, and from F$.94 to F$1.10 per hour for permanent staff (FT 22.2.97), the optimism noted in Grynberg’s survey does not extend to labour’s views on the industry, which since its inception has come under criticism for low wages and poor working conditions. When asked whether garment factory conditions could now be said to be improved, Labour Advisory Board member and former leader of the garment workers’ union, Ema
Druavesi, remarked, “Garment workers’ conditions cannot be described as overall improved because garment employers do not apply the agreed minimum wages order but picked [sic] only the order or legislation that favours them, for example, ‘that probation period has been extended from 3 months to 5 months’” (FT 24.2.97). Druavesi attributed part of the problem to the lack of spot checks by the Ministry of Labour.

The industry erupted into controversy in February 1997 when it was revealed that around 800 expatriate Asian workers were employed in the garment industry, and companies were accused of giving away jobs that were needed by the unemployed in Fiji (FT 19.2.97). Then in April 1997, the Fiji garment industry was in the spotlight in the New Zealand Herald [NZH], which cited the findings of a report lodged with the WTO by the ICFTU. The report included accusations of sweatshop conditions in the Fiji garment industry, including “long hours in poorly ventilated factories”, strip searches of workers, pay rates of just over one third of the poverty level wages, and lack of overtime pay (NZH 12.4.97). The ICFTU went so far as to assert that, “The Fijian government’s violation of core labour standards is an important part of their international trade and investment strategy.” Although the Fiji government had ratified ILO core labour standards with respect to trade union rights, it had failed to enforce them. The ICFTU linked this failure on the part of the government to the existence of low wages and poor working conditions. According to the ICFTU, the government response to these criticisms was that “it cannot improve labour rights as Fiji needs a cheap labour force to attract foreign direct investment and so increase exports.” In 1994, the government had amended the 1991 labour reforms – repealing the six-week validity period for union strike ballots, for example – however the ICFTU charged that the amendments were “selective and minor” and that overall the labour law situation has not improved. The ICFTU report also expressed concern that compulsion may be present in the contract labour system which brought workers to Fiji’s garment industry from Asia, and called for a review.

Investment in the garment industry had slowed in 1996, due in part to lack of investor confidence in the general economy because of the unresolved status of leaseholders under the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (ALTA), and uncertainty as to government intentions regarding reform of the ethnically-based constitution (Forsyth 1996:15-16). While the unanimous approval of a new constitution
and readmittance to the British Commonwealth in 1997 have partially allayed investors’ fears, uncertainty remains regarding ALTA. The potential loss of trade preference also compounds investor hesitation. Despite hopes that calls for a relaxation of SPARTECA’s rules of origin would be successful, the Australian government had other ideas. The announcement in September 1996 that the Australian government wants to phase out the SPARTECA agreement (FT 3.9.96) brought about an outcry by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council of Fiji, which predicted a resulting loss of F$50 million in investments, and from the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) because of the potential loss of at least 8000 jobs (FT 5.9.96). The loss of employment would have serious implications in Fiji, with open unemployment estimated to be between 15 and 20 per cent in 1996 (Forsyth 1996:11). Without preferential access for exports, Fiji’s garment manufacturers cannot compete in terms of price with lower-cost Asian manufacturers. One course of action recommended was to try to compete in terms of quick response to small orders – through just-in-time deliveries (World Bank 1995:42; AusAID 1995:78). Along these lines, the government of Fiji is currently considering how to “implement the recommendations of a study on trading and skill development in respect of niche markets in the clothing sector” (Trade Policy Review Body 1997).

Investment in the garment industry picked up again in 1997 – garment exports soared to F$250 million and were expected to break the F$300 million mark in 1998 (FT 17.2.98).

In summary, in contrast to the impact of the neo-liberal reform programme on the New Zealand garment industry, Fiji’s garment industry has boomed in the wake of the reforms, but would appear to face a much more uncertain future than the New Zealand industry. Employment in the industry reached 15,000 by April 1998 – 15 per cent of the total paid workforce in Fiji (FT 2.4.98). An estimated 90–95 per cent of workers are female (Forsyth 1996:10). Accurate quantitative assessment of the workforce is difficult because numbers are constantly changing as firms add on or layoff staff according to their needs. The implications of the entry of large numbers of women into the paid workforce for the first time in Fiji have yet to be investigated (Chandra 1996:54).

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3 Open unemployment includes the officially unemployed who are lacking work, seeking work and able to work, as well as the unofficially unemployed who lack work and are able to work, but are not seeking employment.
Case Studies

Introduction

The four case studies that follow offer an exploration into the experience of the garment workers whose cheap labour forms the basis of the government's strategy for international competitiveness. Their diverse experiences in the industry also bear out certain commonalities revealing the forces constraining their life choices and negotiation efforts. Siteri is a garment trainee at the national training centre for the industry (GFL). She was previously employed in one of Fiji's largest garment factories. The factory was organised according to a Taylorist progressive bundle production line, controlled by authoritarian supervisors. Rita works in a similar factory, large in size and utilising a Taylorist production line and authoritarian control. Viti and Lata work in medium sized firms. Viti's factory is more high tech than most, but still based on a Taylorist production line, and employees receive relatively high wages and are well treated. Finally, Lata is herself a supervisor, who struggles against management to take into account the circumstances of the employees when supervising the production lines in her factory.

Siteri and Viti are indigenous Fijian women: Siteri is a single mother, while Viti is married. Viti's husband also has an income, and they are expecting their first child. Rita and Lata are Indo-Fijians, both married to income earners, and both with two children. Siteri and Viti were interviewed in June 1996 – Siteri at the garment training centre and Viti outside her factory. Rita and Lata were interviewed in their homes in November 1996. All of the interviews were tape recorded, and the identifying details have been changed. Extensive passages from the interview transcripts have been included to illustrate the workers' situations as they perceive them. The selections presented aim to address the themes of why the women went into the garment industry, the positive and negative aspects they identify about their work, the extent of their resistance to the negative aspects, and their perspectives on their future prospects. The interviews do not address each of these areas equally as the workers were invited to identify and discuss the key issues of importance to each of them. While the interviews
cannot be said to be "representative" as no common denominator garment worker exists, taken together, the women's testimonies provide a window into the lives of garment workers in Fiji: where long hours of hard work, the double burden of home responsibilities, and constrained choices for the future are the norm.

Siteri

Siteri is a twenty-three year old Fijian woman, and she has one daughter. Siteri is undertaking the basic machinist course at GFL. During 1991 and 1992, Siteri worked for eighteen months at one of the largest garment factories in Fiji which employs around 1000 workers. Her sole task at the factory was measuring the waist for men's trousers, and hence she has no machining experience. Siteri first decided to enter into the garment industry after leaving school and then staying at home for a while. Siteri explained that she needed the work experience:

Siteri: I was applying for a flight attendant and they said since you just left school, you might as well get some experience, work experience anyway, so I thought of doing that, and then I will apply again later on.

The garment factory position was her first paid job outside of the home. After she left the factory, she worked as her father's secretary in the family business, and then decided to enrol in the garment training programme when she read about it in the newspaper:

Siteri: At home, the family has its own business. My father runs an aluminium plant, and we sell second hand, plus we have our Fijian farm. Then I saw this course appear suddenly on the paper, that's when I said, might as well do the course since it's free. You don't have to pay anything.

Siteri did not want to pass up the opportunity to learn new skills for free, as this kind of opportunity is rare in Fiji. In the introductory machinist course, Siteri is now learning how to operate the straight sewing machine, three-thread overlocker, and five-thread safety stitch. The trainees learn threading of the machines as well as machining skills. Siteri intends to continue on to do the cutting course, and eventually learn
production of shirts and trousers. She has found it easy to learn machining skills at the training centre, and she gives credit for this to her supervisor:

Siteri: My supervisor was a really nice man, he was patient, and he explained things well, whether we went to him a couple of times. [...] So we caught on.

Siteri plans to support herself with the skills she learns, but is unsure whether she will eventually seek employment in another factory, or be self-employed:

Siteri: I’m trying to gather as much experience as I can from all the training they give. And after that if I wish to join a factory then I will join, and if not, I can run my own business.

Because of the difficulty of saving money to invest in her own sewing machine, it is unlikely that Siteri will realise her dream of being self-employed. Her father has other plans for her – he is hoping that she will use her sewing skills in the family’s secondhand shop:

Siteri: My father thinks that it’s a good idea to come and take a course here, while it’s still... the fee is so low. ’Cause in time to come, you don’t know how much you’re gonna pay to attend a course like this. So he asked me if I could take all the courses and then since we’re running a second hand shop, then I could just have a tailor on the side, too.

Siteri has already decided that if she returns to factory employment, she wants to join the garment workers’ union. She was disturbed by the conditions she had endured for a year and a half, and believed the union could help:

Siteri: Well, as far as I’m concerned, I worked there for a year and a half, it was really slavery. They drive you just like one wild animal until you’re really exhausted. But if the union is there, anything you want they can just back you up. But if you want to say something and you’re not in the union, you want to fight for something, you can’t stand because the union is not there, so you have a disadvantage and it takes a lot of time. But if the union is there, you just give them what you want, and they’ll just go and accommodate and approach the factory manager or whatever he is.
No one had belonged to the union at Siteri’s former factory because it was not allowed, and as the garment workers’ union is now effectively defunct, despite her desire to participate in the union, Siteri will probably be unable to do so. Siteri was bitter about the conditions at her former factory:

Siteri: You know really, the supervisors, I mean, they push the workers too hard. You got about twenty trousers – especially for those cutting – you got twenty trousers you need to finish that within five minutes or something, you know it’s really strict. They don’t give you a certain time to ensure that you can cut up and be sure you don’t cut the trousers. They rush you and you end up cutting those trousers. Not enough time to... [...] Then they blame you again. And then they growl at you just like one dog. [...] Abusive language, and – what you call this – harassment. That goes on too inside the factories, especially from the supervisors.

Siteri felt that her supervisors had no understanding of the workers’ problems, such as the unreliability of transport to the factory, over which workers had no control, or production targets that were unrealistically high:

Siteri: They don’t take reasons why, they just want to do things their own way. They don’t care about difficult rate or miss your bus, how far you stay, as long as you reach there on time and you just follow their orders. Seems like orders. You go and work there just like working, sweating there, then you’ll have to do overtime. If you tell them you can’t do overtime, then they’ll force you to stay back for overtime.

Siteri’s wages at the factory were only 55 cents per hour. She usually earned between $22 and $25 per week. Out of that weekly income, she had to spend $20 to cover her boarding fee, which included food and accommodation, and then she tried to save the rest of her income. It was because of her bad experience in her first factory that she hopes she can be self-employed. Siteri has given up on working as a flight attendant. She is now back at home living with her parents. Her family is large – nine people in all – and the household responsibilities of cooking and cleaning are shared amongst the sisters.
Viti

Viti is a thirty-three year old Fijian woman who has six and a half years of experience working in the garment industry. She was married in December 1995, and is currently expecting her first child. Viti has been at her present factory for four and a half years (since 1992), and it is commonly considered by its 250 or so employees to be one of the best factories to work for in Suva. Before moving there, Viti worked in another factory during 1990 and 1991 – that was her very first paid job. Viti explained that she took her first job in the industry because she was just staying at home:

Viti: I don’t want to stay home, that’s why I came to work... just meet some people, come and enjoy myself.

When Viti took her first job, she was still living at home with her parents, and she thought they were quite happy that she was working:

Viti: They like it, they like it. They wanted me to get a job so I could occupy my life.

Viti had some experience in sewing dresses at home. When she took her first job, she was employed as a bartacker, and had to learn bartacking, which was completely different to straight sewing. The bartack machine sews a dense tack of stitches to fasten belt loops to trousers or to secure the open end of a buttonhole. Viti found it quite easy to learn to use the machine because she never switched to any other operations. While the work was easy, Viti had mixed feelings about her first job due to the monotony of doing repetitive work in the factory:

Viti: Sometimes I like it. Sometimes I feel bored. Just want to stay home, one day, two days, because I used to do the same work every day, sometimes I feel like to stay home... then the next day I come.

When Viti moved to her present factory in search of higher wages, she was trained to work as a straight sewing machinist. She works on the same machine every day, although she sometimes fills in on the bartacker because of her experience in that
operation. Viti is more familiar with straight sewing from making her own dresses at home. However Viti still finds her work in the factory very different to the sewing she did at home, and sometimes she is absent as a result of her boredom with the work:

Viti: At home you used to do all parts of the dress. If you sew a dress, you sew the full body. But in here I just attach the pockets. That’s all. [...] That’s why it’s boring, eh. Sometimes I feel like just staying home when I do the same work every day.

[Laughs]

Viti’s job is attaching pockets to shirt fronts. The pockets are first ironed around a paper card by women working in a pre-production pressing section. They fold the edges of the pocket under and then press them in place to make their shape more uniform, and also easier and quicker to sew onto the shirt fronts. Viti’s factory employs a large number of highly automated machines. The automatic pocket machine attaches pockets to shirts in a fraction of the time that it takes Viti to do it. The automated machines require “operators” rather than machinists. The operators keep the machines fed with material, and replace the cottons when they run out. Meanwhile, Viti works away doing the same task in the more traditional manner. Despite the tedium of repeating this operation all day, every day, Viti enjoys factory work because of the opportunities to socialise:

Viti: I just like communication with people eh, just have fun with them. Meeting the other people... [...] I enjoy with my friends. Sometimes when I feel bored to do any work I just stand up, roaming around the factory, go here, talk, yarn there. It’s good. I like it. Sometimes when I’m sick, back is paining, things like that, I stand up, roam around, feel better. But I like my job.

Viti’s back pain comes from sitting most of the day. She remains at her machine, and the supervisor brings her bundles of garments and takes away the ones she has finished. She is fortunate that her present employer allows her to walk around to stretch when she needs to. She can afford the time to stretch because her factory does not work according to a piece rate system – rather, all the machinists receive an hourly wage plus a bonus if they sew a certain percentage above their targets. Viti did not
identify her back pain as a major problem. For her, there was a more overriding negative aspect to her work:

CH: Anything that you don’t like about the job?

Viti: The wages. [laughs] Everything is okay but the wages. Everything is okay, you know, we... in some other factories, where I was working in [Factory 1]. I mean the supervisors are not too good, very strict, but in here it’s okay.

Viti found the wages too low despite her factory paying higher wages than most of the other factories in Suva. Viti does not intend to stay at the factory much longer. Because Viti is pregnant with her first child, she only expects to work for a few more months. It is unlikely that she will return to the factory soon after the baby is born:

Viti: I don’t know, I might ask my husband if he’s willing to look after the baby. If he’s not, I’ll stay home.

CH: Do you think he’ll be willing?

Viti: [Laughs]. He is going to Lebanon soon, maybe next week.

Viti’s husband is in the army, and will be in Lebanon for one year serving in the United Nations Peace-Keeping forces. Viti lives alone with her husband, and she is responsible for all of the housework, although he does help her with the cooking if he comes home early in the afternoon. Because they have two incomes, Viti is able to save some of her wages regularly, and she uses the remainder for a variety of expenses:

Viti: I save $10 every week, eh, for my banking. The rest I put it in my church tithe, some food and my bus fare. [...] Sometimes I’m buying things for the household. I’m paying the payment for Courts, things like that.

Viti has been able to buy some items for the household on hire purchase from Courts – the local appliance store. Once she stops working, the payments will have to come out of her husband’s salary. Viti also uses her income to support her parents and her niece – her brother’s daughter. Consequently, it is not only Viti and her husband who will be affected when she stops working. Despite the good working conditions in Viti’s
factory, her overall opinion of her job in the garment industry was determined by the wages she received:

Viti: Working in the factory is good. Only one thing, the wages is not good. We’re doing the same work every day we... In one day, we sew nearly a thousand, sometime more than a thousand shirts.

The shirts produced by Viti’s factory are exported to Australia, and she believed that they must sell for a lot of money there, most of which she thought went into the owner’s pocket:

Viti: They need money and we need the money too. While we are single, I mean, it will be okay for us, eh? Once we are married and we have kids, that’s the time that we really need money [...] If we had less wages and we have more expenses, that’s where it will be very hard for us to finalise our income, eh? It’s supposed to go, to buy, and support the kids, their busfares, their fees... Even me, my busfare from where I’m staying – I’m staying right from the village – every week I pay $15 for my busfare.

Viti was facing an increase in the bus fare to $20 per week. Most permanent machinists in Viti’s factory were earning between $1.10 and $1.50 per hour, amounting to a weekly income between $50 and $70. Thus bus fare alone consumed a significant chunk of Viti’s earnings each week. Viti’s inadequate wages are subsidised by the subsistence farming in the village where she lives:

Viti: My brother, sometimes he bring me food, like cassava, tavioka, because my husband is working and I’m working too. We stay in a Fijian village, and we just go and pull out some cassava when I need some cassava. But we buy the food: rice, sugar.

Viti is fortunate that she and her husband do not have the additional expense of rent because they live in a Fijian village. Despite her concerns about the low wages, Viti was uninterested in joining the garment workers’ union.
Rita

Rita is a thirty-two year old, Indo-Fijian woman who is married and has two children. She has seven years of experience in the garment industry, having worked as a straight sewing machinist for another of the largest garment factories in Fiji since 1989. She is one of approximately 1000 employees. Rita discussed why she decided to look for employment.

Rita: I was just staying home [...] My kids grown up, too. They went to school and I was feeling boring, and I thought of coming to work.

Rita’s limited education was a factor in her decision to seek a garment factory job. Because she had only been educated through Form 5, she did not think she would be qualified for any other work. She thought the garment training centre’s free training would give her the qualifications to find a good job in the industry. Rita completed six months of training at GFL. The training course was her first experience working outside the home, and her first experience sewing. The first three months, she learned to sew children’s wear, and the second three months she learned production of adult garments. She heard about the job opportunity at her present factory through the training centre instructors at the end of her course.

Rita’s factory produces men’s trousers for the American and Australian markets. When Rita began working at the factory, she initially did fly top stitching. Next she moved to bottom hemming, and then side seaming. For the past four years she has been enclosing the waistband on the trousers. Because she knows all the straight sewing operations in her line, she sometimes helps out on the other operations once she has met her daily target. Rita’s pay depends on her meeting her target under a bonus system. There are two kinds of waistband operations: one piece and two piece, and the daily target varies as the two piece operation takes longer. To reach the target, Rita must enclose 500 waistbands per day doing the one piece operation, or 450 two piece waistbands:

Rita: One hour we have to make 50, 45, 47, to cover our target end of the day. [...] At first, I was just making 20 per hour, 30, 35. It
goes up and up and up. Now it’s coming 50 per hour and I’m getting the bonus, too. End of the week they give $10 extra – $2 per day.

CH: Okay, if you reach the target you get $10 extra. So how much is the hourly wage?

Rita: Hourly rate is – beginning – $1.00.

CH: And then what’s the most you can hope to earn?

Rita: For a machinist, $1.30 per hour.

There is some flexibility in terms of meeting the targets. Rita explained that if a machinist came quite close to the target – like only five pieces short – then she might still receive the bonus. This is a matter for the supervisor’s discretion. The machinists must meet the target every day of the week, or else they do not receive any bonus pay for the days they did meet the target. The bonus is thereby related to attendance, because the machinist must turn up every day and meet the target every day to receive bonus pay. Because absenteeism was high in her factory, a new personnel officer had been brought in, and Rita remarked that now “they are after absentees”. She considered that absenteeism has declined as a result. The workers have to see the officer the day before they are going to be absent to defend their reasons:

Rita: Yeah, if he’s uncertain about that, you telling lies or, you know, something, then he won’t sign your form, then you have to come to work.

Rita asserted that the factory wants to know who is going to be absent so arrangements can be made to replace that machinist in the line. There is an additional reward system to boost attendance:

Rita: You got good attendance, they give the bus fare, too. [...] It’s the only company they giving the bus fare.

CH: How much do they give you?

Rita: Three dollars.

CH: If you come every day during the week?
Rita: Every day, yeah.

The $10 bonus is crucial to garment workers’ incomes, as it is approximately equal to one day’s earnings. The $3 bus fare is significant as well for some workers, and they will walk long distances to and from work so they can add this amount to their total weekly earnings. The normal working week is Monday through Friday, but Rita must sometimes work on Saturday if a shipment is scheduled to go on Monday or Tuesday. The machinists have to sign up to work on Saturday, and if they do not, then the supervisors will question them about why they refuse to work on the weekends.

I asked Rita what she likes and dislikes about her job. The things she appreciates are the bonus system and the opportunity to learn machining skills, but she finds negative aspects to her employment as well:

Rita: It’s a good idea to have a bonus system so that another machinist will say, “You know, she is getting that much, so why can’t I make that much and I will get that bonus too?” […]

CH: What other things do you like about being a factory worker?

Rita: Learning how to sew, cause I don’t know how to sew before. I learn how to sew, how to sit on the machine, it’s an industrial machine. I never used to sit on that machine. Learned all the operations. […]

CH: And are there any things about the job that you don’t like?

Rita: [extremely hushed] Yeah, it’s about the… [pause] it’s about the lunch hour. Our lunch hour is too short. […] Half an hour. And we have to do, mostly on Fridays, we have to do our shopping. We are just in a rush. Otherwise our target will drop. […] Sometimes we drop, you know? […] If not – we don’t cover that much – sometimes we get a growling, too. They will growl, “Oh you bitch, you...” All the swears. Even one mistake we do. Even if you sit on a buttonhole machine, if it cuts or if there is no stitch and you never see it and it’s already cut. You know buttonhole it’s always cutting. […] If you didn’t see there’s a loose stitch there, or missing stitch and you cut it – Oh, you really get a growling. They’re gonna swear, call you, say you all these bad words.
Rita described how a friend of hers who damaged a pair of trousers on the buttonhole machine was sworn at by the supervisors, told not to come back to the factory, and had her wages deducted. Her friend went to the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM) office for help, but the office was unsuccessful in preventing her wages from being deducted. The friend’s position was then filled by another woman who the factory trained as a replacement. Despite workers’ vulnerability and their need to have someone to campaign on their behalf, union membership is forbidden in her factory:

CH: Does anyone there belong to the union in your factory?

Rita: No one. No one. If anybody in the union, company won’t allow you to work.

Rita maintained that even if the prospective machinist were experienced and fast, she would be told, “Oh, no, no, no. We don’t have any job for you.” The company could thereby avoid fighting with the union over wage improvements.

One of the company’s strategies to get workers to work faster is the colour-card system. Above each of the machinists in Rita’s factory, colour-cards are posted that are visible to anyone on the production line. The cards indicate the experience of the machinists. White cards are for the learners, pink for those who have advanced somewhat, and green for those who are able to reach their targets. Rita clarified the purpose of the cards:

CH: Why do they have those cards up for everyone to see? [...] 

Rita: Just to challenge the other machinist, eh. So even if other supervisors can say, you see, “Look at that machinist. She just came about one month ago and she has improved, and look at you! You just have got white form, and you have not improved.” [...] So you know that’s a challenging job there. [...] Sometimes even supervisors tell us, “You come there, you doing this job, you making only this much. And look at that staff there – she just came two years before you and she is making that much.” So we have to just challenge and make more than her like.

The colour-card system serves as a control mechanism by fostering competition among workers who will not want to be seen publicly to be outdone by less experienced
workers. In addition to the colour-card system to challenge workers to sew faster, workers’ daily production is monitored by other means. In one section of the factory, workers record the quantity and style of the bundles they are sewing as they go along, and this information is used to calculate their targets. For Rita’s production line, where many of the workers do not know how to read or write, the machinists record their production by pressing a counter every time they finish sewing a piece. To prevent workers from trying to feign that they had sewn more than they had, the supervisors are constantly monitoring the line, and production is organised to help catch anyone who escapes their gaze:

Rita: Supervisor will be running, checking, checking. If anybody telling lies, they will be caught in the button hole. ‘Cause button hole – there’s one girl there. In all the other operations there is three, four, three, four people there. [...] If you were wrong with your counted work, you can tell in the button hole because button hole person she’s counting all that.

Rita enjoys the challenging aspects of her work. However she finds many problems with the way the supervisors treat the workers, and returning home to her domestic responsibilities in the evening is a heavy burden:

Rita: There’s plenty problems here. Some of the staff they don’t want to work overtime. They force them to do overtime. [...] Otherwise, “Tomorrow you don’t come to work or I’ll take you to the boss.” You know, sometimes we get frightened so we have to stay back and work. [...] Too much tension. Then come home here and go back to work!

CH: Yeah, cooking and... Two jobs.

Rita: Yeah. And that one, you know, they’ll just growl in front of all the staff – we have to stay back and work. “Who is going to do all this job?” You know? All the threats that we get. [...] You said you had plenty problems there, what are the other problems?

Rita: Oh, yeah. About the going out, going out to the toilet. Sometimes the supervisors, you know, they don’t allow us to go out. [...] “You going out, you have not taken your target out.
Wasting your time going to the toilet, how many times you going?” […]

CH: So if you want to go, do you have to ask the supervisor?

Rita: Supervisor, they are keeping one pass. That pass will go to the security. Security know that you’re going down.

Rita expressed concern that the machinists are allowed to use the toilet only two or three times a day, and after that security harasses them. Her explanation as to why management is so opposed to them using the toilets is revealing:

Rita: Some of the machinists they are taking more time in the toilet. You know, they just go and comb their hair, put lipstick and all that. And lipstick not allowed in our factory.

CH: Why is the lipstick not allowed?

Rita: Some of the machinists, when they get angry or, you know, some problem, they got it in the bag, they just try to put it on the trousers. […] And that lipstick won’t come out. They have tried so many things to clean the lipstick out.

CH: So why do they put the lipstick on the trousers instead of, like, you know, yelling at the supervisor or something?

Rita: Just like boss gonna growl at the supervisor, “How this things happen and you never see?” Supervisor will get a growling.

By marking the garments with lipstick, the workers in Rita’s factory have found a simple and effective way of resisting the abuse they get from the supervisors. Because they depend on the income from their factory jobs, they rely on such covert means of resistance as they are not even able to join a union to work for improvements in wages and conditions. The “No Lipstick” notices posted in numerous factories indicate that this resistance tactic is not limited to Rita’s workplace.

For urban women in Fiji with few educational qualifications, the garment industry is one of the only options to earn an income. Other options are paid domestic work, unskilled jobs in the tourism industry, and prostitution. With a maximum of $1.30 per hour in Rita’s factory, plus $10 a week if they consistently meet their targets, it is not surprising that many people look to migration out of Fiji as the only realistic
way to significantly improve their situations. Rita hopes that her family will become one of the fortunate ones able to migrate. Rita explained that she only planned to continue working at the factory for seven or eight more months. Then her family hoped to migrate to the United States in 1997. Rita is the one who saves her income toward that goal:

Rita: Every week I have to save, save, save. [...] My husband’s wages go on the rent and groceries, eh? Myself I have to just save my money.

CH: Okay, and what about the school fees?

Rita: Ooo, my husband’s wages all good for my family.

The family is fortunate that Rita’s husband is employed by the government, and earns enough to cover the family’s needs. Rita knows from talking to other workers during lunch that many women in her factory are the only income earner in the family, and spend all their weekly earnings on their basic needs. Despite the importance of Rita’s income to the family’s plans to migrate, her husband is not always supportive of her working:

CH: Okay, so how does he feel about you working?

Rita: Ooo! Sometimes he really get cross. Because sometimes I work ‘til 7 o’clock.

Rita’s husband considers that Rita’s primary role should be in the home, caring for the children and cooking for the family.

Lata

Lata is a twenty-eight year old Indo-Fijian woman. She is married and has two children. She has been working in the garment industry since she entered the industry as a fifteen-year-old in 1981. Because of her extensive experience and skill, she is now employed as the sole supervisor at a Suva factory. Lata’s responsibilities include supervising the workers, training new machinists, and making samples. Her factory
gets orders from overseas, and she makes the samples that are sent to determine whether her employer will secure the contract. Lata is paid $1.80 per hour for her work. Lata explained how she entered into the garment industry thirteen years ago after experimenting on the family’s manual machine at home:

Lata: Myself I just learn to sew on a machine that was a manual one, that’s not an automatic machine, not a power one. [...] We have to sew it with the leg. [...] Pedal with the leg. [...] That was home, but I was only sewing on one cloth to see how it goes. Then after that I went to [Factory 1]. [...] And that was my first factory there. So I went there, I learned plenty things there. I learned whole shirt, how to sew the shirt, shorts, plenty things I learned there.

CH: So why did you leave there?

Lata: Oh, from there, because of the wages. Because first when I start my work I get only 30 cents an hour. [...] From there, when I get an increasement in our wages – about 50 cents an hour.

CH: So why did you even work if your wage is so low?

Lata: So, we have to work. We can’t stay home like that, we have to work. [...] From there I shift to [Factory 2]. I worked there for about four or five years. My wages were 70 cents, 80 cents, 90 cents.

CH: So did they increase your wage?

Lata: Yeah, because they see the experience. [...] When they see my work, they give me the raise, 70 cents. [...] From there I went to [Factory 3]. That was a Chinese factory in Vatuwaqa. I worked there for... most probably seven years I worked there. [...] When first I start that was one dollar an hour I was getting. From there I just get to know everything from there. I learned how to sew all the machine. Any machine, I learn how to use it. Sew shirt, t-shirt, plenty things. After two years I worked there, then I was a sampler there. [...] After becoming a sample maker at her third factory, Lata lost her job when the factory was closed due to customs violations in 1993. She was hired by a fourth factory where she is still currently employed. The only other paid work Lata has ever done was as a sales attendant for six months just after leaving school. Lata prefers the garment factory work to sales because of the opportunity to learn production skills:
Lata: Well, in garments you can learn everything, how you sew, what you sew, what ever you want to sew you can sew it if you want to make it by yourself. So in sales we have to only stay... You can see plenty people coming, visit everybody, like that. But I think compared to the garments, I think garments – its good so we can learn production from it. We know what to do, know all the machines, it's easy for us to learn the things like that. But sales, I don't think you could probably learn because we only do sales there. Besides sales, we don’t do anything else.

Now that Lata is a supervisor, she is faced with a new set of problems distinct from those of the machinists. Lata considers her own problems to be worse because of the stress of being responsible for so many people, and the pressures on her from management. Lata is responsible for all the workers in her factory, where supervisors in most other factories only look after a section of the workforce:

Lata: Oh, machinist that’s a very good job. So you have to sit down, you don’t have to bother anybody. Sewing supervisor, you have to bother about everybody. You have to worry about everybody. Certain person is doing this or that, sew that like that. Any mistake comes, [the boss] doesn’t go to the machinist, just come on you: “How you check? You didn’t see this. You told them or not?” That’s all the supervisor’s problem.

CH: So it’s not like, I mean, “supervisor” sounds like one of the managers, but you’ve got a lot of pressure on you.

Lata: Yeah, plenty because some of the factories the supervisors only look after ten people there, that’s all. Ten person in a row, one supervisor there. Another ten, another supervisor there. But in my factory it’s not like that. It’s like whole factory there but I am the only supervisor in there.

In addition to the problems of supervising approximately 150 machinists, Lata finds it difficult to enforce management’s rules on the workers because of their personal circumstances:

Lata: We can’t be so strict to the staffs, too, eh, because we have to see them. Some of them they’re very old ladies, you know. And some of them sick so they want to come here for the money so we can’t tell them to move fast fast, like that. We can’t say
that to them. Because we understand that they are old enough to rest home, but because of the money maybe the home problems, they come to work.

The older workers in Lata’s factory are in their forties, and the youngest have come straight out of school – aged fifteen or sixteen years. The workforce in her factory consists of both Indo-Fijian and Fijian women, except for two men who are employed in the cutting section, and the mostly male managers. Whenever the factory has a vacancy, it is advertised in the Fiji Times, and Lata notes that applicants always turn up to apply for the positions.

Production in Lata’s factory is organised into lines according to the product being sewn. This organisation allows Lata to see where the work is piling up, and decide how to move work around accordingly:

Lata: We just sit one row like this, that’s the t-shirt row, we only sew for the t-shirts. Another row they just only sew short pants. [...] So that’s two rows there, and another row there that’s for the vest. So we see the products there and how they are coming. If sometimes the shorts plenty there, sometimes no more shorts order, no more vests order so everybody do the t-shirts. So we know which machine is going, step by step. The first operation, they do plackets, the second the top-stitch, third they do shoulder, fourth they do collar, like that. Collar top-stitch. We keep the machine in the same way [order]. So nobody has to go and put it [the work] there, take it there. No, it goes by itself. This one finish, same time put it in that other box. That one finish, another box. ‘Cause that will be easy. And we got two, three girls for the passing girls. If that one needs something, another cotton or bobbin, they have to report it and the girls take it.

Most of the machinists work on a particular machine regularly, however many know how to operate two or three machines. If someone is absent, Lata can move a machinist to cover for the absent machinist from a section which has enough workers according to the production coming through. The machinists work on a target system where they are paid a bonus for meeting a certain percentage of their target – the percentage and target vary according to the task. Workers must meet their target every day of the week to get the bonus pay, and if they are absent one day, it will be impossible for them to do enough work to receive a bonus. Hence, the target system is
geared to speed up production as well as reduce absenteeism. While workers in Lata’s factory are allowed to go to the toilet when they want to, the target system also has the effect of cutting back on the number of times workers use the toilet. According to Lata, many people deliberately do not reach the targets:

CH: Is that because they’re not going fast enough or the target’s too high?

Lata: No, no, because they don’t want to reach the targets so much, because they know that if they rush it, every day the boss is going to ask for the target. They don’t reach to the target, they get the hourly rate. Some of them don’t want the bonus because they said that if one day we rush and take the target out, second day, all this pain and they can’t do it second time, too. It is a problem – they don’t want to rush too much.

When the workers complain about being in pain, Lata tells them to slow down, but does not move the machinists to a different operation to give them a rest:

Lata: We just tell them to do it slowly, because sometimes they got pain here or headache, so we give the tablets, whatever. Sometimes massaging oil we give them to put it, so if they relax then they can do it fast. That’s my way, but the boss don’t allow that to do, but I know the ladies can’t do that much, so I just apply it like that.

Although Lata is a supervisor, she empathises with the machinists because of her own experience as a garment worker. Lata had several complaints about the conditions in her garment factory that affect her and the machinists in similar ways:

Lata: First thing, the wages is very less here. [...] Plenty ladies that coming from a long way. Just from here to 8 Miles, 9 Miles, that’s about ten or fifteen kilometres away from here. Some of them their wages very low, maybe 70 to 80 cents, and [...] the bus fare is about 50 cents one way, another way, 50 cents, that means $1.00 per day. They have to take $5 or $6 [out] one week, so what they’re gonna get? About $20, $25.

As Lata is a supervisor, she earns more than the machinists. Still, Lata felt that even her own wages of $1.80 per hour were too low:
Lata: Yes, the supervisor wages is not good. It should be higher than that – what we are getting now – should be higher than that. So, compared to New Zealand, it will be more there. So, if the work I am doing here, I’ll do there, I’m gonna get very much higher rate there.

After the wages, Lata was concerned about the length of the breaks at the factory. “Lunch hour” is only half an hour, and there is just one tea break in the morning that lasts fifteen minutes. Workers commonly eat their lunch during morning tea in order to attend to other business, such as going to the bank, during lunch time. Lata believes that generally speaking, the workers are happy at her factory, except for the low wages:

Lata: The workers, they are happy, but not happy with their wages. Because every year, they got an increasement, but not enough, only sometimes 5 cents, like that. Should be more increasement.

CH: And do they think the factory can afford to pay higher wages?

Lata: Yeah, they think that the factory is getting so much contract, then they must be getting the money, too. They blame to the owners that the owners don’t want to pay us that much, eh.

At present, no union is active in Fiji to campaign on behalf of garment workers for improvements in the wages or conditions:

Lata: The garment factories got no union. [...] But I don’t think they [management] want the union in Fiji because [...] if the union there, you can’t take any person out [fire them] for just nothing, and the wages is so less so you have to increase the wages, the boss has to increase the wages if the union is there. That’s why they don’t want the union.

CH: Right. But what about the workers, do you think they want the union?

Lata: Yeah, they want it because they know if the union is there, in any kind of problem, [...] the boss gonna take you out, the union, they’re gonna fight for you. So plenty people they need the union but I don’t think they are around in Fiji for the garment workers.
Lata does not believe the conditions in the Fiji garment industry will improve. She sees the forces constraining garment workers’ opportunities as international in nature, and too powerful to be affected by any action to improve conditions at the local level. Lata’s lack of optimism is quite evident in the way she talks about her country:

CH: Anything else about the conditions or anything?

Lata: [Laughs, then long pause]. Fiji very bad. No good. I don’t like Fiji anymore. [Laughs].

CH: Why?

Lata: Have to work very hard, then you get the money. No good. Because the wage very low, all the wage is very less, and very hard working here. I think that is why they got plenty contract for overseas. That’s why, because overseas people they want the less wages so that they get the contract this side. I think that’s why. Overseas they have to give the good rate – the wages should be good there, but in Fiji very less.

CH: So do you think it’s going to get better?

Lata: No. Maybe I wish if it get better. Everybody wish it get better.

Lata sees her personal prospects for improving her situation being limited to migration overseas. Lata is waiting for an opportunity to migrate, as she believes wages and conditions in the garment industry must be better overseas:

Lata: One of my friends she is a Chinese one, she came from New Zealand too, she write a letter and she told me that if she needs anybody to work coming over there then they will call me. [...] Most probably in New Zealand, Australia, they need workers who got experience. I don’t think that New Zealand... how they get hourly rate there?

CH: No, a lot of them are on the bonus system. [...] 

Lata: But it’s good the bonus system. [...] As much as you take it out [the target] you’re gonna get the money that much. Reach your target, you’ll get the money.

CH: But what about the problem like when you work so fast you ruin your health?
Lata: Yeah, but in this situation in New Zealand, if you are there, then it means that you get good feelings, your health will be good, everything. But here we don’t get to eat, lunch hour, tea time sometimes we got the money then they eat. If no money then they don’t eat. That’s why maybe they feel illness or sickness to work all that. [...] If the wages enough, then they can do plenty things they want. They can do the work, whatever they’re told to.

It is unlikely that Lata’s family will be able to emigrate unless an overseas garment factory sponsors them to take advantage of her skills. Although Lata and her husband are both working, they are unable to save any money towards emigration as all their earnings are spent on their basic needs:

Lata: Because we have our rent here, we have to pay electricity, telephone, water bills, plus our groceries, for something we have to buy for the kids, this and that, so I don’t think that I can save money, because the wages is less too, so it’s very hard for me. [...] And because some of the ladies working with us, they got only one person with income there, that is the one person working with us. The wife working, they got two, three kids, she must be only one person for the house. Very hard. I don’t know, sometimes I just imagine how these people can do it. If I got two person income here and we can’t save anything, how can these people do it, because they’ve got two, three kids? It’s very hard.

Lata says her husband is happy that she is working because one income is not enough to cover their expenses. Even with two incomes, they can only afford a small flat, and their living conditions are very cramped. Lata’s flat is in a complex where many Indo-Fijian garment workers live. The flat has a small kitchen, small bedroom, and lounge which has three beds in it. The flat costs $180 per month and six people live there – Lata, her husband and two children, and two adult relatives. One of the relatives is Lata’s mother-in-law, and she does much of the domestic work while Lata is at the factory:

CH: At home, who is responsible for cooking and cleaning and all that?
Lata: Oh, but, I’ve got my mother in law, so I go to work, she do the housework, look after my son, like that. But in the afternoon I come and wash the clothes, do the ironing.

CH: So do you think you’re working all day?

Lata: All day. No rest! [laughs]

CH: When do you get your rest?

Lata: Ooo! When I go to sleep [laughs] that is the time.

The hours of work for the machinists at Lata’s factory are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lata stays at the factory until 6 o’clock Monday through Thursday while the factory is cleaned and locked up. The shipments usually leave the factory around 4:30 on Friday, so Lata is able to rush home at 5, and then to town to do the weekly shopping for the household. Sometimes the factory is also open on Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon. On Friday, the work is assessed to determine how much work needs to be done on Saturday. Then those machinists who want to work sign up. Lata asserted that most machinists do want to work, because they get paid time-and-a-half for the half-day. Unlike some infamous factories in Fiji, Lata’s factory provides the minimum wages and conditions stipulated in the law, including overtime pay, five days of sick leave per year, and maternity leave.

Case Studies Discussed

While women in Fiji experience their entry into the garment industry as the product of their individual choices, their entry into the industry must be viewed in light of both societal attitudes and more concrete constraints on the choices available to women. Cultural and religious attitudes with respect to women’s roles in society are a significant influence on women’s entry into employment:

There are, to be sure, important differences between the country’s major ethnic groups – indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians – yet both traditionally have had well defined and sharp divisions between the economic roles of women and men. These social practices have their counterpart in strongly held beliefs defining appropriate and different

The family and community in Fiji have traditionally considered women’s appropriate roles to be as wives and mothers (Leckie 1997a:140). Because of the emphasis on women’s reproductive roles, women historically received less education than men, amounting to fewer employment options. The kind of education received also compounded women’s lack of qualifications. One of the implications of the history of British colonisation in Fiji between 1874 and 1970 was a colonial education system segregated according to gender and ethnicity, and inculcating “missionary ideals of femininity and appropriate education” based on gender stereotypes about work (Leckie 1997a:129, 136-7). These gender ideologies about women’s proper roles in society persist in the present day. Schools play a particularly significant role in socialising attitudes about appropriate gender roles:

They inculcate behavioral patterns and social norms among students, including patterns and norms regarding the socially sanctioned roles of males and females. These non-cognitive aspects of schooling are often deeply embedded in the forms as well as the content of the curriculum, but they also appear in the sorts of programmes, and ultimate careers, toward which girls and boys are directed by their teachers and guidance counselors. (ILO/UNDP 1997:21)

Gender ideologies ingrained in education combine with family and community expectations about women’s appropriate roles, and affect women’s own choices about family responsibilities, educational and employment opportunities (Leckie 1997a:136; ILO/UNDP 1997:3).

Limitations on women’s choices about entry into employment include more concrete constraints as well. Male violence against women is a common way that societal attitudes toward women’s appropriate roles are enforced (ILO/UNDP 1997:22). Direct discrimination against women in hiring and promotion also restricts women’s exercise of choice (ILO/UNDP 1997:2). Employers utilise the cultural stereotypes of women as dependent and men as responsible for the family income to justify their preference for women employees and the low wages the women receive (Leckie 1997a:134, 141). Finally, a fundamental constraint is the responsibility ascribed to
women as caregivers for the family, which again has implications on women’s access to training and employment opportunities (ILO/UNDP 1997:22).

The responses of the four interviewees as to why they went into the garment industry were varied. Siteri wanted the work experience – she planned to use the garment industry as a stepping stone to a more desirable job as a flight attendant. She has now abandoned this goal, and is learning as much as she can in the training centre with the aim of starting her own tailoring business, returning to factory work, or working in the family’s shop as a tailor. A major reason why Siteri is doing the various training courses is because they are free, and she wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to learn garment production skills before she would have to pay for it.

Viti expressed that she came into the garment industry because she did not want to remain at home anymore but instead meet people and enjoy herself. She said that her parents were happy about her working for similar reasons – “They wanted me to get a job so I could occupy my life.” After six and a half years in the industry, it is going to be an adjustment for her to lose her income when she leaves the job to have her baby. As a result of her income, she and her husband have been able to save money, and purchase some household items. Viti and her husband are not the only ones who will have to adjust – she has also been supporting her niece and her parents with her wages.

Rita’s sentiments on why she entered into the industry were similar to Viti’s: she became bored at home when her children attended school. Rita’s limited educational background meant she did not have many options. She enrolled in the training school as it was free, and had six months of training there before beginning her career in the industry. Now the family depends on Rita’s savings from her work if they are to be able to realise their goal of migrating overseas. Finally, Lata acknowledged that she had to go to work for the money, even though her wages were initially only 30 cents an hour in 1981. Despite having two incomes, she and her husband are unable to save any money as it is all spent on the family’s basic needs.

While their initial motivations varied, the entry of all four women into the garment industry had to do with having limited job opportunities, and no real options to have further training to improve their employment prospects. While the first three did not express an economic motivation as the reason for their entry into the industry, clearly their wages are crucial to each of their families – whether this goes towards meeting immediate needs, or enabling savings for the future. As most of the women...
themselves did not identify economic necessity as their initial reason for entering into the industry, it is not surprising that employers surveyed by Grynberg (1996:11) did not think that most workers needed the money they earned either.

However a look beyond their immediate responses reveals the significance of the low wages to each woman’s experience. In 1991 and 1992, Siteri’s wages were so low – 55 cents per hour – that she had only $3 to $5 left each week after paying for her food and accommodation, and such low earnings would make saving to start her own business impossible. Viti asserted that she initially went into the industry because of the opportunities to socialise, however she then moved to her present factory in search of higher wages. Machinists there earn between $50 and $70 per week. She finds even these wages not enough. Viti felt that her situation was tolerable as long as she had no dependents. With her first child on the way, she anticipated having more expenses to meet and that such low wages would make this extremely difficult. For Rita, her husband’s income was sufficient to meet the family’s needs, but their future prospects depended on Rita saving her earnings. Rita noted that many garment workers in her factory were the sole supporter of their families, and were unable to save any money. Machinists in Rita’s factory earned $45 to $60 per week, plus $10 if they earned the bonus, and $3 for the bus fare based on their attendance. Finally, Lata was paid higher wages ($80 per week) as a supervisor than any of the other three, but her own income plus her husband’s were insufficient to save any money. Lata also testified to the problems of women in her factory who were the sole supporter of the family. Most machinists in Lata’s factory earned only $30 to $35 per week. Lata could not imagine how they survived when with two incomes, Lata and her husband are unable to save anything.

The case studies indicate that the primary factor constraining the positive aspects of garment work for the women is the low wages. The positive aspects suggested by the case studies are the opportunity to learn skills, the ability to socialise, and the broadening of women’s life choices. For some of the women, paid work was an alternative to the isolation of staying at home once the children had entered school. The women wanted to do something with their lives, and garment work became “an

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4 Bryant’s (1993) *Urban Poverty and the Environment in the South Pacific* found that a weekly income of F$72.37 was necessary to meet the basic living costs of an average household of six in Fiji in 1991 (ctd in Leckie 1997a:152).
essential element in the path to self-realization” (Miller and Rose 1990:27). With poor educational backgrounds and financial inability to pursue further training, the garment industry has offered women another option in addition to domestic work, unskilled jobs in the tourism industry, and prostitution. Women utilise garment industry jobs to try to achieve their aspirations. Still, the low wages in the garment industry result in poverty, especially for women who are sole supporters of a family, and crowded living conditions and inability to save for the future even for some garment workers in two income families. Garment workers whose husbands are well paid, or who have no dependents, seem to have the best situations.

In addition to the low wages, the organisation of production, with its accompanying control mechanisms, is a constraint on the positive aspects of garment work for the women. All of the women in the case studies worked in factories employing progressive bundle production lines, and this Taylorist manner of organising the labour process is the most common in the Fiji garment industry. Machinists in this type of production usually work at one particular machine, and they perform only minute parts of the garment production. After performing their task, machinists push the work along to the next machinist in the line from their seated positions. Either supervisors or “passing girls”, as Rita called them, move the completed work along to its next destination when it reaches the end of the line. Large firms may employ an overhead rail system to facilitate the movement of work around the factory in place of progressive bundle production. Hanging garments are presented to the machinists one by one, reducing time spent on interoperation handing vis-à-vis the bundle system. Some firms have only recently implemented rail systems, reflecting their commitment to a Taylorist production process at least for the medium term.

Where machinists know how to operate more than one machine because of their years of experience in the industry, they are sometimes moved to work on different operations, especially to cover for absent machinists. However there is not a major move towards “multiskilling” in Fiji (Jones 1994:52). On the contrary, the extent of the deskilling associated with Taylorist labour processes in Fiji is evident in the reduction in the length of the training programme at GFL. Basic training used to last for eight weeks, with the option to continue with more advanced courses. The basic training at GFL has now been reduced to three weeks as a result of lobbying by the employers. Siteri’s case study illustrated the extent of the deskilling. She worked in a garment
factory solely measuring waistbands for a year and a half. She had not learned how to
sew, nor did she possess any skills that would transfer out of the workplace. Her
experience parallels that of many other unskilled workers in the industry. While the
acquisition of skills is one of the positive aspects about garment factory work identified
by the interviewees, the opportunity to acquire skills is constrained by the breaking
down of production into minute tasks in the Taylorist labour process.

Not all factories employ Taylorist production processes. Recently a small
number of factories have experimented with module and stand-up production. Under
module production or “teamwork”, workers are organised into “nests”, often “U”
shaped, employing between five and ten machinists who make up the entire garment.
Two factories visited during the course of the research were employing teamwork. One
was a large factory that was mostly organised in a series of Taylorist lines. A small
stand-up teamwork section had been implemented on an experimental basis. The other
factory was entirely organised into U-shaped nests, and machinists worked sitting down.
A manager at the latter factory explained that the decision to restructure from a
production line to module production was made because module production reduces
work in progress, makes it easier to catch faults, and easier to control. In theory, the
teams are composed of “team members who are skilled in more than one operation and
who can make decisions for themselves about how best to utilize the skills of the team”
(NEDO, 1991, ctd in McLellan, et al. 1996:204). In practice, at this factory, the
supervisor of each nest determined where the machinists should work depending on the
operation they performed best. Most machinists had no more skills than those
employed in factories with progressive bundle production. Again, in theory, the
machinists in module production were meant to “work collectively in teams, making
joint decisions and sharing responsibility for the teams [sic] output...” (Nottinghamshire
Work and Technology Programme, ctd in McLellan, et al. 1996:204). In practice,
despite the video monitoring system through which the managers could monitor any
area of the factory at any time without the workers’ knowledge, there was a rampant
theft problem with workers stealing garments and supplies, and the company was
having to fire workers as a result.

The limited existence of module production aside, Taylorist organisation of
production prevails in the Fiji garment industry. Another drawback to garment work
that emerged from Rita and Siteri’s case studies was the strict control by authoritarian
supervisors that accompanied the Taylorist labour process. Siteri noted the verbal abuse and harassment of workers in her factory, while Rita described how supervisors threaten and swear at the workers. Managers in Jones’s survey (1994) saw the role of the supervisor as training the workers into a work ethic. The “rather aggressive manner” used by supervisors in their dealings with workers was identified as a concern in Jones’s research. One employer noted the supervisors’ “tendency to ‘over discipline’”, and another described their use of “the big stick” approach (Jones 1994:54-5). Supervisors in most firms surveyed by Jones were recruited from within the factory. Some recruits completed the supervising course at GFL as preparation, but others had no training. Recruits from inside the firm were preferred because of their familiarity with the production process, and their ability to communicate with the workforce easily. Unfortunately it is the supervisors’ communication style that constitutes another negative aspect of the working experience of garment workers. Viti’s experience reveals that an authoritarian style on the part of supervisors does not have to accompany a Taylorist labour process. Instead, the relatively higher wages in Viti’s factory appear to have been sufficient motivation for workers to perform as management desired.

Another negative aspect of the deskilling of the labour process is the boredom of repetitive work all day, every day. This has implications for workers’ health:

The most stressful situation in ergonomic terms arises when machinists are working on the traditional production line under Taylorist management techniques. In these circumstances machinists perform specialized operations, repeating the motions over and over again, using the same few muscles continuously, resulting in fatigue and potentially Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). (Brotherton 1993, ctd in McLellan, et al. 1996:208)

Viti recounted being in pain as a result of performing the same minute operation repeatedly. Lata discussed having to give the machinists in her factory massaging oil so that they could relax tired muscles and try to sew faster. Reports of pain by the workers are not uncommon, and are likely due to Occupational Overuse Syndrome, also known as Repetitive Strain, or Repetitive Stress Injury. While there is consciousness of this disease in countries such as New Zealand and Australia, there seems to be no awareness or education about its causes or prevention in Fiji. Jones reported that the health and
safety measures in the factories she surveyed were “either non-existent or carried out incidentally” (1994:57).

Ironically, while employers choose to utilise a Taylorist labour process for the ease of control, it is likely that the features of this system intensify the firms’ biggest problems of high absenteeism, high staff turnover, and low productivity. Viti noted that she sometimes stays home from work just to have a rest from the boredom and discomfort of repetitive work, and these reasons are also likely to be a factor in the absence of other workers. It is probable that turnover in the garment industry is also related to OOS, as once the disease becomes advanced, it is extremely difficult and detrimental to garment workers’ health to continue the task that caused the problem in the first place. With respect to low productivity, Lata explained about the reluctance of workers in her factory to even try to reach their targets because they knew they would end up in pain and be unable to work the next day.

Despite the drawbacks of Taylorist production, it is the preferred way of organising the labour process amongst Fiji garment manufacturers. The story of Rita’s friend who was fired and quickly replaced after damaging a pair of trousers tells us why. A deskillled production process, combined with the high unemployment in Fiji, means that workers are easily replaceable. Being easily replaced results in vulnerability and disempowerment for workers, as the threat of being fired could easily be carried out with little expense to the employer when some jobs can be learned in a matter of days. Lata mentioned that whenever her employer advertises a vacancy, applicants turn up to fill it. An owner of a large factory interviewed for this research stated that twenty-five to thirty people queue up for work outside the factory every Monday. In effect, these conditions in the labour market serve to limit workers’ ability to take any action to improve their conditions.

Another control mechanism employed outside of production itself is the engendering of loyalty among the workers through debt. For example, one factory subsidises $20 of the cost of eye glasses for garment workers. As the glasses cost $80, workers borrow the balance of $60 from the company, and have to make regular payments. In addition to the reduction of absenteeism due to employees’ need to earn enough to make their repayments, this scheme is geared towards improving productivity because workers will be better able to see what they are doing. Debt is further manipulated by some employers as a means of reducing absenteeism through provision
of loans for school fees at the beginning of each year. Workers also incur debts outside the workplace. For example, Viti asserted that she had been able to make payments on items purchased from Courts with her wages. One employer mentioned his hope that workers’ hire-purchases from appliance stores like Courts and Morris Hedstrom would ultimately have a similar effect on absenteeism and turnover in his factory. The function of debt as a control mechanism on garment workers was paralleled in Fiji’s tuna-canning industry until recently (Emberson-Bain 1994:163). Cannery workers in the Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) avoided destitution by subsidising their low wages with loans to meet their living expenses. The high interest rate of sixteen per cent on the loans made breaking out of the “debt cycle” extremely difficult (Emberson-Bain 1994:163). One worker recounted, “One thing that really oppresses us women who work for PAFCO is the bank loans. They have imprisoned us, we are slaves to our work” (Emberson-Bain 1994:164).

The control mechanisms inside and outside the production process have been made possible by the role of the state. The overall free-market approach of the government in recent years has played an instrumental role making low wages the basis of the country’s strategy for international competitiveness. The increasing poverty resulting from devaluations of the currency and the implementation of a Value Added Tax left many workers little choice but to accept the poorly paid garment factory jobs. Apart from the general free-market programme, the role of the state in permitting employers’ poor treatment of garment workers is evident in terms of the legislation in force to regulate the industry, as well as the actual practice of law enforcement. The practice of enforcement of the law allows the poor conditions and low wages experienced by women garment factory workers to prevail even where the workers are protected on paper.

Emberson-Bain (1995) details the legislation that discriminates against women garment workers. There is no overall minimum wage in Fiji, and minimum wages in particular industries are set under the Wages Council Act. The Wages Council Act is discriminatory with respect to both wages and leave for the garment industry. The Act mandates wages for the garment industry, where the majority of workers are women, which are considerably less than for all other industries in the manufacturing sector. As of 1995, minimum hourly starting rates in the garment industry were set at $.72 for trainees, and $.94 for permanent staff. The minimum wage for the rest of the
manufacturing sector was $1.50 per hour. Even when garment industry wages were increased in February 1997 to starting rates of $.90 for trainees and $1.10 for permanent employees, the wages still were not increased enough to match those of the rest of the manufacturing sector. This discriminatory legislation reflects the power of the garment manufacturers’ federation as a lobby group which has pressured the government to keep wages low in this industry (Emberson-Bain 1995:24). The employers’ arguments about their inability to survive if forced to pay a minimum wage of $1.50 per hour have obviously had more affect than the arguments that garment workers’ low wages make their survival precarious. With respect to leave, the Wages Council Act limits sick leave for garment workers to five days per year, and they can only gain this right after three months of employment. In the rest of the manufacturing sector, workers receive ten days of sick leave per year, and there is no minimum period of employment that must be observed (Emberson-Bain 1995:24).

The Employment Act is biased towards employers because inspectors must give twenty-four hours notice before entering a factory, and during their visit they must be escorted around the factory by a member of the management. Penalties for obstructing an inspection or for violations of the Act are ridiculously low, with a maximum fine of F$200 and/or maximum six month prison sentence for these offences (Emberson-Bain 1995:7). (Penalties associated with the Wages Council Act are even less – F$40 for obstructing an inspector, and a maximum of F$100 or three months in prison for a violation). Emberson-Bain documents the Labour Department’s lack of human and financial resources. As of 1994, a total of just twelve Labour Department Inspectors shared the use of one landrover for transport, making enforcement of the Employment Act’s provisions in the country’s numerous industries impossible, although inspection of each enterprise is meant to occur annually (Emberson-Bain 1995:6). In addition to the government’s lack of financial commitment to enforcement of legislation, there have been allegations of collusion between the government and some employers, and a reluctance on the part of inspectors to prosecute employers for violations (Emberson-Bain 1995:5-6). The same problems of enforcement constrained the effectiveness of the Factories Act, which regulated health and safety in industries in Fiji until June 1996 when the new Health and Safety at Work Act was implemented (Emberson-Bain 1995:22).
Finally, the Workmen’s [sic] Compensation Act does not award compensation for the vast majority of illnesses and injuries that garment workers commonly experience. The Act, which provides for the expenses associated with an illness or injury acquired at work to be paid, identifies diseases qualifying for compensation according to a list compiled in 1964! OOS has since then been identified as a compensatable disease in New Zealand, Australia, and many other countries (Emberson-Bain 1995:19). A variety of other common health complaints by garment workers do not qualify for compensation: “They include dust-induced respiratory illnesses like asthma, eyesight problems, aggravated headaches and backache...” (Emberson-Bain 1995:19). The Workmen’s Compensation Act is under review in 1998, and the Wages Council Act, Employment Act, and Factories Act, are likewise in need of reform if the subordination of women garment factory workers is not to remain entrenched in the law, and in the execution of it.

A further example of slack enforcement practices by the state is its failure to enforce the ILO core labour standards it has ratified, which uphold trade union rights. The absence of a union to campaign for improvements in workers’ conditions and wages can be partly attributed to the state’s actions with respect to trade unions. For example, in 1974, the Fiji Government ratified ILO Convention No. 98 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949. One of the articles of the convention prohibits making employment of a worker subject to the condition that she not join a union. The dismissal of a worker for belonging to a union is likewise prohibited (ILO 1998). In spite of the government’s obligations under the convention, both Rita and Siteri explained that workers in their factories were not allowed to join a union. Instead of honouring its obligations under the ILO Conventions, the Fiji government proceeded with the 1991 “labour reforms” to break the power of the union movement. Since the 1991 reforms, the government has not recognised the legitimacy as a conciliatory body of the Fiji Association of Garment Workers (FAGW), established in 1989 by the Fiji Trades Union Congress (Ram 1991:82-3). The government’s refusal to recognise the FAGW has undoubtedly contributed to the decline in membership and the inactive status of the association at the present time. Without the association, women face a number of difficulties in pursuing their rights through court action:
Women lack economic power to afford making expensive complaints in court... Women also tend to be reluctant to issue a complaint because of the stigma which will be imposed upon them by society and fellow workers. Another reason for not submitting complaints is the limited knowledge women have about their workers' rights. (ILO/UNDP 1997:41)

Underlying the role of the state in reinforcing employers' control mechanisms is the ideology of patriarchy. Patriarchal ideology justifies the legislation mandating lower wages for women garment factory workers than other manufacturing workers. The bias against women in the laws of Fiji stems from the dominant culture's patriarchal gender ideologies, which consider the subordinate status of women in society as legitimate (Emberson-Bain 1995:1). The result is that women are employed in the garment industry because they cost less than men, they are unorganised, and their low wages are justified by the argument that they do not depend on the income they earn as they are only supplemental earners to their husbands or fathers on whom they depend. As well as working through the state, patriarchal ideology functions in the domestic realm where it spells a double burden for women garment workers. Domestic responsibilities on top of the long hard hours of work in the factory leave the women no time to rest, and little time to resist.

In sum, the constraints on the positive aspects of garment work for women arise from:

- the employers through low wages and numerous controls associated with the organisation of production;
- the state through legislation favouring employers over employees, and legalising discriminatory pay rates, and through enforcement practices biased towards employers;
- patriarchy, which underlies discrimination against garment workers in legislation, and their double burden in the family.

Women's negotiation of these constraints on their employment situations is affected by a combination of women's culturally and historically constructed "gender identities", and more concrete limitations (Leckie 1997a:127). Gender identities carried from family and community into employment affect women's attempts at collective bargaining over wages and conditions (Leckie 1997a:144):
A number of barriers still exist to women's involvement in trade union action. These include cultural factors, family responsibilities, lack of knowledge about union activities and lack of confidence, a gender-based attitude of male trade unionists, the attitude of the husbands or meetings at unsuitable hours. (FTUC, ctd in ILO/UNDP 1997:40)

Cultural and religious values of "non-confrontation, love and unity" also have implications for workers' willingness to campaign for improvements in wages and conditions (Emerson-Bain 1994:160). Employers may play on these values to obscure the authoritarianism of workplace regulations, bring about loyalty to the company, and pacify militants (Emerson-Bain 1994:160). Additionally, the local context enhances workers' susceptibility to control through means such as the colour card system, or through public reprimands. As Leckie notes, "The inflicting of public shame is highly distressing in many Pacific cultures" (1997a:142).

More concrete constraints on negotiation of employment situations include the brief history of manufacturing industries in Fiji, and widespread poverty. Manufacturing on a large scale is new to Fiji and to the women who labour in the factories, as the country historically depended on exports of raw materials and agricultural products. Women's lack of experience of industrial work and unionisation affects their ability to negotiate their situations (Leckie 1997a:129, 134). Poverty affects over a quarter of the population of Fiji and also constrains women's negotiation efforts (UNDP 1997, ctd in Leckie 1997a:143). Poverty exacerbates women's vulnerability, making employment security particularly important. This vulnerability:

...mitigates against being assertive and organising in the workplace. Garment workers have been afraid of losing jobs if they complain or join a union. Many of these women are sole income earners for their families and must meet expenditure for food, housing, transport, electricity, water, education and other necessities. (Leckie 1997a:143)

What resistance have garment workers been able to mount? Unorganised resistance to the constraints of their employment situations has taken a variety of forms. Smearing lipstick on the garments in the production line is an example illustrated by Rita's case. Workers have also been known to cut expensive materials so as to ruin the garment. These types of resistance give garment workers some relief from the frustrations of dealing with abusive supervisors, but are unlikely to improve their
material conditions. Other examples of such resistance include staying home when they are bored of the work and want to have a rest, and staying in the toilet for similar reasons. This is not to diminish other reasons for women’s absenteeism such as personal illness, or continuing to have all the traditional responsibilities for family caregiving in times of sickness. These factors in women’s absenteeism are compounded by the stress of their lives, their poverty, and the prevalence of domestic violence (Forsyth 1996, ctd in ILO/UNDP 1997:41). Being denied toilet breaks at work may also provoke resistance. In addition to the discomfort, toilet inaccessibility can have serious health implications. Stealing garments or supplies from the factory is one type of resistance that may actually improve women’s short-term material conditions. Workers certainly could never afford to purchase any of the garments they produce.

Organised resistance was facilitated by the Fiji Association of Garment Workers. A number of industrial actions in 1990 and 1991 achieved improvements in wages and conditions in the garment industry. Leckie (1992:10-12) details worker militancy in that period over grievances related to pay and working conditions: long hours, excessively heavy work loads, strip searches, and denial of tea breaks, toilet visits, overtime pay, sick pay and annual leave. Workers became easily disillusioned with the FAGW when the union turned out not to be a quick fix for their employment woes. Corruption in the union leadership contributed to worker disaffection. The FAGW is now defunct, and efforts to improve the low wages and poor conditions of the garment workers are limited to the activities of the Fiji Trades Union Congress and the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement.

The FTUC campaigns for improvements in workers’ wages and conditions, and to retain jobs against the threat of capital flight. The FWRM has pressured the government to change the clauses discriminating against women in legislation such as the Wages Council Act, Employment Act and Fiji National Provident Fund Act. The FWRM has tried to increase enforcement of the regulatory clauses in the same legislation, and also in the Factories Act and Workmen’s Compensation Act, which are designed to protect workers from abuses. In addition, the FWRM serves as a body which garment workers can contact anonymously regarding abuses of their rights without fear of losing their employment. The FWRM then contacts the Labour Department on the workers’ behalf and pressures for workers’ complaints to be investigated. Another important part of the FWRM’s work has been its efforts toward
“legal literacy” of the garment workers themselves, so they will know what their rights are and when they are being violated. Finally, the FWRM struggles to educate the general public about the gender ideologies which keep women in a subordinate position in society and serve to justify the poor wages and conditions for women in the garment industry. However, the efforts of the FWRM have been unsuccessful in changing the government’s strategy for pursuit of international competitiveness based on the low wages of women workers.

In light of the many constraints on their opportunities and the limitations of the organised resistance, how do women garment workers cope with their situations, and what are their future prospects? Some garment workers are subsidised by the subsistence economy. Viti’s case study indicates that her income was subsidised by living in a Fijian village and having access to some of the crops grown there through her brother. Garment workers who live in Fijian villages do not have the expense of rent, however their busfares are significantly higher as most Fijian villages are located far from the industrial areas of Suva. Siteri also mentioned her family having their “Fijian farm”. Other garment workers had their living costs subsidised by Social Welfare, but in 1997, Social Welfare in Fiji declared that it had run out of money and stopped accepting applications for benefits (Ramesh 12.1.98). Support networks formed in the workplace and in religious and neighbourhood associations are also important arenas for garment workers to exchange information and counsel each other.

In terms of coping with the double burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities on top of a full time factory job, many garment workers rely on the labour of female relatives, especially for childcare. Siteri had a large family and shared the domestic work with her sisters. Lata had the assistance of her mother-in-law. Viti bore the primary responsibility for the domestic work, but her husband did help her. Rita had to squeeze in all the domestic work into the hours before and after work – she did not have help. Even for those who do have some kind of domestic assistance, sometimes garment workers have to be absent from work because they are still considered the primary caregiver for the children. Absenteeism in turn reduces women’s prospects for promotion.

With respect to future prospects, opportunities for workers to move up from machinist work to a supervisory position are very limited, and Lata had been one of the few women to be promoted. None of the machinists interviewed looked to promotion
as a viable option for the future. Instead, Siteri was optimistic about becoming self-employed as a tailor, and her response paralleled similar sentiments of many trainees interviewed at GFL. Viti was about to give up her job for another – that of being a mother – and she could not predict whether she would return to the garment industry in the future or not. Rita and Lata hoped to migrate with their families overseas. Rita was saving towards that end, while Lata was unable to save, but hoped that someone in a factory overseas would sponsor her to make use of her extensive skills.

Each of the women used their garment work as part of their strategies to resist the constraints of their wider life situations. Through garment work, the women aimed to meet the family’s needs, to move up to a better job inside or outside the industry, to acquire skills and savings towards self-employment, and to save in order to migrate overseas. Whatever their aspirations, their work in the garment industry should be seen as active negotiation of the constraints of limited education and employment opportunities, and of poverty. The limitations of resistance to wages and working conditions, whether organised or unorganised, must also be understood in this light.

In sum, a combination of subjective and objective constraints limit women’s choices about entry into paid employment, resulting in their concentration in the poorest jobs in Fiji’s formal sector – namely in the garment industry. Still, women’s pursuit of employment in the garment industry must be seen as part of their strategies to address their poverty, lack of opportunities, and patriarchal expectations about women’s proper role in society. Once employed, women struggle to negotiate their pay and working conditions, although their efforts are similarly limited by subjective and objective constraints. Workers’ subjectivities in turn are shaped through resistance efforts targeted at objective employment conditions. Structural limitations clearly intersect with the specificity of women’s cultural and historical subjectivities, and the case studies confirm the interconnectedness of the subjective and objective facets of women garment workers’ experiences.

Conclusion

The expansion of the garment industry in Fiji on the basis of cheap labour is part of the same process of globalisation that brought about restructuring in New Zealand’s
garment industry hinging upon flexibility and the casualisation of work. As flexibility and casualisation have particular implications for women in New Zealand, so the Fiji government’s strategy of maintaining international competitiveness on the basis of cheap labour has gender-specific implications:

Women disproportionately occupy positions at the bottom of the labour market; the low wage jobs in garment production are a prime example, but other activities – for example, fish packing and low level jobs in the tourism industry – are also of significance. If deregulation of the labour market and a “competitive” wage policy mean a greater dispersion of wages within the Fiji workforce, then the relative position of women may be severely damaged. (ILO/UNDP 1997:46)

For women in Fiji, the local impact of the government’s reform programme and the resulting expansion of the garment industry is contradictory. The industry simultaneously offers an avenue to resist the poverty, lack of opportunities, and patriarchal constraints that characterise women’s lives, and imposes new constraints on women workers who ultimately “…pay the price of export competitiveness” (Emerson-Bain 1994:168). The constraints in the workplace will endure within the context of globalisation, as concern shifts from wages and conditions to preserving the garment industry altogether.

The future of the Fiji garment industry is highly uncertain as preferential access to key markets is eroded by the wave of trade liberalisation sweeping the globe. As it is today, the industry will not be able to compete with manufacturers in lower cost producing nations once the protection that tariffs offer to Fiji is removed. As members of APEC and the WTO, Australia and New Zealand will reduce their tariffs on imports to zero by 2010, and potentially much sooner. While the Fiji government’s negotiation of SPARTECA’s rules of origin may preserve access to the key Australian market in the short-term, this approach does not offer a long-term solution for the industry.

The Fiji garment industry faces two options in the present crisis. The first option is a radical restructuring of the industry to improve efficiency, productivity and profits. The ILO/UNDP report recommends this path as the best way to retain jobs in the industry, and asserts that such restructuring can go hand in hand with improvements in wages and working conditions (1997:46-7). The report calls for a shift in the nature of government intervention in the industry in order to assist the restructuring. Further
government investment in training would provide the skilled workers necessary for an industry targeting upmarket niches on the basis of quality, design, and service. Investment in new technology, and improvements in Fiji’s infrastructure and air transport facilities would facilitate manufacturers’ ability to make a “quick response”. Finally, the ILO/UNDP report looks to the new Health and Safety at Work Act adopted in June 1996 to improve working conditions, and calls for government investment to overcome the problems of enforcement noted previously (1997:28, 47).

The path recommended by the ILO/UNDP seems unrealistic as the garment industry boomed precisely because of the cheap labour and preferential market access that Fiji offered. With respect to the ILO/UNDP report’s optimism about the new Health and Safety Act, Emberson-Bain cautions, “…the chances of a tougher inspection regime emerging to safeguard the interests of workers look decidedly slim in the current climate of deregulation and public expenditure cuts” (1994:162). In light of the “current climate”, the ILO/UNDP’s calls for further government investment in training, technology, infrastructure, and transport also seem overly optimistic. The second option for the Fiji garment industry appears the more likely outcome of the current crisis: the Taylorist labour process will be retained and workers squeezed further in the short-term. In the medium term, it is likely that factories will relocate in anticipation of the complete erosion of Fiji’s trade preference. The impact of the industry’s demise will again be gender-specific, hitting hardest on the women who constitute the bulk of the garment workforce (Emberson-Bain 1994:165).
CHAPTER 6: SUBJECTIVITY AND STRUCTURE – THE SHAPING OF GARMENT WORKERS’ LIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION

Introduction

The case studies of the New Zealand and Fiji garment industries reveal that both subjective and structural forces shape garment workers’ experiences. To enable comprehension of the interplay between the subjective and structural forces as they affect garment workers’ situations, this chapter moves from the empirical research back to a more general level. Garment workers’ experiences in New Zealand and Fiji are first set side by side to allow a comparison based on the case studies in chapters four and five. Specific themes considered are the structural and subjective forces constraining the garment workers’ experiences – capital, the state, patriarchy, and the labour market, along with societal ideologies about women’s roles.

Globalisation is then taken as a context to shed light on the comparison of workers’ experiences, and the industry profiles and state reform programmes in the two countries are compared in that context. The ideology of neo-liberalism is taken into account in this consideration as it provides the principles underlying the process of globalisation. Declining working conditions and increasing insecurity emerge as the key features of garment workers’ experiences of globalisation. The chapter concludes with an exploration of women’s attempts to improve their future prospects through resistance to the subjective and structural forces constraining their experiences.

New Zealand and Fiji Garment Workers’ Experiences Compared

Workers’ experiences in the New Zealand and Fiji garment industry are compared in this section with particular attention to skill and control, both identified in chapter two as key arenas for an exploration of the experience of work. As Burawoy’s later writings underscore, control of the labour process is organised on the factory floor and beyond it, and the internal and external dimensions of control are both explored. The comparison reveals continuities and contrasts in the experiences of women garment workers in the New Zealand and Fiji industries: the similar structural and subjective
forces constraining the workers’ lives at the local level are experienced and negotiated differently in the two sites. While this discussion is informed by the case studies of specific individuals that were included in the previous chapters, analysis is presented at the more general level of the labour force in the two industries. Each of the significant themes that emerged from the case studies will be considered in turn.

Both objective and subjective factors underpin women’s entry into the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji. Economic necessity is the most obvious push factor, particularly in Fiji where the rapid escalation of poverty serves to organise a sort of “consent” to accepting work in industries with low wages and poor conditions. Poverty and lack of access to resources mean that the choices of how to earn income are limited. Without the resources to pursue further training, the free training in the garment industry makes it one of the few options other than domestic work, unskilled jobs in the tourism industry, or prostitution. A job in the industry represents an expansion of the options open to women. In New Zealand, the free training offered in garment production also makes garment work an attractive option.

Societal attitudes toward women’s roles have limited women’s employment opportunities, both for Fijian and Indo-Fijian women, and for migrants in New Zealand. The view of women’s primary role as mother and wife limits women’s access to educational and employment opportunities by ascribing childcare and domestic responsibilities to women. In Fiji, the attitude that women’s appropriate role is in the home has historically been reinforced in the missionary educational system. To this day, girls and boys are channeled towards different employment prospects based on the legacy of patriarchal missionary ideals. For women in Fiji and migrant women in New Zealand, the constraints of their educational backgrounds limit job prospects. Women search for employment according to their qualifications, and garment work is an area in which women are more likely to be experienced either from making clothing at home or in home economics in school.

Women also limit their own choices about entry into paid employment because of the idea that their primary role is as housewives who do not do paid work. For some, domestic and caregiving responsibilities lead them into outwork (and their legal status may be an additional factor). Similarly, the prominence of migrant women in New Zealand in manufacturing industries is related to the availability of shiftwork, enabling women to better juggle paid employment with domestic and caregiving responsibilities.
Direct discrimination against women in the labour market based on patriarchal ideologies also restricts women’s employment options. Discrimination according to ethnicity further constrains the job prospects of migrant women in New Zealand even when they have strong educational backgrounds and work experience.\(^1\) Their limited English-speaking ability is a compounding factor. In sum, the decision to enter the garment industry, whether in New Zealand or Fiji, must be seen in terms of both push and pull, or subjective and objective factors. The women garment workers make the best of the options open to them in choosing to enter the industry, options that are limited by both structural and ideological constraints. As Chhachhi and Pittin assert, “They are agents, making choices which are in part compelled…” (1996:110).

Women experience positive aspects of their work in the industry in both places. The acquisition of skills through their work is highly appreciated. The opportunities to socialise offered by factory employment are particularly valued by the factory-based workers. The New Zealand workers enjoy making different styles of quality clothing, and the challenge involved in meeting the targets. Finally, the money earned by women in both sites is important for their families, although in differing ways. Family circumstances, such as whether or not the garment worker is the sole income earner, determine the specific impact of the workers’ low wages on family economic strategies. The wages contribute towards immediate needs in some cases, and towards savings for the future in others.

The women’s experiences are constrained by a variety of factors both inside and outside the workplace. Inside the workplace, the primary constraints are the low wages, and the organisation of production and its accompanying control mechanisms. With respect to the former, in Fiji, the low wages make workers’ survival precarious, and the women, especially those who are sole income earners for the household, struggle to cover their expenses in the areas of housing, food, power, school fees, transport, hospital expenses and church tithes. In New Zealand, low wages are received despite the lengthy training undertaken. A particular constraint of the work for outworkers is payment according to piece rates. For women who are recent migrants to New Zealand, the wages earned represent an improvement in the concrete conditions of

\(^1\) Sassen points out with respect to the United States that: “…even immigrants who are highly educated and skilled when they arrive in the United States tend to gravitate toward the low-wage sectors of the economy” (1995:279).
migrant women who could never earn as much in their home countries. Still, they have to manage on those wages within the more expensive New Zealand economy. New Zealand garment workers’ main expenses are the basic living costs of rent, food, power, phone, school fees, health care, and transport. Some women are forced to depend on social welfare to supplement their wages.

In terms of the organisation of production, for some workers in both countries, the labour process restricts opportunities to learn skills, constituting another negative aspect of workers’ experiences. As large firms have implemented high technology, many skilled machinists have been replaced by “operators”, also known as “machine minders”. Operators continually feed fabric into the machines – they require no sewing skills. A repetitive Taylorist labour process still exists in some New Zealand factories, although to a lesser extent than in Fiji. In Fiji, the shortened length of the training programme to cater to the needs of the industry bears testimony to the deskilled nature of the labour process, although this has occurred through Taylorist organisation of production in most cases rather than through implementation of new technology. Complaints relating to the repetitive labour process are common in Fiji.

In contrast to the deskilled labour process in Fiji, New Zealand outworkers and factory workers, especially in small firms, are more often “multiskilled”, and make up significant parts of a garment. The length of training required to find a job in the industry evidences their high skill levels. The contradiction between highly skilled and “operator” positions in the New Zealand industry has brought about a reaction by some manufacturers to the extent of the skills trainees learn in preparation for jobs in the industry. As discussed in the New Zealand case study, some employers equate “multiskilling” with “overskilling”, and consider that employees who can do a range of tasks may be dissatisfied with factory work, contributing to high turnover. Similarly, in Fiji, even the limited extent of training is resented by some employers, who allege that workers who come through the training centre think they are better than factory-trained workers and expect higher wages.

The control mechanisms employed in production vary greatly in Fiji and New Zealand. In Fiji, control mechanisms such as the colour card system in medium and large firms aim to get workers to produce faster by encouraging competition among workers. The cultural context in Fiji makes the public humiliation of such systems an effective control mechanism. In some workplaces, targets are set so high that workers
have to jeopardise their health to reach them and workers sometimes report being in pain. Women experience the targets differently: some as a personal challenge, and others as a burden. Control mechanisms target absenteeism as well as productivity, for example, through provision of bus fares for perfect attendance or the connection of the target system with attendance. Some factories issue loans to workers to gain their loyalty, and debt organised through the factory is thereby utilised as a control mechanism.

More repressive means are also at work in Fiji, evidenced by the presence of security in the garment factories, in restricted access to the toilets, in handbag and body searches of workers, in threats and sometimes hitting by supervisors, and in verbal and sexual harassment. Supervision is often authoritarian in Fiji – characterised by a “big stick” approach. These repressive means are enabled by the combination of poverty and unemployment in Fiji, with the deskilling of the labour process. This combination results in workers who are easily replaced, and consequently have less leverage to change their conditions. Finally, a major drawback of the work in Fiji is the stress of being so rushed in the production process, and outside work as well due to the need to fulfil a range of domestic responsibilities. Lunch breaks at the factory are not long enough to allow workers to recuperate.

In New Zealand, while authoritarian-style supervision still prevails in a few factories, workers are generally not subjected to the same type of authoritarian control mechanisms that are present in Fiji. Control mechanisms in the New Zealand industry range from computerised technology in large firms through payment according to piece-rates with outworkers. Some of the largest New Zealand firms have been able to afford the implementation of computerised manufacturing systems such as Procom. The computerised systems serve as “electronic panopticon” – bringing a “disciplinary gaze to bear at the very heart of the labour process” (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992:283). The systems monitor worker performance throughout the production process, by means of mechanisms such as swipe-cards or bar-codes that are attached to bundles, enabling management to track workers’ progress. According to the South Island Clothing Trades Union secretary, Paul Watson, the computerised technology was implemented as “factories competing against cheap clothing imports were demanding more output from fewer people.” The union successfully publicised the outcry by workers that met the introduction of the Procom system. Of eighty-nine South Island workers surveyed by
the union, “80% felt their bonus times were unrealistic. 74% believed the pace of production is too high and blamed Procom for making their work life more difficult… 25% reported repetitive strain injuries, including back pain, sore wrists and pins and needles.” Lane Walker Rudkin, New Zealand’s largest garment employer, uses the Procom system, however a general manager, Graeme Abbot, maintains that their workforce is content and has a low incidence of repetitive strain injury (SST 23.4.95).

The key principle behind the organisation of the labour process in some New Zealand factories is flexibility. For some workers, flexibility has meant a choice regarding what hours to work and how to balance domestic responsibilities with paid work. For example, a few Dunedin factories have recognised women’s responsibilities in the domestic realm, and have instituted flexible working hours to allow women to better carry out their work in both the paid and domestic realms. Where most factories have an eight hour day, plus two fifteen minute tea breaks and a half-hour lunch break, the flexible working hours system requires forty hours of work from each employee per week, and workers choose when they work the forty hours within the opening hours of the factory. At one of the Dunedin factories operating on this system, employees commonly choose to have only fifteen minutes for lunch Monday through Thursday, and then leave the factory at 2 or 2:15 p.m. on Friday. Others work even longer hours between Monday and Thursday and leave by 10 a.m. on Fridays. These employees tend to be sympathetic to management, and push themselves to work faster – they are self-motivated and self-regulated.

For other garment workers, flexibility has not materialised in terms of hours of work or childcare. Instead, they experience inconsistent part-time, temporary or contract work, as flexibility is fostered through the casualisation of the employment relation. Sometimes workers have no work (and no wages) for several weeks in a row, and flexibility is a constraint rather than a positive aspect of their experience. The use of immigrant labour is also significant in the casualisation of industrial work – the relative powerlessness of immigrants enables firms to utilise direct and personal control measures with workers rather than more costly structural controls. In some firms, use of outworkers is the main strategy to achieve flexibility. Outworkers are controlled by their isolation and by payment through the piece-rate system. Outwork enhances flexibility by allowing firms to externalise costs and keep wages low. For the outworkers, bearing many of the costs of production externalised by the factory is a
constraint on their experiences. All forms of casualisation ultimately lower costs by reducing benefits for workers and through the numerical flexibility they offer to employers.

Constraints external to production emerge from the state, patriarchy, and the labour market. The state’s role is manifest in the educational and legislative arenas, and the state’s role in determining garment workers’ experiences proves contradictory in both areas. With respect to education, on the one hand, the state provides opportunities to women in both New Zealand and Fiji. The case studies demonstrate how the provision of free training through Garment Fiji Limited, and through the Training Opportunities Programme in New Zealand, widens the options open to the women workers. On the other hand, the opportunities provided by the state in this area set workers up to play out certain roles in the industry.

In New Zealand, the recent implementation of the NZQA Framework signifies the centralisation of control over the curriculum in order to align workers’ career aspirations with industry needs. Under the Framework, “units” are the building blocks of qualifications, and unit standards are set in consultation with industry. Therefore, the qualifications that can be pursued in choosing a career path channel workers right into the needs of industry. In this way, the general education system contributes toward the preadaption of individuals to industry. The introduction of NZQA into the garment training programmes brings with it the underlying goal of creating the right type of person for the needs of industry. As an adjunct to the training in skills, the garment training programmes engage in ideological alignment of workers with the needs of industry. Trainees learn to conceive of themselves as enterprising individuals, with rights and responsibilities. The rights include, “… the ‘right’ for each individual worker to negotiate their pay and conditions with their employer. These include hours of work and shift provisions, holidays and other leave, meal breaks and health and safety provisions” (Newby 1993:166). Trainees also learn how to represent themselves in interview situations and through the curriculum vitae so that they can best compete as enterprising individuals in the labour market.

In comparison to the importance of educational reform to the New Zealand government’s free-market programme, in Fiji, calls for educational reform have brought about little change in practice. No centralised system channels people through the schools and into the needs of industry. Still, the general educational system contributes
to the preadaptation of workers to industry. Warren and Bourque maintain that, "Education is felt by multinationals to preadapt workers to the regimentation of industrial settings" (1991:305). Lim (1985, qtd in Warren and Bourque 1991:305) elaborates that multinationals consider education to be "a proxy for other desired workforce characteristics such as hard work, perseverance, ability to perform repetitive tasks, tolerance of authority and discipline." However, in contrast to the garment training programme in New Zealand, the garment training programme in Fiji concentrates wholly on skills and does not educate workers about their rights as industrial citizens. The education workers receive about their rights comes from the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Trades Union Congress rather than the educational system.

Legislation with respect to the industry has also had contradictory effects on workers' experiences. Workers in both places are protected by legislation regulating their minimum conditions of employment. While New Zealand workers have been better off throughout most of the twentieth century, they have lost some of their achievements in the area of employment conditions. New Zealand workers achieved a five-day working week and an eight-hour day, and an accompanying increase in leisure time. Five days of paid sick leave, paid public holidays and three weeks of paid annual leave per year of service are inscribed into the law. Considerable health and safety provisions have also been achieved. With current trends in New Zealand, these gains are eroding. Penal rates for overtime, shift and nightwork were one of the first gains to be lost through the Employment Contracts Act. Workers must now negotiate rates for overtime, shift or nightwork with the employer. Recent moves challenge the standard of two tea breaks per day, ebb away at the paid public holidays legislation, and aim to reclassify OOS so that it no longer qualifies for accident compensation (NZH 2.8.97; Industrial Relations Service 1997; Radio New Zealand [RNZ] 23.3.98). In Fiji, workers over this century have not been as successful in achieving gains. A nine-hour day is standard, and a half-day on Saturday is commonly required in addition to the five-day week. Workers have only one tea break per day. While garment workers have the same five days of sick leave and paid public holidays as New Zealand workers, they receive only two weeks of paid annual leave per year of service (FT 19.2.98). Penal rates for overtime and Sunday work are still required by the Wages Council Order 1997, but workers have not achieved as many health and safety provisions as in New Zealand.
Legislation to protect the welfare of garment workers exists in both places, but is stronger in New Zealand than Fiji at least for the moment. This is illustrated through the penalties for violations of protective legislation in the two countries. As discussed in the previous chapter, under the Employment Act 1978, factory inspectors in Fiji are required to give twenty-four hours notice and to be escorted during a factory inspection. A maximum fine of F$200 and/or a maximum six month prison sentence may be imposed for obstructing an inspection or for violating the Act. A F$40 fine may be imposed for obstructing inspection under the Wages Council Act 1978, and violations are punished through a fine of not more than F$100, or a three month prison sentence. This contrasts markedly with legislation with respect to industry in New Zealand. New Zealand inspectors can enter a workplace at “any reasonable time”, and do not need to be escorted. Obstruction of inspection or a violation of the Minimum Wage Act 1983 will incur a fine of up to NZ$1000. For a violation of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, a fine ranging from NZ$25,000 to NZ$100,000 may be charged depending on the seriousness of the offence.

Despite measures to protect employees in some New Zealand legislation, other legislation serves to make workers vulnerable. One garment worker described his experience under the Employment Contracts Act: “When the Contracts Act came in they dropped our wages and introduced a bonus system to make us do another third of production to earn what we were earning" (SST 23.4.95). The Employment Contracts Act, celebrated in the name of workers’ freedom to choose whether they want to belong to a union, has created a deregulated labour market, broken the power of the union movement, and removed penal rates for shift and night work. Under the ECA, employees have the legal right to negotiate the terms of their employment, but the labour market conditions often make them powerless to do so, and the rights that they have been educated about prove contradictory. The irony of the ECA is that although it was implemented in the name of freedom and choice, the Act is very regulatory in relation to workers’ rights and plainly supports employers’ needs at the expense of workers. Under the ECA, the state determines when workers can strike and when they cannot, for example.

In Fiji, legislative changes to transform the nation into a low wage economy in pursuit of international competitiveness have similarly had a negative impact on workers. For instance, the institution of a Value-Added Tax on all basic consumer
items has brought about an increase in poverty and in numbers of workers with little choice but to accept low-waged jobs. The Wages Council Act has had a negative effect by assuring that garment workers, who are primarily women, are paid less than manufacturing workers in other, mostly-male industries. Also, since the 1991 "labour reforms", the government has not recognised the Fiji Association of Garment Workers as a legitimate conciliatory body, thereby ensuring that no garment workers' union can actively campaign for improvements in wages and conditions in the industry. The government has failed to enforce ILO core labour standards with respect to trade unions, because the unions might demand employer compliance with existing labour laws. Without a union to speak for them, some garment workers are subject to the repressive control measures discussed previously, measures that are enabled partly by the permissive environment created by the state.

Additionally, law enforcement practices in both New Zealand and Fiji prove to be problematic. In many cases, the law exists on paper but not in practice. In New Zealand, the blind eye turned by the state is a mixed blessing for outworkers working illegally, as it enables them to earn an income but opens them up to abuses without recourse to the law. Outworkers often do not receive the benefits that accrue to full-time factory workers in New Zealand. For reasons related to their legal statuses, they may not be in a position to demand these benefits. The state turns a blind eye to the abuse of outworkers in this manner. In Fiji where outwork does not exist, the state turns a blind eye to abuses within the system of factory employment. The denial of hard-earned wages or benefits to garment workers is the subject of numerous complaints, but the government has been slack in enforcing the law in this area on the employers. Through the selective and inefficient administration of justice by the state and through legislation that favours industry at workers' expense, the state ultimately provides the conditions that allow employers to invoke repressive means against the workforce.

Patriarchal ideologies play a part in justifying state discrimination against women garment workers in the law and in slack enforcement of the law. Patriarchal ideologies result in a gender division of labour in both countries, at home and in production. In both case study sites, the women bear the primary responsibility for the home and family, resulting in their double burden of domestic and paid work. Although the New Zealand workers have better access to household appliances that aid with the domestic work, in Fiji the burden of domestic responsibilities and childcare is more
likely to be shared with extended family members. The patriarchal ideology that women's primary role is in the home affects the concrete reality of many women. In New Zealand, the migrant women encountered poorer job prospects than their husbands despite similar education and work experience. Other women in New Zealand found that their domestic responsibilities limited their employment options to outwork. In Fiji, the attitude prevailing among garment workers was that they should maintain the household as they had before they had full-time jobs. Where they were not able to do so, they called on female family members for help.

Patriarchal gender ideologies have also been imported into production in both New Zealand and Fiji, and the gender division of labour is the clearest expression of this. Men are typically involved in managerial and "skilled" positions such as cutting, and women in machining tasks. This traditional gender division of labour, based on the idea that women are biologically better able to withstand long hours of monotonous, repetitive work (Ong 1990:396), has been maintained in New Zealand despite restructuring of the industry, and reduces the potential for collective resistance. Low wages in the garment industry are another manifestation of the importation of patriarchal ideologies into production.

Two patriarchal ideologies serve to justify the low wages in the garment industry (where women predominate) as opposed to the rest of the manufacturing sector. First, the ideology that women are dependent on men holds that women work only for "lipstick money", not to support a household (Moore 1988:101). This ideology holds wages down for women in the garment industry in spite of the fact that this logic has been shown to be problematic by numerous cases of women as the main income-earner for the household. The second ideology maintains that garment work is unskilled because women have traditionally performed it in the home. The Dunedin case study workers were shown to be highly skilled, with the lengthy training required to secure a job in the industry as evidence. While many women in Fiji do work in a deskill labour process without the potential to develop their skill levels, the increased speeds at which tasks must be performed offset the fragmentation of the work into minute tasks in terms of the "skill" involved in the job (Frances 1993:181). In addition, some workers in Fiji are highly skilled in terms of being able to perform a wide variety of tasks at a high standard of quality.
Even the “multiskilled” New Zealand women have been unsuccessful in contesting the skilled nature of their work partly because it historically involved training acquired outside of capitalist production. Phillips and Taylor argue that no matter how skilled the work women do is, “Women’s work is often deemed inferior because it is women who do it, and women workers carry their subordinate status into the workplace with them, where this status comes to define the value of the work they do” (1980, ctd in Moore 1988:101). This explanation accounts for the fact that regardless of how skilled some New Zealand workers are compared to their overseas counterparts and “operators” at home, they frequently receive just over the minimum wage like unskilled workers. The social construction of skill by the women evidently has not succeeded in either New Zealand or Fiji, and wages are ascribed accordingly.

In some countries where women have entered into labour intensive industries in large numbers, a trend towards the breaking down of patriarchy within the household has been noted, and a limited amount of evidence of this was found in the Dunedin and Suva case studies. However, patriarchy is arguably reconstituted in new forms in the workplace. Ong documents the ideological organisation of Malaysian women’s factory work both inside and outside the workplace. Outside the workplace, an alliance between family and management served to consolidate the daily reproduction of women’s subordination to men on the factory floor (Ong 1990:403). On the factory floor, patriarchal family patterns of male control over females were reproduced, with males supervising female machinists. Ong argues, “female inferiority is instilled in the operators by … daily surveillance and the need to ask for male permission for the most mundane activities” (Ong 1990:404). Through these processes, the “concepts of male domination and female subordination are infused into and become the ‘common sense’ of power relations in the industrial system” (Ong 1990:398). These same processes are at work in Fiji, where male supervision of female machinists is common, and female machinists in some factories regularly have to ask male security for permission to use the toilets. Male violence against women in the home also finds its counterpart in sexual harassment in the workplace.

The third area constraining workers’ experiences from beyond the workplace is the labour market. In New Zealand, workers must negotiate the conditions of their employment because of the deregulation of the labour market. They have little power to do this in the context of factory closures and the numbers of skilled workers seeking
employment. Some only find part-time work as employers prefer the flexibility this allows. Additionally, the characteristics of the labour market affect the experiences of garment workers in New Zealand and Fiji by pitting groups of workers against each other in the competition for work. As New Zealand and Fiji workers vie for capital investment, divisions within each country also exacerbate insecurity for workers in both places.

The New Zealand labour market offers a choice between factory work and outwork, and the main division is between these groups of workers. Domestic responsibilities push some women to take up outwork, which offers a measure of flexibility in combining paid work and family responsibilities, while others choose this option due to their status as non-residents. This division of garment workers into separate and competing groups puts factory-based workers under threat that work can be moved out to outworkers, enabling firms to externalise costs. A less significant division among New Zealand garment workers is between recent migrants and long-time residents. New Zealand citizens are under threat if they cannot accept the wages and conditions being offered because recent migrants may willingly do so. The recent migrants who take jobs in the industry tend to be less concerned about the low wages because even these are a substantial improvement over conditions in their home countries.

Outwork is prominent in New Zealand, where it recreates the conditions of the labour force in poor countries within an “advanced industrialised” nation. Outworkers in New Zealand and factory workers in Fiji share similar characteristics that are sought by employers – they are non-unionised workers who accept low wages and have little power to demand improvements in conditions. In contrast, garment companies in Fiji are not known to utilise the labour of outworkers. A number of practicalities underlie outwork’s absence in Fiji, including the crowded conditions in people’s homes, and workers’ inability to acquire enough capital to purchase their own machines. Another deterrent is workers’ relative lack of skill to make up entire garments due to the deskilled nature of the labour process in the country’s garment industry, and the newness of large-scale garment production in Fiji. This relative lack of skill would bring a host of problems associated

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2 A similar situation in the United States brought the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union to campaign for outwork to be outlawed (Rowbotham 1993:60).
with the monitoring of the quality of outwork. Outwork has undergone a recent expansion in other poor countries, including Mexico, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand (Rowbotham 1993:25-7). The absence of outwork in Fiji indicates that the practicalities inhibiting outwork outweigh the benefit to employers of an expansion in this area.

Even within Fiji’s already cheap workforce, capital seeks to enhance its ability to pursue old strategies of profitability such as labour intensification and lengthening of the working day. The division in Fiji between Fiji citizens and temporary Asian workers facilitates pursuit of such strategies. Estimates on the number of Asians employed in the Fiji garment industry range from 800 to 2000 (FT 19.2.97; 21.2.97). The Asian workers primarily come from China and the Philippines (FT 16.3.94; 20.2.97). The Fiji Trade and Investment Board and the Immigration Department allowed employers to bring Asian workers into Fiji “so that they could pass on new skills and encourage the infusion of productivity, efficiency and quality of production at the factory floor” (FT 24.4.97). Additionally, the Director of Immigration, John Tevita, claimed that locals were not willing to work in the garment factories (FT 21.2.97).

The Fiji Trades Union Congress has countered that Asian immigrants do exactly the same work as locals and are taking away jobs needed by Fiji citizens (FT 19.2.97). The FTUC maintains that employers utilise Asian workers because they can pay them even lower wages and the women will work longer hours than locals who prefer to go home early (FT 20.2.97). Employers undoubtedly benefit from the separation of the Asian women from their families and associated domestic responsibilities. Criminalisation of workers’ mobility (Cohen 1980:14) serves as an additional control mechanism on immigrants. The Asian workers are reported to labour and live in extremely poor conditions, vulnerable to abuse because if they leave their employment, they face a forced return to their countries as their permit to stay in Fiji is automatically invalidated (FT 19.2.97; 17.5.98). Through the use of these two vulnerable groups – outworkers in New Zealand and immigrant workers in Fiji – employers are able to pursue traditional strategies of profitability alongside newer strategies. The divisions among groups of workers within countries and between
countries present the control mechanism of reduced bargaining power in relation to capital because employers can make good on their threats to take work elsewhere.

In sum, the experiences of garment workers in New Zealand and Fiji are affected by similar structural and ideological forces in specific ways according to the local conditions in each country. Subjective and objective factors combine to lead women from constrained educational and employment opportunities into the garment industry. Once at work, the positive aspects of employment in the garment industry are constrained by employers’ control strategies and sometimes by the organisation of the labour process. This was the experience of most workers in Fiji, and New Zealand workers in deskilled positions in the industry. Despite the opportunities it offers, the state’s role as a constraint is significant in its bias toward employers, enabling repressive control mechanisms to be used against workers in Fiji, and worsening workers’ bargaining position in New Zealand through deregulation of the labour market. Within the labour market, the division of workers into competing groups further diminishes their bargaining power. Finally, patriarchy serves to reinforce the state’s role and compounds women workers’ situations by ascribing the burden of domestic responsibilities to them in addition to their industrial work.

**Industries Compared in the Context of Globalisation**

Having summarised the comparisons and contrasts in the forces shaping the women garment workers’ experiences in the two case sites, a comparison of the industry profiles is in order. Recent trends in the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji must be viewed in the context of changes ongoing in the global economy. Trends in the international economy have been encapsulated in the buzzword, “globalisation”, and a digression is necessary on this point to allow comparison of the New Zealand and Fiji industry profiles. What is globalisation? In brief, globalisation describes the penetration of capital into all aspects of life, the accelerating movement of capital, financial transactions, people and commodities around the globe, and the accompanying changes in the cultural and political realms.

Views diverge on the driving force of the process of globalisation. McGrew outlines the two major schools on this topic: the mono-causal and multi-causal
approaches. Wallerstein, Rosenau and Gilpin fall in the first category. Wallerstein maintains that the driving force of globalisation is "the logic of the capitalist world-economy", while Rosenau holds technological transformation (the "information revolution") to be the primary factor (McGrew 1992:70). Gilpin links recent global trends to political factors: "in particular the existence of a 'permissive' global order – a political order which generates the stability and security necessary to sustain and foster expanding linkages between nation-states" (McGrew 1992:71). Giddens and Robertson take a "multi-causal" approach to the driving forces of globalisation (McGrew 1992:72). Giddens includes as key, the factors of "capitalism; the inter-state system; militarism; and industrialism", where Robertson incorporates "spread of capitalism, western imperialism and the development of a global media system" into his explanation (McGrew 1992:72-3). It is not necessary to choose between these approaches for the purposes of this discussion.

The process of globalisation is not new, and is best understood as an acceleration of trends ongoing since capitalism began its expansion through colonialism in the sixteenth century. The colonial system enabled capital, which was rooted in particular colonising countries, to gain access to sources of raw materials, labour, and new markets in the colonies. These processes were facilitated through alliances established with local elites. As resistance to colonialism developed and colonies became politically independent, economic dependence on the former colonial powers continued through neo-colonialism, defined by Parenti as "the practice of direct exploitation without the burden of direct rule" (1989, qtd in Aguilar 1997). Despite political independence, the former colonies remained dependent on the markets of the former colonisers to consume their exports, mainly raw materials and agricultural products.

During the neo-colonial period, production was still rooted in particular countries. Labour was therefore successful in the former colonial powers in gaining concessions from capital in the form of the welfare state, because an acquiescent, "industrially disciplined" labour force was required for capitalist industry. The welfare state provided a "social wage" – social services which subsidised wages earned. The poor nations of the former colonial system relied on the subsistence sector to subsidise the wage economy rather than a welfare state. Globalisation has perpetuated the neo-colonial situation, only capital is now multinational in nature – most often based in two or three, and at most four, of the rich countries (Dicken ctd in Gibson-Graham 1997:8).
Multinational capital is no longer required to conquer the poor countries in order to gain access to their raw materials and labour. The former colonial powers continue to benefit from the historical power relations of colonialism in the “post-colonial” period. The former colonies remain export based, although they now export manufactured goods as well as raw materials and agricultural products. The consistencies of globalisation with previous periods brought Harvey to refer to globalisation as a “gimmick to make the best of a necessary adjustment in the system of international finance” (Harvey 1995:8). That is, “globalisation” represents new strategies for capital accumulation within the changing conditions of the same system.

Financial institutions at the international level have developed to facilitate capital accumulation for multinational corporations. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) emerged out of the Bretton Woods agreement following World War II, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), formed in 1995, is the most recent manifestation of that effort to promote free-market reforms internationally. The World Bank and the IMF provide loans to poor countries, contingent upon implementation of a reform programme in line with the institutions’ free-market agenda. To receive their loans, poor governments must implement Structural Adjustment Programmes involving deregulation of the economy, liberalisation of trade, cuts to social services, and often the implementation of an export-processing, or free trade zone. Such zones commonly exploit the low-waged labour of women workers and immigrants (Phizacklea 1983:131). Labour is increasingly cheap in the poor countries due to the austerity measures pushed on the population by national governments under pressure from the World Bank and IMF. The Fiji government’s reform programme since 1988 is a prime example of World Bank–inspired structural adjustment.

The implementation of free-market reform programmes in poor countries around the globe has enabled capital investors to move production to offshore sites to take advantage of the cheap labour. Governments of wealthier countries have adopted similar programmes in pursuit of international competitiveness, less the export-processing zones as the wealthier countries do not base their competitive advantage on cheap labour. New Zealand is an exemplary case given the reforms initiated in 1984 by the Labour Government, carried on by National, and continuing to the present under the National–New Zealand First coalition. As a result of the competition among states to attract investment, one of the key features of globalisation is the movement of
production itself around the globe. As Dirlik explains, globalisation is characterised by "unprecedented mobility under the new economic 'regime' not just of commodities and financial transactions but of the very process of production itself" (1994:41). The nature of the labour market has effectively been globalised through the communications revolution which made world financial markets a reality, and has provided the conditions that make affordable the physical separation of stages of industrial production. Tolerance of a social wage for labour has waned with the heightened mobility of capital investment under globalisation:

... from the point of view of capital, state social expenditures become less necessary... the threat to relocate production and/or shift assets to alternative investments is utilized as a lever to convince state officials to enact (or repeal) appropriate legislation. (Ross and Trachte 1990:67)

Capital investors are able to move amongst a variety of global production sites, and therefore have an improved bargaining position vis-à-vis labour and the state. In the face of enhanced capital mobility, labour is losing ground in its ability to gain, or even to maintain, concessions in the form of the welfare state. In highly mobile industries, such as the garment industry that requires little investment in terms of infrastructure, capital investors are more able to discipline labour directly, without the help of the welfare state, through threat of relocation to another poor country. Additionally, capital investors are no longer as tolerant of the reduction in profits that the welfare state entails through taxation of industry. The balance of class forces has shifted with globalisation, resulting in a tendency for multinational corporations to have the upper hand with the state, while labour's position in relation to the state weakens. The state is also more subordinate to multinational corporations due to competition between states to attract investment as capital is no longer rooted to a particular state (Arrighi 1997).

Despite the shift in the balance of class forces, state politics retain importance to the process of globalisation. Indeed, the politics of a small number of states have everything to do with globalisation. Fiori (1995) highlights the role of the state in the

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3 Sassen illustrates the reality of world financial markets enabled by the information revolution: "Foreign exchange transactions were ten times larger than world trade in 1983; only ten years later, in 1992, they were sixty times larger" (1996, qtd in Arrighi 1997).
larger processes of globalisation. The world’s financial institutions which facilitate
capital accumulation by the multinationals and spur on the process of globalisation, are
dominated by the countries made rich in the former colonial system, namely the Group of Seven (G-7)\textsuperscript{4} and OECD countries. Fiori stresses the importance of politics in these
countries to the processes of globalisation: “While globalization emerged behind the
backs of many producers and governments, it is also the result of political and economic
decisions made, in an increasingly focused manner, by a relatively small number of
global oligopolies, banks, and a few national governments” (1995:99). At the local
level, state policies bring the pressures of globalisation to bear on industries and
communities: “It is the state that is responsible, after all, for setting up the conditions
favorable for investment…” (Aguilar 1997).

The ideological underpinnings of the processes of globalisation stem from neo­
liberalism, an adaptation of the ideas of classical liberalism, which date back to the
writings of English political theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such
theorists conceptualised liberty or freedom in terms of the individual: “… only if
individuals are free to pursue their individual gain will the best interests of society be
promoted” (Collins and Lear 1995:37). The key to individual autonomy was “that the
individual not be hemmed in or coerced by society. Freedom is defined negatively, that
is, in terms of the absence of outside intervention … economic freedom is the right to
make choices as a producer or a consumer without government interference” (Collins
and Lear 1995:37-8). The classical liberal theorists held market capitalism and their
conception of freedom as the absence of constraint to be the basis of a free society.
Individual freedom was to be realised in the market through “unfettered competition
between enterprises. The freedom of the individual results from the free functioning of
the market” (Collins and Lear 1995:38). Through the free-market mechanisms of
supply and demand, efficiency would be maximised and all individuals would benefit.
The classical liberal theorists held that in the absence of state coercion, individuals
would be free to exercise their “natural egoistic drives and instincts” in their own self­
interest (Hall 1986:41).

\textsuperscript{4} The Group of Seven consists of the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Italy, France and Germany.
Neo-liberalism developed out of classical liberal ideas, but utilises a more active conception of the state’s role. In addition to not encroaching on individual rights, the role of the neo-liberal state should be to actively create “the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation” (Olssen 1996:7). Furthermore, “In neo-liberalism the state seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur”, and who must actively “shape and manage his or her own life in order to maximise its returns in terms of success and achievement” (Olssen 1996:7; Miller and Rose 1990:26). Consequently, the concept of citizenship also undergoes a change under neo-liberalism:

Citizenship is to be active and individualistic rather than passive and dependent. The political subject is henceforth to be an individual whose citizenship is manifested through the free exercise of personal choice amongst a variety of options... Programmes of government are to be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they enhance that choice. (Miller and Rose 1990:24)

The citizen’s rights in terms of freedom from constraint are accompanied by responsibilities. And because expansion of consumption is needed for economic growth, those responsibilities include consuming: “The citizen is now assigned a vital economic role in his or her activity as a consumer” (Miller and Rose 1990:25).

The criticism of neo-liberalism’s negative conception of freedom is that it says nothing about providing the conditions so that poor people could take advantage of the opportunities in society, or have access to society’s “bank of knowledge/power/resources” (Zavarzadeh and Morton 1994:30). Economic threats to freedom, such as poverty, illiteracy, or unemployment, prevent access to opportunities but are not regarded as constraints on freedom in the neo-liberal sense (Olssen 1996:13). Because of this conceptualisation of freedom, neo-liberalism “… ignores the sense in which people’s freedom to act depends on, and presupposes a certain degree of equality in the distribution of societal resources” (Olssen 1996:13).

To return to a consideration of the profiles of the New Zealand and Fiji garment industries, we take the state reform programmes as a starting point as the reforms have dramatically affected the industries. Comparison reveals both similarities and differences in the paths taken by the state in the two countries in the climate of globalisation. The reform programmes in both New Zealand and Fiji aimed for
international competitiveness. The elements of the reform plans in common between the two countries include: trade liberalisation to open the economy to the pressures of the international marketplace; tax reform to replace revenue lost through tariff reduction with value-added tax or goods and services tax; and labour market reform to achieve flexibility through breaking the power of the union movement. New Zealand's Employment Contracts Act and other deregulatory measures are paralleled in Fiji by the 1991 labour reforms. The two countries' reform programmes are distinct from each other because of the heavy emphasis in New Zealand on educational system reforms to create an enterprise culture and cater the skills and desires of the population to the needs of industry, while Fiji focused on the implementation of the Tax Free Factory scheme.

The discussion of globalisation illustrates that the common pursuit of international competitiveness in New Zealand and Fiji emerges from the state's need to attract capital investment into the economy. The capitalist state depends for its survival on the taxation of income earned through successful capital accumulation by the private sector. The differences in the reform programmes stem from the relative positions of New Zealand and Fiji in relation to the process of globalisation, arising out of the roles played by the two countries in the colonial encounter. Where New Zealand was a colonial power, Fiji was a colony. As a result of the colonial system, Fiji, like most former colonies, has comparative advantage based on its cheap labour. To increase that advantage, the government devalued the currency to make wages even more internationally competitive (i.e., lower) and implemented the TFF scheme. Fiji has undergone rapid industrialisation as a result of the influx of capital investment in manufacturing industries. In contrast, New Zealand's economic restructuring is marked by deindustrialisation: a major trend is in employment away from manufacturing and into services as New Zealand tries to capitalise on its comparative advantage in terms of a skilled population, high technology, and design, research and development capabilities.

The reform plans implemented in New Zealand and Fiji have had quite different effects on the industry: New Zealand's garment industry was forced to restructure to remain competitive. The industry before restructuring was relatively large and well established, reflecting the historical trend for manufacturing industries to concentrate in the "industrialised" nations. New Zealand's garment industry was highly protected by licensing, tariffs, and subsidies for exporters. With trade liberalisation, the industry was
faced with competition from cheap labour in offshore sites, and mass production based on price competition was no longer profitable. Firms continuing mass production usually opted to relocate to an offshore site. Firms remaining in New Zealand shifted orientation away from price competition to competition based on quality and service and the targeting of niche markets. Large firms implemented high technology, intensifying work and downsizing the workforce in the process of reorganising. Some jobs have become deskill ed in this process as large numbers of machinists were replaced by "operators". Small firms that could not afford to implement technological innovations have relied on other methods of achieving flexibility: the use of outwork, and in factories, use of the intensified labour of a casualised, and sometimes multiskilled workforce. As a result of the restructuring, the industry proved to be robust in its ability to compete and survive the changes in the economy. For many workers, however, this restructuring brought the loss of employment, and for those who remain employed, the loss of security in their jobs.

In contrast, the Fiji garment industry expanded rapidly to take advantage of the concessions being offered by the Tax Free Factory Scheme and the devalued currency. The development of Fiji's garment industry, practically non-existent prior to the government's free-market reforms, reflects the trend whereby foreign investment in the "developing" countries is rising in the area of manufacturing as these regions are increasingly utilised for their pool of low-waged labour. Indeed, "investment in manufacturing in the periphery now exceeds investment in raw material extraction" (Ross and Trachte 1990:87). The changes in the Fiji economy towards export-oriented production can be seen as part of a global process in which the role that "developing regions" play in the capitalist world economy has changed. Fiji's Tax Free Factory scheme is typical of export-processing zones implemented in former colonies where cheap labour is abundant. The new garment industry in Fiji engages mainly in mass production for the export market, utilising a deskill ed labour process where wages are low and workers are easily replaceable. Thousands of women entered into the industrial workforce for the first time in the history of Fiji. A large number of Asian immigrant workers have since been brought in as well. The predominance of women in Fiji's Tax Free Factories is also in keeping with global trends whereby companies utilise gender stereotypes - of women's innate dexterity, submissiveness, and willingness to accept low wages - to develop female-intensive industries.
Littler (1982) pointed out the importance of ideology, both within and outside the workplace, to control of the labour process, and this point was discussed in chapter two. Burawoy expressed this idea as the need to consider the “specific combinations of force and consent that elicit cooperation in the pursuit of profit” (1979a:30). In New Zealand and Fiji, a combination of coercion and consent is employed to bring workers into industry, and to arrange their cooperation with industry’s aims. Economic compulsion is a powerful coercive force generating workers’ acceptance of poor wages and working conditions. In New Zealand, such compulsion has intensified with the economic decline of the 1980s, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the permissive regulatory environment fostered by the state since 1984. In Fiji, worsening poverty as a result of structural adjustment reforms contributes to economic compulsion as a push factor into jobs with poor wages and conditions.

With respect to the organisation of consent, at the most basic level, ideology underlies the fact that people go to work in capitalist industries at all. As Escobar explains in reference to the Industrial Revolution, the organisation of workers for capitalist production has historically presented an extremely difficult problem: “People did not go into the factories gladly and of their own accord; an entire regime of discipline and normalization was necessary” (1995:60). For the market system to become entrenched, an ideological transformation was necessary to normalise it, and capitalism now recruits its labour force with relative ease (Weber ctd in Taussig 1980:22). In Fiji and New Zealand, this transformation would have begun in the colonial era. For example, in Fiji, the experiences of the indenture period, for the Indo-Fijians, and the “tax farm” system, for the indigenous Fijians, initiated such a normalisation, and ongoing proletarianisation and monetisation of the economy sustained it.

More recently, the New Zealand government’s approach to the moulding of the population’s abilities to the needs of international competitiveness involves the active promotion of neo-liberal ideology on behalf of capitalist industry. In a turnaround from the ideology of collectivism of the welfare state, neo-liberal ideology is invoked to

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5 In the 1870s, the Colonial Government’s “Native Policy” stipulated that Fijians who had not paid their poll tax must labour on copra and banana “tax farms”, and pay tax to the government in those commodities (not in cash). (See: Jay Narayan. 1984. *The Political Economy of Fiji*. Suva: South Pacific Review Press)
justify the elements of the state’s reform programme: deregulation, privatisation, and trade liberalisation. The pressures of international competition are purported to bring about efficiency gains, and ultimately, enhanced consumer choice. In keeping with the neo-liberal conception of the role of the state, the New Zealand government has reformed the educational arena. NZQA aims to align the population’s career aspirations with the needs of industry, and to create the enterprising and competitive “possessive individuals” necessary to fuel economic growth through both production and consumption.

In Fiji, ideology imparted beyond the workplace is also used to align the goals of workers and employers. Rather than the ideology of neo-liberalism, however, employers appeal to pre-existing cultural and religious values. On the one hand they appeal to the cultural values of “consensus, compromise and non-confrontation (the ‘Pacific Way’)” to organise workers’ cooperation (Emberson-Bain 1992:158). On the other hand they make use of religious ideologies: “Generally the ideologies of submissiveness to authority, the virtues of ‘femininity’ and the primacy of the role of wife and mother for women have been reinforced by Hindu, Muslim and Christian ideologies” (Leckie 1997b:84). For example, workers’ compliance with the rules is related to their attitudes toward authority before even entering the workplace. While many women have broken away from attitudes of submissiveness, women’s timidity has been strongly socialised via the family and community’s gender ideologies, and reinforced through an education system inculcating patriarchal missionary values with respect to women’s appropriate roles in society.

The balance between coercion and consent differs in the two countries. In Fiji, coercion is the more powerful push factor in the creation of subjects to contribute to international competitiveness. Several factors combine to make coercive controls prevalent specifically within Fiji’s TFFs: the growing numbers dependent on waged work for their survival; the deskilled labour process making workers easily replaceable; and the competitive pressures of globalisation prompting firms to employ coercion in the interests of profitability. More generally, the coups in 1987 brought a military state to power, as well as a coercive environment in which the threat of force is always present (see Emberson-Bain 1992). The military state initially prohibited unionisation inside the new tax free factories. Although later changing this policy, by 1991 the institution of a number of labour decrees strangled the power of existing unions. The
forcible imposition of a Christian state despite the non-Christian beliefs of half of the population ensured that the threat of force underlies even the religious values to which companies appeal in order to stifle workers’ militancy and engender their loyalty.

In New Zealand, the balance between coercion and consent leans toward the latter, or as Burawoy expressed it, “consent prevails, although never to the exclusion of coercion” (1983:590). For example, the New Right also appeals to Christian values in New Zealand, but no underlying threat of military force backs this up. The stronger role of consent in New Zealand relates to the history of the welfare state, which constituted the interests of workers and companies as “concretely coordinated”. Whereas capital formerly made concessions to labour in the form of the social wage to ensure an industrially disciplined labour force, labour now has to make concessions to capital due to the global competition for jobs. The pressure on workers to make concessions to capital in order to keep their jobs on-shore is particularly strong in such mobile manufacturing industries as the garment industry. In both New Zealand and Fiji, the power of economic compulsion as a push factor in the organisation of a workforce for capitalist industry is deepening as workers’ fear of capital flight increases with globalisation, and the balance between coercion and consent is shifting more and more towards coercion.

While ideology plays a role in constituting subjects for the labour force in both places, in New Zealand the state’s emphasis on simultaneously creating consumers who will stimulate growth is distinctive. Marx expressed this as the need to create “not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object” (1993:92). Where the domestic market is a major market for New Zealand’s garment production, in Fiji, workers in some cases produce suits selling for F$600–$700 a piece while earning wages of approximately F$40 per week. Clearly these objects are not intended for these subjects! The importance of Fiji garment workers in the global economy lies much less in their role as consumers than as cheap labour although they do consume limited quantities of low-grade manufactured goods. New Zealand garment workers are by no means well paid, but the dual nature of their role as labouring and consuming subjects is much more significant than that of garment workers in Fiji.

As both countries move toward more coercive regimes, the effects on labour of the free-market reform programmes and their impacts on the industry are in keeping with global trends described above. The gains made by labour over this century in New
Zealand in the form of the social wage have been eroded. Recent changes in New Zealand have seen the implementation of the Employment Contracts Act and the "community wage" or "work for the dole" scheme, as labour loses ground under the reality of capital mobility. In Fiji, instead of worsening wages and conditions of work as have been experienced by garment workers in New Zealand, the industry curbed workers' benefits as it developed. Constant dispute revolved around the establishment of a minimum wage for the garment industry, with employers threatening that any increase may mean they would have to shift their operations elsewhere. The Fiji government argued that it cannot improve low wages and poor working conditions because of the need for a cheap labour force to attract foreign investment and increase exports (ICFTU 1997). The government hindered the formation of a garment workers' union, and sided with the industry in keeping the costs of labour down. Workers' demands are thus restrained with the argument of the competitive environment of globalisation.

The containment of benefits to workers of industrialisation in Fiji is typical of globalisation trends: export-processing zones that have been implemented to attract investment in scores of poor countries are characterised by low wages, poor working conditions, and long hours of work. These conditions are compounded for women by their double burden as industrial workers as well as reproducers of the next generation of workers. Prospects for changing these conditions appear bleak in the medium-term because manufacturing has shifted to the poor countries precisely because of the low wages and limited rights for the workforce, and the increased profitability that they represent. For the governments of poor countries like Fiji, "Remaining competitive usually means that the state enforce discipline and austerity on the working class" (Ross and Trachte 1990:112). As a result of the Fiji government's pursuit of international competitiveness in this manner, widening poverty and disparity in wealth have accompanied recent industrialisation. The common features of garment workers' experiences in Fiji and New Zealand are declining working conditions and increasing insecurity. The following section delineates the foundations of workers' insecurity, and then explores the women's efforts to resist the conditions of their employment and cope with the pressures of their daily lives.
Resistance and Consent in the Context of Globalisation

The preceding discussion of globalisation and the enhanced mobility of production illustrates that the loss of garment industry jobs in New Zealand and elsewhere should be seen as the cost of job creation in Fiji. The loss of garment factory jobs in New Zealand demonstrates that the futures of workers, particularly in mobile industries such as manufacturing, are marked by uncertainty in the climate of globalisation. The growing element of risk in garment workers’ lives under the state’s economic reforms stands alongside declining working conditions as one of the main parallels in the experiences of the case study women. In New Zealand, where a number of factories have closed recently, job insecurity springs from the consequent glut of skilled labour in the labour market. Further insecurity is due to the permissive environment of deregulation, resulting in lack of a written guarantee of the term of employment through a contract. The dubious statuses of some outworkers heighten their insecurity. For women in Fiji, job insecurity stems from the high number of unemployed people ready to take any job available to them in the industry.

While workers’ insecurities in New Zealand and Fiji have a different basis at the local level, they have much in common at the national and international levels. Trade liberalisation spells further insecurity in New Zealand through the government’s tariff reductions on clothing imports. In Fiji, the likely loss of the garment industry’s preferential access to its key markets under trade liberalisation does not bode well for the industry’s future. As their industries produce for the export market, all garment workers are subject to the whims of governments, domestic and foreign, in terms of their international trade policies. A good example is the current uncertainty for several Fiji garment firms and their employees over the outcome of negotiations with the government of Australia on the SPARTECA rules of origin. Similarly, in New Zealand, uncertainty revolves around negotiations with Australia over the CER rules of origin.

Garment workers’ insecurity in both countries also stems from their dependence on the whims of consumers in the market countries. The consumers who affect the New Zealand industry through their exercise of choice are located primarily in New Zealand and Australia. Consumers particularly in the market countries of New Zealand, Australia and the United States, will affect the futures of Fiji’s garment workers. Consumer taste has become diversified in recent years. Changing product markets have
brought notable changes in work, particularly the implementation of flexible production methods in larger firms. In New Zealand, as some large firms downsize and implement new technologies, workers may find that their present skills are no longer adequate or applicable. Employment opportunities and the potential to increase skills come in the face of constant threats of job loss in the wake of changing consumer taste, new requirements of flexible industries, and possible capital flight. Insecurity looks set to intensify with globalisation in both countries as labour loses ground in relation to the state and capital in the industrialised countries, and austerity is imposed on workers in the poor countries.

Women actively negotiate their worsening employment situations and insecurity as well as the circumstances of their wider lives. Resistance to the conditions of the employment situation can take organised forms, for example, through a union, or can assume more unorganised “everyday” (Scott 1985) or “covert” forms (Cohen 1980). With respect to organised resistance to the conditions of garment work in Fiji, in 1991 and 1992, women garment workers carried out a number of strikes organised by the Fiji Association of Garment Workers (FAGW) (Leckie 1992:10-12). Hundreds of women were mobilised into collective action to demand improvements in their wages and working conditions. While the period of garment worker militancy in the early 1990s achieved some gains with respect to wages and conditions, Leckie documents, “overt militancy was not sustained” (1997a:145). Although the FAGW is no longer active, the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM) and the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) continue to campaign for improvements in the industry.

Through a legal literacy programme, the FWRM strives to educate women about their rights under the law. The FWRM lobbies to change the laws that discriminate against women, and for better enforcement of existing legislation. The FWRM also resists the patriarchal aspects of the state programme constraining women garment workers’ opportunities, and struggles to educate the general public with respect to the gender ideologies maintaining women’s subordinate position in society. Similarly, the FTUC is campaigning to improve wages and conditions in the garment industry, and to retain garment jobs in Fiji. In New Zealand, a precedent for organised resistance was set in the late 1980s, when a large number of garment workers participated in union-organised protests against the relocation of their jobs to Fiji. Although the South Island Clothing Trades Union is active today, none of the women in the case studies had heard
of the union or were participating. In both countries, the organised resistance in the garment industry aims for higher wages and improved working conditions, or the prevention of job loss altogether. On the international scene, even unions are now sometimes reputed to focus their efforts on containing workers’ demands in order to retain their jobs.\(^6\)

Some workers have collectively responded to their increasing employment insecurity by trying to achieve self-sufficient alternatives to dependence on an employer. As Burawoy discusses, through such resistance efforts, workers “can sometimes go beyond a negotiated order and carve out spheres of self-organization” (1991b:286). In New Zealand, a good example of this type of workers’ struggle and of its limits, is the case of five Greymouth women who bought out a Lane Walker Rudkin subsidiary when it made them redundant in 1990. Their employee-owned venture, Greymouth Apparel, was successful until 1998, when they announced the closure of their factory due to the impact of the government’s trade liberalisation programme and impending tariff reductions on clothing imports (RNZ 15.4.98).

Most of the garment workers’ resistance efforts take more everyday or covert forms. Everyday resistance makes use of the weapons available to disempowered groups, and includes acts ranging from workplace theft to sabotage (Scott 1985:xvi). In the Dunedin case, unorganised everyday forms of resistance to the employment situation among the case study migrant women were limited to leaving factories in search of better wages and working conditions with other employers, or leaving the garment industry altogether. Some women sought outwork in resistance to the conditions of factory work. By working in their own homes, women escape the control mechanisms of factory production. For example, Helen had taken up outwork after several negative experiences with supervisors in the factory environment. At home, outworkers gain “time sovereignty” in that they can decide when they want to do their work. As Paula recounted, “You want to hurry, you go faster. You just take your own sweet time, it’s okay… It’s up to myself.”

Everyday types of resistance were more marked in the Fiji case. Two of the case study women testified that they had moved from factory to factory in search of higher

\(^6\) For example, Safa (1995:134) notes with respect to the activities of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union in Puerto Rico: “The union is primarily interested in containing worker demands in order to retard the flight of garment plants to cheaper wage areas elsewhere.”
wages and less authoritarian supervisors. Women have also left the garment industry and returned to rural life. In addition to leaving the factory or the industry, workers resist the conditions of the labour process, particularly the control exercised by management and the “unequal distribution of reward for the labour power extended”, or “differential reward” (Cohen 1980:11). One form of resistance involves workers’ attempts to establish a measure of control over their productivity targets. For example, one of the case study women asserted that women in her factory did not even try to meet the targets in order to spare themselves the pain that comes with rushing: “...they don’t want to reach the targets so much, because they know that if they rush it, every day the boss is going to ask for the target ... Some of them don’t want the bonus because they said that if one day we rush and take the target out, second day, all this pain and they can’t do it second time, too.” This covert resistance enables workers “to avoid fatigue by allowing them to work at a comfortable pace” (Gordon 1977, qtd in Cohen 1980:16-17).

Incidences of workers creatively sewing garments or deliberately lowering productivity are acts of sabotage taking resistance to managerial control and the differential reward of the capitalist labour process a step further. Cohen explains: “Sabotage can also be seen as a means of levelling [sic] down profits to reduce inequality rather than, as in a wage demand, attempting to reduce inequality by levelling-up” (Cohen 1980:17). Cutting garments and marking them with lipstick also give workers some relief by getting the supervisor in trouble. Theft is a common occurrence in Fiji’s factories, and is another way that workers rectify the “differential reward” of the capitalist labour process. Theft can be seen “…as a form of labour protest which has the effect of reducing the rate of exploitation of the workers by an informal wage supplement... ‘theft’ becomes an act of recovering some ‘surplus value’, which would otherwise be appropriated by the employer” (Cohen 1980:21). Theft from factories is one type of resistance that actually improves workers’ short-term material conditions.

Absenteeism also constitutes a form of resistance through which workers achieve some freedom from employers’ control (Cohen 1980:20). Cohen argues that workers’ sickness is sometimes “an attempt to deny their labour-power to the employer while coping with debilitating conditions the employer has provided” (Cohen 1980:19). One of the case study women acknowledged that she sometimes stayed home to have a
rest from the boredom and discomfort of doing the same operation everyday: "Because I used to do the same work every day, sometimes I feel like to stay home... then the next day I come." Lingering in the toilet can also be viewed in this light. This perspective on absenteeism and toilet visits must be immediately qualified with the reassertion of other health-related reasons for absenteeism and time spent in the toilet, along with women's caregiving responsibilities that result in days away from work.

Scott stresses the limitations of everyday forms of resistance because they do not present a real challenge to structural forces nor extend as far as collective protest. As Cohen summarises, "There is no sense here in which workers can combine for a sustained long-term programme, or seize the instruments of production or govern themselves..." (Cohen 1980:21). A combination of objective and subjective factors serve to limit women's resistance to the constraints of their employment situations. Women's lack of experience with industrial work and with unionisation is one concrete factor resulting from the brief history of manufacturing in Fiji, and for the migrant women in New Zealand, from their status as new entrants to the industry. Secondly, poverty makes women vulnerable, reducing their willingness to risk their employment security through resistance efforts. Thirdly, the breaking of the union movement in both countries, reducing the association among garment industry workers, further inhibits collective action. Lack of association is most extreme among outworkers in New Zealand, for whom dependence on the employer and isolation in the home make engaging in resistance extremely difficult. As Frances states:

... workers' input to the shaping of work needs to be collective to be effective. In what circumstances does a group of workers arrive at a common decision that something needs to be done? It is clearly not simply a matter of the degree of exploitation. If that were so, female outworkers would be among the most militant instead of the least militant. Obviously, there needs to be a certain level of association between workers so that they can appreciate their common lot. (1993:192)

Fourthly, women's caregiving responsibilities assign them a heavy workload aside from their factory or outwork, limiting the time available for coordinated resistance efforts. For example, Rita recounted being forced to do overtime in addition to her normal shift, and "then come home here and go back to work!" Finally, many women have been
subjected to the control mechanism of male violence against women, restricting their involvement in resistance efforts.

Subjective factors also limit women's resistance to the constraints of their employment situation. Women's gender identities, and cultural and religious values from the family and community, are carried into the workplace and into women's attempts at collective bargaining. For example, in Fiji, two participants in the research discussed feeling compelled to do overtime to avoid public humiliation by the supervisors: "they’ll just growl in front of all the staff...". Employers in Fiji also take advantage of workers' non-confrontational cultural values to quash worker militancy. Women's timidity in Fiji is another barrier to resistance efforts, especially when combined with the patriarchal attitudes of male trade unionists, husbands, and fathers with respect to women's appropriate roles. One workers' husband made his dissatisfaction with her long hours of work evident: "Ooo! Sometimes he really get cross. Because sometimes I work 'til 7 o'clock." Similarly, Kirin's husband's attitude towards her appropriate role was clear in his instruction that she stay home to look after their daughters rather than undertake training. In New Zealand, the migrant women's own attitudes constrained their negotiation of the conditions of employment. For example, Paula's position on negotiating her employment contract was, "It's up to them how much they want to pay me." Daria could not negotiate as she did not even know the terms of her employment – her husband had arranged everything with the employer.

Subjective factors stifle worker resistance in other ways as well. For example, many of the trainees interviewed expressed their intention to gain skills in the garment industry and then start up their own businesses. One woman's response was typical of the trainees: "My aim is to do my own business. I'd like to run my own shop, like that." Cohen documents the dream of successful entrepreneurship as a form of psychological resistance to limited employment prospects. Cohen explains, "...many urban workers perceive their employment as temporary, not because they can now hope to return to the land, but because they hope to become petty entrepreneurs and independent craftsmen [sic]" (1980:15). While achievable for some workers, the goal of self-employment is a myth for others: "For such workers, the mythology of successful petty entrepreneurship has replaced the rural idyll as an object for escapism. Subjectively such fantasies are part of the workers' resistance to the objective reality that most of them will have little chance to avoid selling their labour-power..." (Lloyd 1974, ctd in Cohen 1980:16).
Similarly, workers' efforts to migrate overseas were a common form of resistance to the constraints of the employment situation. The Fiji case study workers place their families' hopes for the future on this strategy. The migrant women in the Dunedin case study also see their garment work as short-term until they would move on with their families to Australia. They are not alone in employing this strategy – globalisation has seen a marked increase in the movement of people around the globe along with capital, financial transactions, and production. As options for people in one locale prove limited according to trends in the global economy, people are shifting to where they can improve their life prospects. The dream of self-employment or migration has implications for resistance to the concrete conditions of work. Workers see waged employment as short-term and are less likely to identify strongly with it or struggle to change its conditions.

With these kinds of hopes for the future, workers focus on coping with the day-to-day reality of low-waged industrial work. In Fiji, coping involves subsidising wages through the subsistence sector, through kinship networks, or to a very limited extent through social welfare. The labour of female relatives helps with the double burden of domestic and industrial work. In New Zealand, the neo-liberal ideology encourages workers to be personally responsible as entrepreneurs to manage the risks involved in the global economy. If the needs of flexible production mean that their present skills are no longer applicable, this ideology would have women seek further training to enable them to take advantage of the opportunities that come through the free-market approach. Those who find that such opportunities do not materialise may fall back on the remnants of the welfare state (although being steadily eroded). The women in the Dunedin case coped by trying to do well in their jobs so that they could retain their employment, and also turned to social welfare to subsidise their low wages and inconsistent incomes. In both countries, support networks developed in neighbourhood and religious associations also help workers cope by serving as a venue for women to counsel each other and exchange information.

On another level, resistance within the employment arena is pre-empted because women are actively using their garment work to resist both the objective and subjective constraints of their wider life situations. Workers may therefore prioritise keeping their jobs over working for improvements in wages and conditions. Garment work is a key part of women's strategies to resist the constraints of poverty and meet the family's
financial needs. For example, Lata described that some employees in her factory entered the industry to earn income to pay for health care: “Some of them sick so they want to come here for the money...”. Women also use their garment employment to resist their lack of opportunities. Rita wanted to find a paid job once her children were all in school. Aware that her education through Form 5 would be inadequate for any skilled position, she pursued training in the garment industry because it was offered for free. Women also take advantage of the opportunity to acquire skills in the garment industry. Lata left her job as a salesperson to work in a garment factory, preferring the latter because of the opportunity to learn skills: “...in garments you can learn everything, how you sew, what you sew, whatever you want to sew you can sew it if you want to make it by yourself. So in sales we have to only stay... I don’t think you could probably learn...”. Some of the case study women in both New Zealand and Fiji used their employment in the garment industry as a vehicle to get out of the home and meet people. Garment work is therefore an important part of their strategies to resist their isolation, whether it stems from the confines of domestic work or the difficulties of developing social networks in a new country.

Garment work is also used as a means of resisting the conditions in other industries. One participant in the research, Gayatri, had entered the garment industry from a cleaning job in a hotel. She had felt unable to move up to a more desirable job in the tourism industry due to the discrimination against Indo-Fijians in that sector: “I thought like it’s racialised or something like that... Like they [the Fijian women] do it what I can do. The other Indian girls can do it and yet they don’t give us a chance. They give them the job.” For Gayatri, garment work was a way of resisting the constraint of racism in the tourism industry. Women were also using the garment industry to gain work experience with the goal of moving on to a better job. Siteri is a good example: “I was applying for a flight attendant and they said since you just left school, you might as well get some experience, work experience anyway, so I thought of doing that, and then I will apply again later on.” Garment work was considered an avenue that might allow savings toward self-employment or migration overseas. Rita was saving for the latter purpose: “Every week I have to save, save, save... My husband’s wages go on the rent and groceries, eh? Myself I have to just save my money.” Garment work is also used to resist patriarchal ideologies about women’s appropriate roles in the home as mothers and wives, not income earners. For example,
Kirin had entered the garment industry against her husband’s wishes while he was living overseas. Through outwork in particular, patriarchal constraints are negotiated: by working at home women can better balance the domestic responsibilities with income earning, and they resist the patriarchal ideologies about their appropriate role as dependent wives.

At the same time that women resist the subjective and objective constraints on their lives through their garment work, their employment situations impose new structural and ideological constraints. Women factory workers can be subjected to sexual harassment reinforcing their subordination to men, and wages low enough to reproduce their poverty and sometimes their dependence on male incomes. For example, although Rita was working full-time and often overtime, she still regarded her own income as surplus to the family’s needs: “...my husband’s wages all good for my family.” Migrant women workers have resisted the constraints in their home countries by migrating overseas and taking up employment in the garment industry. Due to the national borders erected by the state, migrant women find themselves powerless in their employment situations relative to national workers. That powerlessness is manipulated to undercut organised labour and to ensure a cheap and flexible labour supply for capitalist industry. The division between factory workers and outworkers is similarly manipulated by employers to their advantage. Women outworkers have pursued employment outside the factory both as a means of resisting the control mechanisms on the factory floor and as a way to balance their responsibility as primary caregiver for the family with the need to earn an income. New forms of control are imposed on outworkers through piece-rates, production deadlines, and isolation from fellow workers. The patriarchal ideology of women as the primary caregiver that leads many women into outwork is also reinforced as they juggle their income-earning and caregiving responsibilities.

Cohen’s work is useful in underscoring the dialectic between resistance and adaptation inherent in workers’ negotiation attempts. Whether negotiation attempts lay the basis for further organised resistance to the constraints of the employment situation, or assist in the adaptation of workers to the capitalist labour process, depends on the particular case and its conditions. On the one hand, “If protest can be kept on a sporadic and informal basis, it can ultimately be seen as a form of adaptation to the conditions of capitalist production” (Cohen 1980:21). For example, theft from the factories and
absenteeism provide workers short-term relief from the conditions of their employment situations, and may divert attention from more transformative efforts. On the other hand, resistance efforts could "...lay the basis for an organization and leadership, if not a consistent ideology" (Cohen 1980:21).

The forms of resistance that have been discussed here were often women's individual or family-based strategies to improve their situations, and did not take place on a collective level. Collective resistance will have to overcome the variety of historically-constituted divisions that exist among garment workers. Divisions along ethnic and religious lines stem from the history of colonialism. The state's role in creating and enforcing national borders has resulted in divisions among workers by nationality and legal status. Workers are also divided according to whether they engage in factory or outwork. Chhachhi and Pittin (1996: 101) argue that the "selective mobilisation" of the various aspects of women's identities may serve to stifle resistance efforts, as the ascendancy of different aspects of their identities may constrain efforts to transform their conditions. On the other hand, the varied aspects of women's identities are potential areas around which mobilisation could occur:

...the very multiplicity of roles and plethora of pressures may provide both the impetus and the necessary networking and organisational structures or base for women to organise. (italics in original, Chhachhi and Pittin 1996:120)

Conclusion

The discussion of globalisation has illuminated trends in the New Zealand and Fiji garment industries by invoking the historical context of the expansion of capital around the globe beginning with the colonial encounter. The comparative advantage determining the restructuring of the New Zealand garment industry and the recent growth of the Fiji garment industry has been shown to be a legacy of colonial relationships. In both countries, a combination of coercion and consent make available a labour force for capitalist industry, and the dialectic between coercion and consent has been explored on a general level and in the more specific context of garment workers' lives. On a general level, economic compulsion and the threat of force combine with
the ideological organisation of workers' cooperation through the normalisation of capitalism, and more recently, through neo-liberalism and employers' appeals to cultural and religious values.

At the level of garment workers' lives, women's entry into the garment industry is at the same time a result of employment options constrained by a combination of structural and subjective factors, and a form of active resistance to both the concrete and ideological constraints of women's wider life situations. Women's employment options are limited because of a combination of their poor educational backgrounds, poverty and lack of resources, discrimination in the labour market, societal attitudes about the primacy of women's roles as wives and mothers, and the caregiving responsibilities subsequently ascribed to women. Through garment work, women also actively resist these ideological and structural constraints. They use their employment to gain work experience, acquire skills, save for self-employment or migration overseas, and to resist patriarchal and racist constraints, poverty and isolation. In other words, women's entry into the industry is both a product of, and a form of resistance to, the objective and subjective limitations on their lives.

Women's employment experiences in the garment industry are constrained in the labour process itself and in arenas external to production - the state, patriarchy and the labour market. This chapter has underscored women's agency and active negotiation of the forces constraining their employment situations through both organised and more everyday forms of resistance. Women's ability to negotiate those constraints is nevertheless restricted by a number of objective and subjective factors. In addition to the objective constraints on their employment options described above, we can add the historical circumstances in each country, the breaking of the union movements, the lack of association among workers, and the control mechanism of male violence against women. To the subjective constraints indicated above, we add women's gender identities, cultural and religious values, and dreams of successful entrepreneurship or migration. Furthermore women are focused on coping with their daily lives, and their use of garment work as part of their coping strategies may preempt resistance to employment conditions as they prioritise keeping their jobs.

Women's employment situations impose new structural and ideological constraints. The divisions among the workers heighten their insecurity by reducing their bargaining power. Globalisation makes it easier for multinational capital to utilise
such divisions to its advantage on an international scale. The conditions of the employment situation also serve to reproduce women’s subordination to and dependence on men. The shaping of garment workers’ lives is clearly a complex process involving the interplay of subjective and structural forces. Transformation of the constraints on garment workers’ lives will require as a starting point collective organisation across the divisions among women garment workers. This chapter has established that the subjective and objective aspects of garment workers’ experiences are not only interconnected, but also mutually determining. Many of the theoretical themes from chapter two were implicit in the discussion. The final chapter of this thesis turns to the task of summarising the findings of the comparison, and placing them back in the theoretical context explicitly, so that a more general application might be drawn from the research.
This thesis has contributed to an understanding of the impact of global industrial restructuring on women garment workers in New Zealand and Fiji through an analysis of the forces shaping their lives within the current climate of globalisation. In order to understand the impact of restructuring on women garment workers, the thesis considered restructuring of the organisation of the labour process at the workplace level, and at the wider level of the restructuring characterising globalisation at present. This concluding chapter summarises the findings of the comparison: first, in terms of the labour process approach, and second, in light of the literature on global industrial restructuring. Recent developments in the garment industries in New Zealand and Fiji are then considered to illustrate how workers' resistance may broaden to a more collective level in response to the increasingly repressive environments created by the state. The chapter concludes by discussing the potential for collective resistance to bring about transformative social change in light of the ideological hegemony of globalisation.

The central theme of the labour process literature is the nature of managerial control of the workforce in the capitalist labour process, and managerial control organised in the labour process and in external arenas was a key element of the case study workers' experiences. The organisation of the labour process had implications for workers' skill levels. The comparison illustrated that some garment industry jobs in New Zealand have been deskill ed as large firms implement high technology innovations and downsize their workforces; while smaller firms increasingly rely upon multiskilled workers who produce nearly the entire garment, whether labouring in factories or in their own homes. In Fiji, the majority of garment industry jobs are deskill ed positions in Taylorist production lines where workers are engaged in repetitive tasks. Workplace control measures in the two sites range from authoritarian supervision, particularly prevalent in Fiji, through target systems, computerised monitoring and self-regulation.

Arenas external to the workplace also play a part in control of the labour process. The interrelated roles of the state, labour market and patriarchy are crucial to an understanding of control of the labour process, as Beechey (1982), Littler (1990) and Pollert (1981) argued. The comparison of the garment industries in New Zealand and
Fiji supports their assertions. Beechey's reminder to consider the role of the state in capitalist control proved instrumental to understanding control in the garment industry in New Zealand and Fiji, particularly with respect to the state's legislative and educational arms. Education contributed to the pre-adaptation of workers to industry in both New Zealand and Fiji. In New Zealand, the new NZQA system aimed to align the needs of employers with the career paths of employees, and the inculcation of an "enterprise culture" attempted to engender desired attitudes to work. Legislation and the select enforcement of it also affected capitalist control of the labour process. Legislation to protect workers was in place in both countries to varying degrees, however selective enforcement in some cases served to increase workers' vulnerability to exploitation. Other legislation actively fostered workers' vulnerability by breaking the power of the union movement and creating a permissive regulatory environment for industry.

Littler's directive to look towards labour market conditions aided the comparison of women's experiences in the labour process in New Zealand and Fiji. International and national labour market conditions shaped the control measures implemented in the labour process and workers' ability to respond. On both the international and national levels, groups of workers are pitted against each other in the competition to attract capital investment and jobs. Divisions exist between factory workers and outworkers in New Zealand, and in both countries between national workers and recent immigrants. The deregulation of the labour market requires workers to negotiate the conditions of their employment contract, but they have little power to do so in a climate of high unemployment. Labour market divisions, deregulation, and high unemployment all contribute to capitalist control by reducing workers' bargaining power.

Patriarchy is another area that demands consideration to understand women's experiences of industrial restructuring. Patriarchal hierarchical relations in the family were found to translate into women's subordinate roles in the labour process, as Pollert argued (1981). Hartmann (1982), Beechey (1982) and West (1990) point out another relationship between the family and the labour process - patriarchy ascribes the bulk of unpaid domestic and family caregiving work to women according to gender ideologies about women's appropriate roles in society. The relationship between women's roles in the family and in the capitalist labour process is therefore central to an understanding of
capitalist control. The comparison revealed that women’s roles in the family and the corresponding gender ideologies result in flexibility taking a “gendered” form as women make up the bulk of the part-time, temporary, and contract workforce created with industrial restructuring in New Zealand’s garment industry, as well as the labour intensive workforce in the industry in Fiji.

Burawoy (1979a) stresses the importance of workers’ subjectivities in capitalist control, maintaining that a combination of coercion and consent, the latter generated in the ideological or subjective realm, is used to organise workers’ cooperation with capitalist aims. This was illustrated in the comparison as economic compulsion and threat of force intersected with the normalisation of capitalism, and ideologies – patriarchal, religious, cultural and neo-liberal – in generating a workforce for the garment industry. The discussion of the labour process literature culminated with Thompson’s (1989) assertion that both objective and subjective factors enable capitalist control, and Knights and Willmott’s (1989) argument that subjectivity and structure are mutually determining. These points proved crucial to understanding women’s experiences in New Zealand and Fiji. Subjective and structural forces combined to bring women into the industry, and shaped their resistance to the constraints on their lives. The findings of the comparison reiterate that according primacy to either subjective or structural factors in analysis of women’s experiences of global industrial restructuring will yield an inadequate understanding.

Women’s active resistance to both the subjective and structural constraints on their lives was underscored in the comparison. However, new forms of subordination were shown to be imposed on women even as they resist the constraints in their wider lives through their employment. The discussion of women’s resistance in the comparison demonstrated that as well as being affected by structural forces, women do shape structural forces. Although it was beyond the scope of this comparative study to do so, other writers further develop the idea of women’s impact on structural forces. For example, Silverblatt underscores the point that “those who are supposedly ‘impacted’ by the state are integral to and indissoluble from state-making itself” (1991:156). Herod extends this critique of the literature to include women’s role in global restructuring:
there is little sense that workers are themselves capable of proactively shaping global economic landscapes through their direct intervention in the geography of capitalism. They are portrayed as the bearers of global economic restructuring, not as active participants in the process. (1995, qtd in Gibson-Graham 1996/97:4)

Women's impact on structural forces becomes most evident when their resistance undergoes a qualitative shift to a more collective and political level. Recent developments in New Zealand and Fiji's garment industries illustrate the potential of women's resistance to coalesce into collective protest in both locales. Before turning to the recent developments, the state reform programmes in New Zealand and Fiji and corresponding trends in the garment industry are briefly summarised to situate both industries in relation to the theoretical contexts of global industrial restructuring.

The industrial restructuring in the New Zealand and Fiji garment industries is part of worldwide trends as states implement free market reforms to achieve competitiveness under the pressures of globalisation. Particular reforms are implemented to attract capital investment according to each country's historically constituted comparative advantage. The New Zealand government hopes to capitalise on a highly educated workforce and design, research and development capability. The Fiji government focuses on a strategy to attract capital investment based on the availability of cheap labour and the country's market access. Internationally, industries are pursuing flexibility to maintain profitability in the face of market changes arising from the competitive pressures of globalisation. The decline of mass production in advanced industrialised countries such as New Zealand resulted, with a shift to new flexible industries. In less developed countries like Fiji, mass production has undergone tremendous growth as companies relocate due to the availability of cheap labour. Firms pursue differing strategies of flexibility in New Zealand and Fiji according to the local conditions. In New Zealand, firms utilise workers' multiskilled labour as a key part of their strategies. The comparison illustrated that flexible technology innovations were less important than the casualisation of work in achieving flexibility in New Zealand's garment industry. In Fiji, firms pursue flexibility through a cheap and disempowered workforce. The casualisation of work in the advanced industrialised countries and the expansion of low-waged labour intensive manufacturing jobs in the less developed
countries were discussed as part of the downgrading of manufacturing. This downgrading has particular implications for the low-waged and casualised workforce.

In both countries, globalisation has seen the state become more repressive and destroy the power of the union movement. The comparison illustrates that the defeat of workers’ resistance on the collective union level left their resistance limited for the most part to individual or family-level strategies. As a consequence, workers experience declining working conditions and increasing insecurity as the balance between consent and coercion employed to elicit labour’s cooperation with industry shifts toward the latter. Worsening conditions of work in New Zealand’s garment industry are paralleled in Fiji. Trade liberalisation by the governments of both countries heightens workers’ fear of capital flight and erodes their job security. Rising unemployment results in tougher labour market conditions. In New Zealand, the casualisation of work replaced the job security that accompanied full-time factory jobs covered by collective contracts with the insecurity of part-time, temporary, contract or outwork often without any written contract. Another parallel in the two countries is the decline in real wages. The depreciation of the currency in New Zealand brought the decline in real wages, while in Fiji the government’s currency devaluations reduced the buying power of wages. Collective bargaining in both places is being replaced by individual bargaining on paper, although most often in practice no bargaining occurs whatsoever.

Numerous signs of increasingly repressive environments in New Zealand and Fiji became evident in 1998. The state’s measures to further erode labour’s past gains in New Zealand included an average 71 per cent increase in ACC levies for workers, “from 70c for every hundred dollars earned to $1.20 per $100” (NZH 7.3.98). Secondly, the Court of Appeals ruled that workers are not guaranteed redundancy payments unless their employment contracts explicitly state that they are so entitled. This ruling signals the end of redundancy payments for those with no written employment contracts (NZH 16-17.5.98). Thirdly, certain statutory holidays became negotiable with changes to the Holidays Act. Moves were also underway to change the Employment Contracts Act in 1998 – with a tougher probation period for employees and greater ease for employers to sack workers within the first six months. Additionally, the government rushed ahead with tariff reductions despite widespread protest, eliminating all tariffs in the automobile industry instead of year 2000 as originally scheduled. The remaining automobile manufacturers in New Zealand
announced the closure of their operations in response. In June 1998, the New Zealand dollar dropped to its lowest rate in thirteen years at 49.36 US cents, 20 cents less against the US dollar than a year earlier. The fall in the New Zealand dollar will bring increases in the price of imported goods such as petrol, amounting to a declining standard of living (SST 14.6.98). The collapse of retailing chains – DFL, Heros and Paulls – also contributed to a more coercive environment by boosting unemployment and heightening the insecurity of the chains’ former suppliers. Finally, following redundancies in the automotive industry and in several other sectors, unemployment was announced to be at 7.7 per cent in August 1998 – the highest rate in four years – and expected to increase to 8 per cent by early 1999 with serious implications for workers’ job security (NZH 8-9.8.98).

In Fiji, further devaluation of the currency was the main indicator of an increasingly coercive environment. On 21 January 1998, ten years after the first devaluations totaling 33 per cent, the Board of the Reserve Bank devalued the country’s currency once again by 20 per cent. The government’s justification was that the devaluation was necessary for the economy in light of the financial crisis in Asia, and the depreciation of the currencies of Australia and New Zealand – Fiji’s two largest trading partners (FT 21.1.98). With the value of the currency falling in New Zealand and Australia, Fiji’s main export markets, the Fiji government devalued to ensure their exports’ continued affordability overseas by reducing the prices of Fiji’s exports. The devaluation also aimed at restoring Fiji’s international competitiveness in attracting capital investment and overseas tourists. The devaluation worsened workers’ situation primarily by decreasing the buying power of their wages, and by bringing about a number of redundancies. The decrease in the buying power of wages has been assessed at 45–55 per cent due to the strengthening of the US dollar following the Fiji devaluation (Ramesh 12.2.98). A dramatic jump in the cost of food and other basic provisions has occurred: “Basic consumer items such as potatoes have gone up from around $7.00 a bag to $13.00. By 17th of February sharps and flour are going up by as much as 45%” (Ramesh 12.2.98). Bus fares will increase as Fiji imports all its fuel. Redundancies in a number of sectors in the wake of the devaluation worsen the climate of job insecurity in Fiji (FT 5.4.98). Prospects for those made redundant were poor with no social welfare net to fall back on and in many cases no redundancy package as it is not provided for in legislation. As one unionist wrote, “Redundant workers will have
no means of survival because we neither have employment benefits in Fiji nor alternative jobs available” (Attar Singh, *FT* 15.5.98).

With the increasingly coercive economic environment resulting from the pressures of globalisation, conditions in New Zealand and Fiji reached a breaking point for garment workers in 1998 at which resistance again expanded to a collective level and targeted state policies. In New Zealand, the government’s planned tariff reductions on the textile, clothing and footwear industries were the catalyst for the collective protests. As a member of APEC, the New Zealand government is committed to reducing all import tariffs to zero by 2010. Tariffs on clothing imports, currently 26.5 per cent, are scheduled to be reduced to 15 per cent by July 2000 (*NZH* 2-3.5.98). The exact schedule for the tariff reductions is under review in 1998. The government maintains that New Zealand should lead the way, lifting tariffs on the textile, clothing and footwear industries even ahead of the country’s major trading partners. Critics argue that the tariffs should be reduced at the same rate as the tariffs of New Zealand’s major trading partners – the Australian government decided to pause tariff reductions until 2005. Tariff reductions to date have already seen clothing imports from China alone increase from NZ$77 million in 1992 to NZ$278 million in 1997 (*NZH* 2-3.5.98). If the tariff reduction programme were halted for five years, this would allow the industry more time to restructure towards the targeting of niche markets.

In anticipation of the results of the government’s tariff review on the timetable for the reductions, factory closures continued. Within the space of one week in June 1998, four provincial North Island clothing companies closed down with a loss of 130 jobs: Plastalon Sportswear in Masterton, Taranaki Clothing in Hawera, Supertex Industries in Marton, and Staples Bros Ward in Newtown, Wellington (New Zealand Trade Union Federation 1998). New Zealand’s largest garment manufacturer, Lane Walker Rudkin, was also considering moving its remaining domestic production offshore due to the tariff cuts. Lane Walker Rudkin had already cut its workforce back from 3,500 in 1990 to less than 900 in 1998 (RNZ 12.6.98). In 1998, employment in the New Zealand garment industry is approximately 9,000 workers, with further job losses expected to ensue as manufacturers relocate overseas unless the tariff reduction programme is halted (*NZH* 2-3.5.98). Job losses in the textile, clothing and footwear industries could number as many as 35,000, bringing about concern from a variety of quarters over the tariff reductions. On 1 May 1998, unions and management joined
together for a day of action to demand that the government slowdown tariff reductions. The mayors of provincial New Zealand towns where the garment industry is a substantial source of employment also participated. In eighteen centres around New Zealand, thousands marched, calling for trade barriers to remain in place. Maori MPs also protested against the tariff reductions due to the expected impact on the large number of Maori women who work in the industries, and their families (MP Tukuroirangi Morgan, National Radio 22.4.98).

In Fiji, the catalyst for collective protest was the devaluation of the currency. The impact of the devaluation on the garment industry has been mixed with some companies closing down and others expanding. Factory closures such as that of Solanki Garments relate to the increase in price of all imported materials and equipment that the devaluation represents (Ramesh 12.2.98). Following the devaluation, manufacturers exporting to the Australian market had to plead with the Australian government to change the SPARTECA rules of origin as they could no longer meet the 50 per cent local content requirement. In April 1998, the Australian government agreed to reduce the local content requirement from 50 per cent to 44 per cent. The Australian government’s decision to slow tariff reductions for the benefit of its own garment industry will also assist manufacturers in Fiji, as tariffs into the Australian market for non-SPARTECA countries will preserve preferential access from Fiji in the short-term (FT 4.10.97).1 With export prices cheaper for overseas buyers, and with the problems with access to the Australian market reduced for the short-term, some garment manufacturers were expanding following the devaluation. Three hundred workers were being added at Mark One Apparel, and United Apparel was hiring an additional 400 to meet the surge in demand from buyers in Australia and New Zealand (FT 17.2.98; 11.4.98).

For women garment workers, the impact of the devaluation has been severe. As low wages were already the biggest constraint on their opportunities, the reduction in the buying power of their wage tremendously exacerbates their situations. The drop in the value of the currency and the rising costs of basic goods make the goals of migrating overseas or starting up businesses more distant. In order to preserve the comparative

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1 Tariffs into the Australian market for clothing imports have been reduced from 55 per cent in 1988 to the current level of 34 per cent, and after 2005 will be further reduced to 17.5 per cent (FT 4.10.97).
advantage restored by the devaluation, the government struggled to forestall workers’ demands for higher wages to compensate for the drop in the buying power of their wages. To pre-empt wage increases, in April 1998, the government passed legislation restricting increases to 3 per cent for two years in the private sector. Although the government later promised not to implement the wage order, protests ensued against the limitation of unions’ right to collective bargain over wages (FT 15.5.98). A 12,000-strong protest against the wage order took place on 23 April 1998. When the government began investigations to prosecute union members who participated, the FTUC organised a national strike for 2 June 1998 in which 50,000 workers participated.

The May Day protests in New Zealand and the national strike in Fiji in the wake of the devaluation illustrate that workers do continue to resist the constraints on their lives, even collectively, despite the defeat of the union movement and workers’ alleged powerlessness under globalisation. When conditions reach a breaking point, negotiation can coalesce into collective resistance. However, even workers’ collective resistance in the two sites was restricted to negotiation within the limits of the present system. Neither workers’ organised nor unorganised resistance efforts aimed for an alternative to the present system, in which countries compete to provide the lowest wages and least regulations to attract investment. In this sense, workers’ resistance is simultaneously a form of consent to capitalist globalisation, because it is based on “...acceptance of the parameters of capital investment in a ‘competitive’ world...” (Ross and Trachte 1990:10).

Collective resistance is insufficient to bring about transformative social change unless the ideological hegemony of globalisation is challenged. The competing perspectives on globalisation reveal the concept’s ideological hegemony. Some regard globalisation as a “virtue” (Harvey 1995:8): a process that will result in all countries specialising in what they are good at, and competing according to their comparative advantage, resulting in efficiency gains, lower prices, higher quality goods, and enhanced consumer choice. Others maintain that globalisation is a “brakeless train wreaking havoc” (Harvey 1995:8): a process leading to a downward spiral where countries have no choice but to compete against each other to provide the lowest wages and fewest regulations in order to attract capital investment. Both perspectives take globalisation as a natural and inevitable process.
Globalisation is not natural and inevitable, but arises out of specific conditions and is open to transformation. The potential for transformation is strong as globalisation heightens the contradictions inherent in capitalism. Meiksins Wood points out that as capitalism has become totalised, it has grown into a system not only without effective rivals but also with no real escape routes. Capitalism is living alone with its own internal contradictions. It has little recourse outside its own internal mechanisms to correct or compensate for those contradictions and their destructive effects. (Meiksins Wood 1996:38)

A principal internal contradiction of capitalism is the need for consumers to make production profitable. As firms struggle to increase profitability by ebbing away at workers’ wages and conditions, they create a crisis on a collective level in terms of maintaining the consumption required to perpetuate capital accumulation. Such contradictions will continue to intensify as the sectors that historically cushioned workers from the worst impacts of the capitalist approach erode: in New Zealand, namely the welfare state, and the subsistence sector in Fiji.

In the medium-term, women workers will continue their struggles to negotiate and resist the subjective and structural limitations they encounter in the workplace, labour market, legislation, education, and in the family and community. Their struggles will be shaped by the increasing number of women entering the workforce and also by changes in the labour market and the labour process as the trend toward the casualisation of work continues. In light of the state’s pursuit of the neo-liberal approach, which is adversely affecting wider segments of the population, it remains to be seen how long the state can continue to invoke the consent of the labour force to work for the needs of capitalist industry. The longer term may see women’s negotiation and resistance efforts broaden into more organised forms of counter-hegemony in response to the increasing compulsion of the state’s neo-liberal approach, which has affected women most severely in the Pacific region.
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