

THE GROWTH AND ORGANISATION OF A PRECARIAT:

WORKING IN THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY IN JOHANNESBURG'S INNER CITY

Katherine Joynt and Edward Webster

INTRODUCTION

Yau starts his day at 5am in Orange Farm where he catches a minibus taxi to go to work in inner city Johannesburg. Here, amongst fellow Malawian immigrants, he sews jackets in one of the small Cut Make and Trims (CMTs). Like many other CMTs housed in the cramped rooms of the dilapidated building where he works, Yau's CMT is struggling. He makes an average of R400 per week to support his wife and child, R120 of which he uses for transport to and from work. The job does not entitle him to any benefits. Yau hopes that one day he will be able to access loans so that he can buy more material to establish his own business. But the enterprise is not registered and it will be difficult for him to obtain a loan.

This is the story of many people working in the clothing industry in inner city Johannesburg where competition is tight and customers are few. Some factory owners reminisce about the heyday of the district which was once a thriving hub for the clothing industry in South Africa. Large Full Package Manufacturers (FPMs) which operated the entire manufacturing process of clothing dominated the industry and provided employment for thousands of machinists. Today, FPMs are few and the industry is decentralised, with hundreds of small, unregulated and informal CMTs and micro-enterprises (MSEs) characterising the industry. As one employer (2007) recalls, 'In the 70s and 80s the clothing industry stretched from Carlton down to Troyville. Large factories hired up to 1000 skilled workers. Now there has been a big change. It has gone from a hub similar of that in Manhattan to lots of informal traders selling Chinese goods and counterfeit trading'.

The CMTs and MSEs which have multiplied in inner city are either sub-contracted by larger factories or supply small retail outlets directly. Forced by international competition into the periphery of the industry, they operate in abandoned or hijacked buildings in South Africa's inner cities. The so-called Fashion District in Johannesburg's inner city is one such example.

In 1994, South African industry moved away from its protectionist past¹ towards a more open and integrated economy (Naumann, 2002: 32). As clothing and textile industries were previously amongst the most highly protected of South Africa's industries, enterprises faced intense pressure to become more competitive and cut

¹ From the 1960s to the late 1980s, the South African economy – including the clothing manufacturing industry – was insulated from the global market place. The apartheid government had introduced a range of import substitution and policies aimed at developing the internal manufacturing industry. One of the main instruments was the use of tariffs. For the clothing and textile industries, high tariff walls effectively prevented imports penetrating the local market place or putting any pressures on local industry. Sanctions helped protect the industry too from global pressures (Bennet, 2003: 9).

costs². An estimated 80 000 clothing workers lost their jobs in the 1990s as cheaper clothing and textiles were imported from East Asia (Greenburg, 2005, cited in Budlender, 2009:40).

Under the impact of liberalisation, labours' collective power was weakened by fragmentation of the labour market through decentralisation of production, casualisation, part-time work and the accompanying outsourcing of workers to a third party. Guy Standing (2010) has described this trend in the labour market as the growth of a precariat. "Below the core are the new legions of the precariat", writes Standing, "flitting between jobs, unsure of their occupational title, with little labour security, few enterprise benefits and tenuous access to state benefits. They include the more fortunate of the vast informal economy... (they) lack employment security, being in jobs usually regarded by employers as short-term or casual, and seen that way by those doing the work. Often they have no employment contract, or if they do it is casual" (Standing, 2010:110).

The main effect of the emergence of this precariat was to reduce wage costs, especially indirect costs, through the lack of benefits. As Castells and Portes (1989:30) argue, "By lowering the cost of labour and reducing the state-imposed constraints on its free hiring and dismissal, the informal economy contributes directly to the profitability of capital". It also undermines, Castells and Portes continue, the power of organised labour in all spheres: economic bargaining, social organisation and political influence: Undeclared, unprotected labour: small units of production; networks rather than socialised labour processes; homework rather than factories; unstable relations of production; multiple intermediaries between labour and capital; segmentation of labour along age, gender, and ethnic lines; dependence of the job upon the absence of legal control (Castells and Portes, 1989:31). All these factors, they conclude, "contribute to the de-collectivization of the labour process and to the reversal of the material conditions that historically allowed the emergence of the labour movement as an organised force" (Castells and Portes, 1989:31).

It also, they argue, blurs class differences through the emergence of intermediaries. There are still exploiters and exploited, work authority relationships and submissive work, yet between the structural logic of production and appropriation of the product and the actual social organization of these processes, there are so many mediations that the experience of labor and the emergence of stable class positions do not correspond to each other anymore. Thus, the women sewing at home for a 'friend of the family' who is a middleman selling to a commercial intermediary of a large department store, cannot be socially equated, nor does she equate herself, with a garment-factory worker (Castells and Portes, 1989:31).

Finally, they argue, the heterogeneity of working situations is generally reinforced by the specific characteristics of the workers who tend to be involved in the informal economy – women, immigrant workers, ethnic minorities and the young. "It is in this

² In 1994, South Africa was signatory to the Marrakech General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement, where the country agreed to embark upon a massive liberalization of tariffs on manufactured goods, including those of the clothing and textile sectors.. Inefficiency and corruption in South Africa's customs administration intensified the impact of tariff liberalization. Large quantities of clothing, mainly from the Far East and from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, entered the country without any duties being levied at all, or without the relevant 'rules of origin' being adhered to (Bennet, 2003:9).

sense that the process of informalisation tends to reinforce some specific social groupings that differ markedly from those associated with stable class lines” (Castells and Portes, 1989:32).

The question then is whether the precariat could become, like Fanon’s “Wretched of the Earth”, the class to lead working people to “the new politics of paradise”? (Standing, 2009: 286). Standing provides us with a contradictory answer. On the one hand, he writes, the precariat is- “easily swayed by the theatrics of political salespeople, because it does not have a firm sense of identity to defend. The Italian precariat would have voted for Berlusconi, and may have seen his venality and banalities as inconsequential, identifying instead with his battle against bureaucracy. The precariat does not have freedom because it lacks security” (Standing, 2009:314).

Yet, on the other hand, he argues that in spite of the obstacles facing the precariat, they are the historic agent to lead “a struggle for redistribution”. “A progressive agenda”, he writes, “must build on the energies, anger and aspirations of those most likely to become active...In today’s tertiary society, that is the precariat” (Standing, 2009:286). He develops this argument further in his latest book by arguing that this ‘dangerous class’ needs a voice (Standing, 2011). He proposes a ‘good society’ in which the precariat is re-engaged, more people are actively involved in civil society and the state provides an unconditional basic income for everyone. However, Standing’s book contains very little concrete information on the social composition of this new class; their experience of working conditions, their consciousness, their organization and, above all, the source of their potential power.

The central question raised in this paper is the nature of the growth and organisation of the precariat in the clothing industry in inner city Johannesburg? Drawing on surveys, visual ethnography and non-participant observation, this paper provides a sociological portrait of this precariat. We do this by describing their workplaces and the conditions under which these predominantly illegal immigrants work. Three research interventions were undertaken over a five year period; in 2007, in 2009 and again in 2011.

A survey was first undertaken in 2007 (Joynt, 2007). Of the seven factories (FPMs) which were visited, three were producing clothing for corporate and marketing companies, two were producing clothing and ties for large South African retail chains, and one had secured a niche market by producing scuba diving outfits. The largest factory in Gauteng, hiring about 400 workers, was the only factory which outsourced part of its production. When they outsourced, it was to a medium-sized registered factory with 100 workers who performed the tasks of pattern cutting, aligning pattern pieces for sewing, and washing the final garments made by workers in the FPM.

The three sewing shops which we visited were producing traditional African clothing and bridal wear for their own small retail outlets which were attached to their CMTs. Finally, the two clothing designers who ran their own CMTs had secured their own niche markets, supplying garments to high-end fashion boutiques in and around Johannesburg. A total of twenty-one workers were interviewed from a number of different FPMs, CMTs and MSEs in 2007. In 2011 we revisited the Fashion District and some of the factories from 2007, and interviewed another seven factory and CMT owners and another thirteen workers from different clothing enterprises.

To explore the possibilities of extending organization to this precariat we employed a mapping model as a tool for organizing purposes in 2009 (Webster and Bischoff, 2011). We designed a seven step process in which the researchers would locate those workers who are often invisible, working in MSEs. Through the mapping process, we aimed to make them aware of their identity as workers and their collective interests. Through the interviews and workshops, MSE workers would begin to frame their sense of injustice in ways that could enable organizing. Known as mobilization theory, this approach provides an explanation for individual participation in collective action and organization (Kelly, 1998; Frege and Kelly, 2004). This approach is particularly applicable to workers in MSEs where work is often informal and non-standard- these workers, we hypothesized, stand to benefit from the process of mapping.

The paper is divided into three parts: in Part One we focus on Johannesburg's Fashion District and the restructuring of the industry. Part Two identifies what we call the decent work deficit, the low wages, lack of security and inadequate representation of these workers. In Part Three we describe the attempts made by the clothing workers union to close the representational gap by organising informal workers in the inner city. The union believes that its only source of power is moral pressure on retailers to refuse to deal with enterprises that are non-compliant. This, we suggest, is not sufficient pressure on employers to reduce the decent work deficit. We conclude by arguing that the only association that has deep support amongst these workers are faith based associations and that religion is a neglected source of union power. To harness this power the union would need to form coalitions of mutual interest with churches and mosques in inner city Johannesburg.

PART ONE: THE FASHION DISTRICT AND THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY IN THE INNER CITY

Johannesburg's 'inner city Fashion District' covers thirty-four blocks in the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) and consists of over 1000 small and medium-sized enterprises, most of which are in the clothing industry (JDA, 2007).

Visually, the district is vibrant and diverse. There is a buzz of economic activity in the high rise buildings and on the mosaic patterned pavements of the district. In the countless small rooms in tall buildings, businesses range from informal driving school offices and nursery schools to traditional healers and CMTs which sew custom-made garments, bridal gowns and traditional African dresses, while on the pavements hawkers cook and sell food, informal hairdressing salons offer haircuts, people collect paper for recycling and women stuff cushions with mattress foam cut-offs.

The buildings in the area are a unique mix of old historic architecture, religious mosques and churches and 'hijacked' dilapidated buildings which contrast with newly renovated blocks of brightly painted loft apartments and functional industrial warehouses, some of which are still used as spaces for clothing manufacture. Most of the remaining larger clothing factories operate on the fringes of the Fashion District in New Doornfontein.

The lower levels of many of the buildings in almost every street are occupied by small retail outlets selling a variety of goods from traditional African clothing, cheap Chinese imported garments, bags and bridal wear to haberdashery, fabrics and curtains. Many of these small retail outlets are run by informal traders, most of whom sell Chinese goods which they obtain through counterfeit trading. Much of the informal retail industry in the district is controlled by Muslims, Indians and Pakistanis, while the formal side of manufacturing and retail as well as building ownership is mainly controlled by Jews (Design House Owner A: Interview, 2007).

In the broader Fashion District community there is integration because clothing manufacturers make use of the fabric stores and patternmakers in the area. Yet along with the integration between businesses in the area, there is also intense competition both for sales and with regard to design. Many retail owners refused to allow us to take photographs of their curtains or dresses because they were concerned that we intended to 'steal their patterns and designs' and copy them in order to start up our own competitive outlet selling the same items.

The 'hijacked' buildings in the area are easy to identify with their rundown facades peeling with paint, crumbling walls, broken windows and dingy entrances. Usually the landlord has left the country and abandoned the building, neglecting to pay for electricity, water or maintenance. Nigerians 'hijack' the buildings by illegally charging people rent if they want to stay in the building.

Many of the people living in these buildings are undocumented foreign migrants who have been forced to migrate to South Africa to escape political turmoil and economic crisis in their home countries. A recent Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) survey showed that 49% of the respondents in such buildings shared a toilet with over 100 people and 84.5% are living below standards of minimum crowding, pointing towards a health crisis in inner city Johannesburg which the survey links to high rates of dermatological and respiratory illnesses (Wilhelm-Solomon, 2010). MSF has identified 82 overcrowded buildings in inner city Johannesburg in which an estimated 50 000 to 60 000 people, mostly foreigners, live.

Landau (2009: 199), drawing on Leggett's survey and work by Kagiso Urban Management, points out that almost 25 per cent of residents in central Johannesburg are foreign born, while 'pockets of the inner city are 60 per cent foreign'. A large portion of the informal workforce in the clothing industry in the area consists of foreign labourers. Often these workers are more skilled than the South African workers because they bring with them advanced skills in embroidery and stitching and valuable experience which they are unable to use back home in their own countries due to the collapse of the clothing industries there.

Migrants from West and Central Africa, particularly Ghana and Malawi, often work as tailors specialising in traditional West African clothing and embroidery. These tailors have incorporated traditional West African embroidery with modern elements of South African clothing styles and fabrics such as Shweshwe in order to appeal to a wider market.

There is a large and closely-knit Ethiopian community in the Fashion District. An Ethiopian lady who was running one of the curtain-making CMTs described a

hierarchy operating between the Malawian and Ethiopian communities. The Ethiopians 'generally operate on the business side of things' and hire the Malawians to work for them in their CMTs (Desai, interview, 2007).

The Pakistani community in the area specialises in curtain making and sells imported blankets and Indian wrap skirts. Manufacture of the Shweshwe domestic worker outfits which are unique to South Africa has been taken up by manufacturers in India who mass produce the outfits. Many retail outlets run by Indians or Pakistanis now sell these outfits at very low prices.

Indians own about 90% of the fabric shops in the Fashion District and they dominate that market in South Africa in general (Desai, interview, +2007). Many of the retail outlets selling fashion fabrics and upholstery in the Fashion District buy their supplies from large wholesalers in Fordsburg on the other side of town.

The restructuring of the clothing industry in South Africa was the result of an increase in trade liberalisation since 1996. Since the production of clothing is now a globally interlinked phenomenon, local factories are subject to global competition. The trend for global clothing production networks is that higher skill functions such as international branding houses are located in countries in the North, while low skill functions such as CMT are generally located in countries in the South (Anner et al. 2006: 23). Global competition between different CMTs for tenders linking them into these global production networks is tight and usually depends on who can offer the most competitive price in relation to quality. This price hinges on the only flexible input; the cost of labour.³

In her assessment of the South African clothing sector, Miriam Altman (1994: 82) asserts that the South African clothing industry is unable to compete with cheaper Asian clothing imports on the basis of price due to the low cost of labour in those countries and therefore the low cost of production with which they yield a competitive advantage. While it is true that South Africa's clothing industry is battling to compete on the basis of low wages, the low prices of Chinese products are also due to the fact that 'production is often realized by state-related firms, benefiting from advantages private firms in other countries normally do not have access to' (Mbaye and Weiyong, 2008: 8).

The textile and clothing industries in China receive generous state subsidies and government support. 'A subsidy represents a direct or indirect transfer of resources from the government, and therefore the taxpayers, to a producer or exporter' (Capital Trade Incorporated, 2009/10: 7). The most common types of Chinese state subsidies are tax subsidies, preferential loans and grants, as well as favourable input prices and transfer of assets to favourable firms at prices that are below market value (e.g. cost of electricity and domestic machinery) (Ibid).

³ In the global apparel industry costs of labour are a small proportion of the total costs in the production of clothing. On average wages constitute less than one-half of 1% of the retail price of branded sweatshirts (Miller and Williams, 2009).

While a competitive private sector still dominates the clothing industry in China, 32% of enterprises in clothing/textile industry in China in 2001 were state-owned with a growing trend of government spending and state bank lending to state owned enterprises to combat the current financial crisis (Mbaye and Weiyong, 2008: 8, and Wines, 2010: 1). In 2000, China held an 18.13 % share in garment exports globally, while five out of the top ten world exporters were Asian (Yeng and Mok, 2004, in Mbaye and Weiyong, 2008: 7).

This suggests that South African manufacturers and industrial policy-makers will have to focus on other production factors such as quality and branding, as well as market-related factors such as preferential market access, bilateral and multilateral partnerships, efficiency and protectionist measures, if the industry is to survive on an international level.

The South African clothing industry is squeezed both globally and in its own local market. CMTs in South Africa find it difficult to link into global clothing production networks through tenders because South Africa has a relatively high cost of labour compared to manufacturers in Asian countries (some of which also receive subsidies), while entry into the local market is squeezed by competition from an influx of cheap clothing imports from countries such as China, Malawi and India.

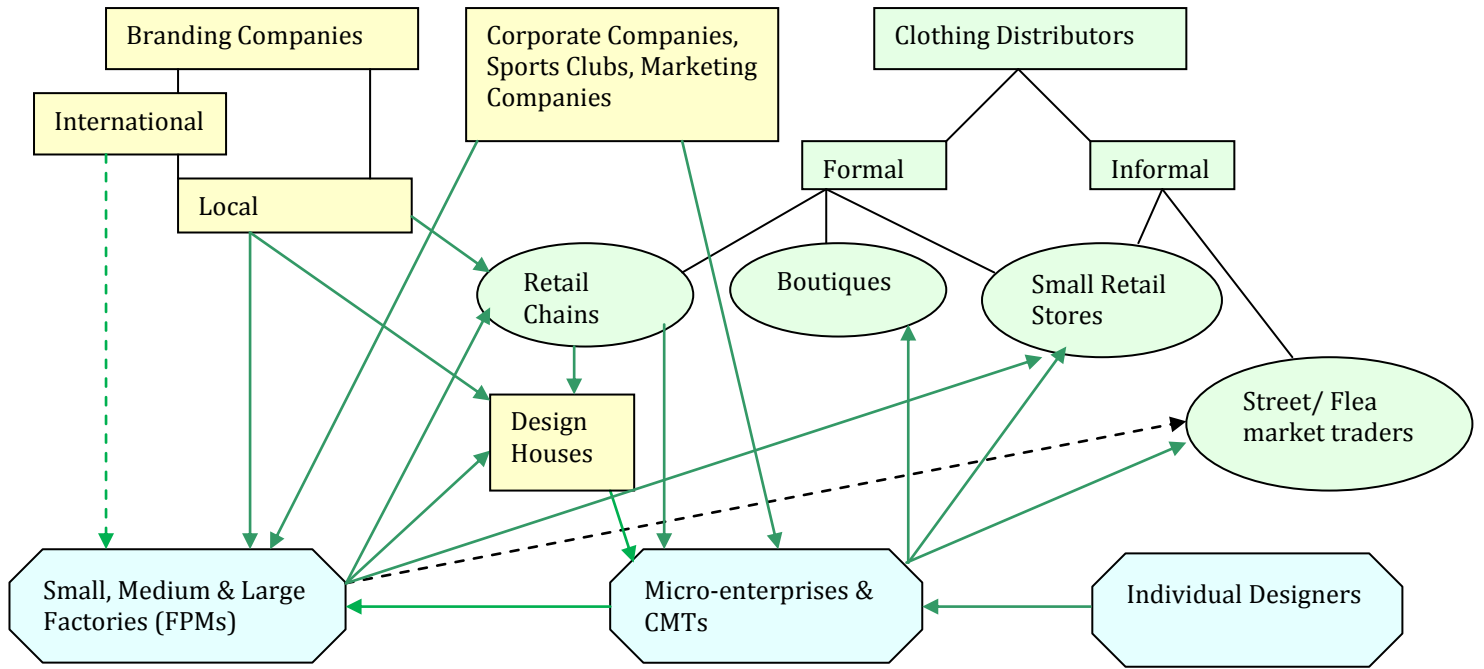
In response to competition in international and local markets post 1996, many South African factories downsized through retrenchments or closed down altogether. Other factories relocated, either to rural areas in South Africa, or to neighbouring countries. Wage rates in rural areas in South Africa are lower than in urban areas. For example, while workers in urban areas such as Gauteng may earn R500 a week, workers in rural areas such as Newcastle will earn R280 for the same job. Many factory owners relocated their factories to countries such as Lesotho or Botswana where there were no unions and wage rates were low. In Botswana the government gave incentives to factory owners in which they subsidised wages for the first five years and imposed no import duty on fabrics brought in from neighbouring countries.

PART TWO: WORKING IN THE FASHION DISTRICT

International competition has led to a 'recomposition of labour' which has involved the massive growth of 'informal economy' employment with a rise in informal CMTs and MSEs. Most of the work performed at these unregistered enterprises is underpaid, flexible, involves non-contract (casual work) and is insecure work. Workers in many of these CMTs do not fit into the traditional union worker mould because they have complex employment relationships and thus different needs to workers in standard employment relationships (SERs).

The majority of the enterprises in the Fashion District are linked to small, primarily domestic value chains and there are few production links from larger factories in the district to the micro-enterprises in surrounding areas. For the most part, factories in the Fashion District are neither export-oriented, nor are they linked to international brand names.

The diagram below illustrates the links in the buyer-driven value chain for the production and retail of clothing in inner city.



Four main types of FPMs and CMTs were identified in the Fashion District:

Type of enterprise	Links to the value chain	Workers	Decent Work Deficit
1. FPMs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connected to value chain - Receive regular orders from large retail chains, branding houses, designers and corporate companies - Registered and regulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bargaining Council wages - Regular working hours - Unionised - Mostly local workers - SER 	Increasing insecurity
2. Connected CMTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connected to value chain - Linked to a design house, designer or subcontracted by a larger FPM - Usually registered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bargaining Council wages - Regular working hours - Not unionised - Local and foreign workers - SER 	
3. Piecework CMTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rely on contracts for tenders - Registered/unregistered - Supply designers, small retail chains and corporate companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paid per piece (piecework) - Irregular hours - Not unionised - Local and foreign workers - Atypical employment 	
4. Survivalist CMTs and micro-enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detached from formal value chain - Supply small retail stores, street traders and individual customers - Unregistered and unregulated - Cannot access loans or tenders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor irregular wages - Irregular hours - Not unionised - Mostly foreign workers - Atypical employment, often with close-knit ties (family or friends) 	

Interviews with workers in these different types of factories and CMTs demonstrate that worker insecurity (the decent work deficit) tends to increase from enterprise type 1 to 4 as the enterprises became increasingly detached from the formal chain/s of production. Below we describe each type of enterprise and give an account of the experiences of workers in those enterprises.

Type 1. FPMs

In recent years the number of FPMs operating in the Fashion District has decreased due to factory closures and relocations to areas where wage rates are cheaper (e.g. rural areas within South Africa or Swaziland and Botswana). The remaining FPMs operate the entire manufacturing process of clothing, occasionally outsourcing parts of work to large CMTs when orders are too big to finish on time. FPMs are well linked into the value chain for clothing, and are registered and regulated. However, since the value chain is buyer-driven, FPMs are still controlled by the buyers (the branding houses, retail chains etc.) and subject to tight competition. FPMs supply large retail chain stores, corporate companies and a few independent boutiques through large-scale tenders which they compete for based on quality, price, delivery time and design (often in collaboration with the branding company).

Most workers in these FPMs are unionized, work regular hours and are paid according to the Bargaining Council minimum wages. Nonetheless, many of the interviewees from these factories were disillusioned and frustrated with their wages which did not stretch far enough:

'I am looking to other less hectic things...here we run around like headless chickens and earn nothing'.

'There is not enough money... I have just been wasting my time for nineteen years and still they have not changed my job as a machinist in the factory. I only realise I am wasting my time now'.

'I work only for food and transport. I cannot reach it all. I have worked in this for fifteen years now and I do not even have my own house anymore. I can only afford to rent'.

This could be an indication that as the South African clothing industry shrinks with foreign competition, so does people's desire to work in the industry. Young people entering the labour market generally have higher aspirations than to enter a demanding factory job with low pay and high levels of job insecurity resulting from factory closures and downsizing.

Despite the disillusionment, these workers have the most secure jobs in clothing enterprises in the inner city of Johannesburg. Most of them said that it is difficult to find a job like theirs because there are so many people looking for jobs, and it would be difficult for them to lose their jobs. Five of the female workers interviewed had up to ten dependents because they were providing for their sister's children as well as their own, illustrating the pressure on these workers as the breadwinners for their households.

Type 2. Connected CMTs

The second types of enterprise, connected CMTs are linked into formal clothing production chains. In all cases in the Fashion District, these CMTs were producing clothing for niche designer markets in South Africa, and in rare cases international markets (e.g. Maldives, Seychelles). Most of these CMTs had a built-in 'design house' component which is where their competitive advantage lay. They were owned by South Africans or foreigners and hired both South African women and Malawian, Zimbabwean and Mozambican men. Most of these CMTs were registered.

The majority of the interviewees working in these CMTs were not unionised, but had regular hours, indefinite contracts and were paid similar or above the agreed Bargaining Council minimum wages. In these enterprises there was a perception that belonging to the clothing union, Sactwu, was expensive, could make things worse and had not helped underpaid workers in clothing factories in the past. One worker, aware of the competition for stable jobs like hers said *'I hold this job like eggs because I know that if I lose this job I am going to suffer.'*

Workers in these enterprises were aware of the fact that China sets the price for clothing. Even if the prices of textiles, food, petrol and electricity had gone up, the sale price of the garment that their factory made would stay the same and therefore they said that they did not expect a wage increment from their bosses. Of particular concern was the high cost of transport which sometimes costs one quarter of a worker's weekly wage. The apartheid induced 'dislocation of residences of production of labour to production of accumulation of capital' has resulted in heavy transport costs for many workers who live in non-metro areas.

Type 3. Piecework CMTs

The third type of CMT does not usually have a 'design house' component and relies on contracts for tenders from local designers, retail chains and corporate companies who award the tender based on fast turnaround times and good quality. Yet the tenders were much smaller than those for the FPMs and the pattern and material for the required clothing was provided by the buyer, making these enterprises CMTs, not FPMs.

Workers in these enterprises are not unionized. They are paid per piece, meaning that their income and their working hours were irregular, often working through the night to complete orders on time. One self-employed interviewee running a CMT said *'there is too much stress here. Sometimes we sleep here overnight when it is too busy but sometimes there is no business for the whole month'*. Both the owners and the majority of the workers in the enterprises in which we conducted interviews were foreign males.

The foreign-owned, unregulated and non-compliant CMTs which pay their workers per piece are seen as competition by compliant South African CMT owners. One local CMT owner (enterprise type 2) who complies with the set Bargaining Council minimum wages indicated that he is battling to compete because he takes a 30% mark-up while these foreign-owned CMTs take a 100% mark-up on each garment

because they pay their workers R15 per completed garment and receive R30 per unit from the customer.

Type 4. Survivalist CMTs

The fourth type of enterprise is detached from the formal value chain of production and is neither linked to a design house, nor to any tenders. These are the most common types of CMTs in the Fashion District. The majority of these CMTs that we encountered were owned by foreign males and employed foreign males and housed in small rooms in high-rise buildings in the inner city. Although affordable, these rooms are cramped, stuffy and dimly lit.

Due to the fact that these CMTs usually had less than five people, closeness seemed to have developed between workers and their employer. When they spoke about the business, workers and the self-employed entrepreneurs who hire them spoke as though all of the people in the CMT made up a unit, which 'works as a community' to make profit and to help each other. One of the CMTs run by a Malawian male had five other male workers in it, all of whom were immigrant workers and friends. All of the workers received a wage, but the closeness of their relationship to their employer meant that contracts seemed unnecessary for employment security. None of these workers were unionised.

The customers of these enterprises are individuals. They either sell clothes through word of mouth, or through the small Pakistani clothing shops lining the streets of the Fashion District. One man who supports six dependents said *'It is difficult. You have to sew and then go out there and talk- market yourself, in the hope of making a sale.'* Two main reasons why these CMTs are unable to expand is because they are unable to register for VAT in order to obtain tenders and they were unable to obtain loans to expand their businesses. Both of these limitations were linked to their status as foreigners, often undocumented. One Malawian man illustrated this sense of isolation when he remarked *'no one supports us- we are foreigners...we don't have the papers'*.

The workers and indeed owners of these enterprises make very little money, sometimes less than R250 per week. Considering that transport costs sometimes amounted to R120 a week, this is very low. Many local South Africans working in the clothing industry have a pooled household income which also consists of social grants such as child grant, pension and disability grant. However, foreigners do not have access to government social grants, which reduces their potential pooled household income.

Security in terms of wages and regular working hours tends to decrease from enterprise type 1 to type 4. However, interestingly, workers in smaller CMTs believed that their future in their job was promising and that they were learning different skills which they were able to use in different jobs. They believed that the CMTs where they worked were growing and would become increasingly successful. This can be explained by the fact that an increase in profit is a mutual achievement in which everyone can benefit. This is especially the case in those CMTs in which the employees are closely knit circles of friends and possibly even family.

Respondents running their own CMTs were hopeful that their businesses would grow ('it is in my heart' and 'I am definitely going places'). They were confident that it is not easy for someone else to take over their job because they are the ones teaching the other workers in the CMT how to sew and come up with ideas. On the other hand, many workers that we interviewed in the FPMs were negative and frustrated about their careers and ability to transfer their skills as they had remained in the same job for many years with no promotions.

Unfortunately for workers working in a larger factory, an increase in profit that the factory makes does not necessarily directly affect them and their career. As one young machinist observed, *'The women here have worked in this place for too long and it has shortened their minds. They have low self-esteem and do not believe that they can do better than this. If you are negative in everything no one can invest anything in you'*. However, for many, the challenge remains to find any job given South Africa's high unemployment rate and competition between workers.

The area (New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg) is unsafe. Regulations inside some of the factories include fire regulations, medical aid, security guards and training and safety procedures. One lady said that although the factory where she works is safe, *'the area is not safe especially on the weekend because there are too many Nigerians and I take the train. They shoot people there'*.

Five of the workers said that they felt unsafe at work. Some mentioned that the water is dirty and their factory is dusty and unclean. One interviewee explained, *'there are robberies at the factory. They come in, we get held-up, and they take all of our phones and everything. Crime is the highest in Doornfontein. Sometimes they hit the car windows on the corner here and take the stuff. It is not right at all here...you must be careful'*. Another interviewee explained that it is very unsafe in the factory where she works because of electricity and *'sometimes these big shocks come down from the ceiling'*.

Many interviewees also pointed towards health problems associated with work. These include TB from flaky material, spinal chord problems from sitting with a bent back, leg aches and sore veins from standing all day and fumes and dust causing asthma. Arguably, health and safety risks are higher in unregulated enterprises which are often cramped, cannot afford security and other safety measures and fall under the radar of the Department of Labour's Occupational Health and Safety inspectors.

PART THREE: ORGANISING THE PRECARIAT; CLOSING THE REPRESENTATION GAP?

Unionisation in the inner city is much higher amongst workers in the FPMs than in the CMTs. Of the fourteen workers interviewed who worked at FPMs, twelve were unionised. Contrastingly, of the nineteen workers who worked at CMTs, only one was unionised. One explanation for this is that FPMs are usually larger than CMTs, and are established through their links in formal production chains, making them easier to identify and organise. On the other hand, CMTs, especially the survivalist type, are smaller and their workers often work irregular hours making them more difficult to locate and organise.

Another key difference between the workers in the FPMS and those in CMTs is that all of the workers we interviewed who work in FPMS are South African citizens, while the majority of workers that we interviewed in the CMTs are foreigners, mostly men from Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique and Botswana. This is expected given the previous statistic drawing from work done by Kagiso Urban Management 'that pockets of inner city Johannesburg are 60% foreign' (Landau, 2009: 199). What is striking is that both South Africans and foreigners working in the CMTs said that there are no organisations, even apart from the union, representing their work interests. The only community groups that any of the interviewees belong to are religious congregations at churches and in one case, a mosque.

A number of recent studies assert that religion in South Africa, specifically inner city Johannesburg, is performing multiple functions, not only as a site for religious worship, but also in the provision of economic and social resources (Nzababino, 2010; Va'squez, 2009; Jeannerat, 2009 and Landau, 2009). In this sense, for immigrants, as for locals, religious sites of worship can be seen as an alternative form of organisation in which members' find strategies for coping whether it is spiritually, socially and/or financially.

Not only is this evident in the 'unabashed gospel of health and wealth' and the 'theology of evil' that Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches are using to attract members who want salvation and transcendence from their experiences of misfortune and deprivation (Va'squez, 2009: 274 and Jeannerat, 2009). It is also through practical assistance provided by churches; 'food, job referrals, legal aid and housing accommodation' (Va'squez, 2009: 274).

Nzababino (2010) suggests that religion has particular relevance for the lives of migrants, shown by the fact that migrants become more receptive to religion in host communities than in their home countries. For migrants in inner city Johannesburg, these churches have particular pull because they offer social recognition; a 'new spiritual form of citizenship' in a global community in the midst of a hostile South African citizenry, as well as concrete opportunities for economic mobility in a largely exclusionary capitalist economy (Va'squez, 2009: 282, Landau, 2009: 198). As Nzababino (2010: 5) indicates, pastors and fellow church members are the first port of call for immigrants in need of employment; 'it is often in this way refugees have managed to find jobs or contacts to obtain a foothold in the business market in Johannesburg'.

In Landau's (2009: 197) study, for immigrants in the unstable and 'violently exclusionary' inner city Johannesburg, religion is a key strategy for 'negotiating inclusion and belonging while transcending ethnic, national and transnational paradigms.' According to Madsen (2004) and Anderson (2006) (in Landau: 2009: 202) 'In Johannesburg there are ethnic and immigrant networks, but these are typically limited to assisting others only to overcome immediate risks, when there are direct, mutual returns, or when a corpse needs returning to a country or community of origin', and even among South Africans levels of trust of each other and public institutions are low. Landau (2009: 202) argues that it is 'this lack of collective awareness that is critical to understanding the evolution and creation of forms of membership within a city'.

The exclusionary power of authority, as demonstrated by lack of access to most formal banking services for foreigners and the abuse of this lack of access by police who often refer to foreigners as 'mobile ATMs', coupled with xenophobia from locals, gives foreigners 'a deep existential apprehension over the meaning of belonging' (Landau, 2009: 203, 204). This also explains the suspicion foreigners (especially undocumented foreigners) may have of trade unions in the workplace as an organisation which may bring them closer to the authorities.

Landau (2009: 206) coins the term 'tactical cosmopolitanism' which refers to foreigners' use of a 'cosmopolitan rhetoric and organisational forms to live outside of belonging while claiming the benefits of it', in other words the self-alienation of foreigners from the undesirability and difficulties of national inclusion in exchange for a more significant global form of membership through religion. Churches function in 'helping people to find jobs or find ways (physically or spiritually) out of Johannesburg's hardships' (Landau, 2009: 210).

Linking this to the migrants whom we interviewed in the CMTs (mostly the survivalist type) in inner city Johannesburg, it is easy to understand the attraction of the church. The enterprises where these foreigners work are detached; they are not concretely linked to the formal value chain for clothing and provide little and irregular income for those working there. Consequently, the power of workers in these enterprises is weakened. Religious organisations provide a new form of power. They function in physically helping their members with other job opportunities and housing etc, as well as spiritually by providing 'the conceptual tools to deal with desire and materialism in a world of limited means and lack', something which is not provided by trade unions or other organisations (Va'squez, 2009: 282).

This was confirmed by some of our respondents in the Inner City who belonged to a variety of faith based organisations (FBOs) (Interviews with workers belonging to faith-based organisations, 20 August 2011). They saw their FBOs as primarily performing a spiritual function and stressed the fact that they are not business organisations. However it is clear that if you are a member of a FBO these organisations play a central role in integrating new comers into city life. In particular our respondents emphasized the help FBOs give members in finding jobs and accommodation. Job vacancies are often announced at the FBO and in some cases they are able to provide jobs and accommodation. Some FBOs assist members to access social grants and other official documentation such as birth certificates and ID books. FBOs also facilitate contact between the members and their home countries or villages through providing a free land line. Respondents described a system of informal banking designed to overcome their lack of trust in the formal banking system in their home countries. One respondent described how she only trusted members of her church to remit money home on her behalf. Does the involvement of these workers in FBOs open up possible links with trade unions?

The South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) has an office in the inner city. Registered (formal) enterprises are generally easier to organise as they are likely to comply with labour law, tax and occupational health and safety measures and are easier to identify. Furthermore, the union has persuaded the Bargaining Council to extend its agreements to cover the wages and working conditions of

workers in informal enterprises (Bennet, 2002: 11). These agreements are now legally binding on a national level including both non-metro and metro areas. This means minimum protection and minimum conditions of work for all workers in the clothing sector, regardless of whether they belong to the union or not. This initiative is supported by some employers who argue that ‘unregulated informal establishments present substantial competition to their own business’, while other employers reject the initiative as they are ‘happy to have low-cost producers to whom they can subcontract work’ (Bennet, 2002: 11).

As an overall strategy, SACTWU recognizes the need to “break the anonymity” of informal work and is attempting to map home workers and their links with each other as well as expose the links between home work and other forms of informal production of clothing sold by retailers to consumers in South Africa (Webster, Bischoff, Serrano, Xhafa, 2008). At their 1999 Congress, SACTWU adopted a phased strategy for organizing in the informal economy (Bennett, 2003: 20).

Box 1: Decision of the 1999 SACTWU National Congress

“Organize the Home and Informal Sector

1. As work flows into unregulated sectors, either through ‘home-production’ or informal sector work, our organization should follow the work and organize.
2. As a first step, we resolve to maintain a membership among members who are retrenched, and offer a service of job placement for them.
3. SACTWU will revisit its benefit structure, and offer a set of carefully selected benefits to people in the informal clothing sector, covering housing, bursaries, access to clinics or death benefits. This can be the start of developing a national register of workers in the informal sector.
4. This will be followed up with an agreement with employers to sub-contract CMT work only to people on the union’s national register. Retailers will similarly be approached.
5. The SETA-linked training institutions should provide training to workers and entrepreneurs on the national register.
6. Bargaining councils should conduct ongoing research on the size and economic linkages of the informal sector.
7. Shop stewards should complete annual questionnaires on the use of home workers by their companies for contracting work out.
8. As a medium term objective we resolve to negotiate the rates applicable in the home and informal sectors. At the level of union strategy, we must focus on ways of reducing the unit cost differential between the formal and informal sector. We resolve to use our access to policy-making forums to obtain funds and support efforts to modernize the operations of companies in the informal sector as part of the overall objective of formalizing activities.”

Source: SACTWU, 1999 (cited in Bennett, 2003:21).

Ultimately, SACTWU aims to introduce more characteristics of formality into the informal economy by:

- introducing written contracts between work providers and informal producers
- inducing South Africa’s tax authority, the South African Revenue Service

(SARS), to hold work providers to informal producers and/or retailers responsible for ensuring that informal producers pay the applicable taxes

- mobilising formally employed clothing workers to fight for measures that will improve conditions for informal producers.

Overall, the long-term strategy is to:

- eliminate informal production that relies solely on reduced labour standards to increase competitiveness
- retain informal production that contributes to competitiveness by creating flexibility in the capacity of work providers and/or time flexibility for informal workers.

The union developed a plan of action to organise clothing workers in the Coloured residential suburb of Mitchells Plain in the Western Cape in late 2000. The organizer in charge of this initiative concluded that the union’s attempt to organize informal sector workers failed because the union relied on “conventional trade unionism forged in the formal workplace, creating shop steward structures, focusing on the workplace, and establishing a negotiated relationship with the direct employer, instead of assessing where the real power these workers possessed resided” (Bennett, 2002: 15). For Bennett (2002), the power lay in the formal sector originators of the clothing orders.

The mapping exercise undertaken in 2009 revealed that SACTWU organisers have a high degree of awareness of non-standard workers but they underestimated the need for different organisational forms to respond to the specificity of atypical employment. As a result they have attempted to bring these atypical workers into the ambit of existing representation in order to secure for them similar protection to those in standard employment (Webster and Bischoff, 2011). We describe this response in the figure below as an imitative extension of protection (cell 2).

		Willingness to innovate representation models	
		<u>Low</u>	<u>High</u>
Awareness of specific nature of non standard workers’ interests	<u>Low</u>	1. Indifference	2. Imitative extension of protection - <i>Sactwu</i>
	<u>High</u>	3. Resistance/ reduction of differences	4. Specialisation of protection/ reconfiguration of representation - <i>Faith-based union coalition</i>

Figure 2: Adapted from Webster and Bischoff (2010: 13) and Regalia (2006: 248)

However, recently SACTWU has begun to recognise the different needs of these workers and has introduced new organisational strategies and modes of representation. We illustrate this attempt at the reconfiguration of representation in Cell 4 in the figure above. In order to attract home workers to join the union, SACTWU now offers a number of ‘carrots’ (Interview: Vlok, 2007). These include easily accessible clinics, optometrists and dentists as part of the healthcare fund. Medical aid, funeral benefits, HIV/AIDS testing, education and a pilot anti-retroviral (ARV) programme have also been negotiated at the Bargaining Council during wage negotiations. In addition, education bursary programmes, in which workers’ children can study at any recognised tertiary institutions, have been implemented. For all of these benefits, contributions are made by the employer and sometimes also by workers as part of their union membership fees. SACTWU also provides assistance to owners and managers of CMTs by providing services such as managing books for finance in order to ensure that the CMTs are conforming to legislation (Interview: Vlok, 2007).

In the 2010 SACTWU congress a new membership category was introduced- associate membership- for six sets of workers: retired workers, retrenched workers, family members, students, designers and home workers (Interview: Vlok, 7 April, 2011). As Vlok (2011) acknowledged: ‘We recognised that these categories of workers need different levels of organisation and benefits tailored to their needs in order to get them into the fold of the union’. The most successful initiative is with students who have formed the SACTWU Students Union. In the case of home-workers the aim is to set up a special unit that would give homeworkers benefits, for example, not having to pay subs, which would usually be 1% per week with a minimum and a maximum amount (Vlok, 2011)⁴.

In spite of the resources SACTWU has put into organising non-standard employees and small enterprises, the obstacles to organising informal work remain formidable. Four obstacles have been identified by SACTWU; firstly, there is the ability of small enterprises to “to pack up and move the next day in order to evade union membership” (Vlok, 2011). Secondly, there is the blurring of the employer-employee relationship as “many of the managers are also sitting at the machines working alongside the other workers” (Vlok, 2011). As a result “there is a different type of loyalty to the manager in such a factory. Often the designers ate also the employers” (Vlok, 2011). Thirdly many home-workers are resistant to unions because they feel they are better off working from home where they do not pay taxes and do not have to pay travel costs. In some cases they are also disillusioned with unions because of their failure to defend their rights (Vlok, 2011). Finally, informal workers resist union as they often work irregular hours. “They may have to work this week. Suddenly they might start working in the evenings to finish off orders but then next week there is no one there because there is no work. This makes them difficult to locate and track down to organise. A recruiter might go there today and tomorrow there is no one there because there is no work” (Vlok, 2011).

Where then does the union see its source of power? The strongest lever on informal employers, the union believes, is “moral persuasion” (Vlok, 2011). SACTWU has

⁴ This differs from the two-tier policy of the National Union of leather Workers (NULW) which “caused work to flow out of the formal sector into the informal sector leading to a decline in membership. The NULW has less than 6000 members mainly involved in making general goods and handbags” (Vlok, 2011).

been able to put pressure on certain retailers to only buy from enterprises that are compliant with the labour agreement on wages and working conditions and refuse to give sub-contracted work to non-compliant enterprises” (Vlok, 2011).

However for such a strategy to become widespread SACTWU will need to deepen its support within the community. An obvious point of entry and potential source of power are the pre-existing faith based organisations. We illustrate the possibility of a faith-based union coalition in cell 4 in figure 2.

CONCLUSION: NEW SOURCES AND FORMS OF POWER?

We have suggested in this paper that international competition has forced a restructuring of the clothing industry in South Africa. This has had a profound effect on the labour market creating a new class of precarious workers, a precariat. This has weakened organised labour, creating a representational gap.

We have provided a sociological portrait of those who work in the clothing industry in the inner city of Johannesburg. We confirm the rise of a precariat and the attempts by Sactwu to bring these workers into the industrial relations system. We suggest that there is recognition by the union of the need to reconfigure the form of representation of these workers. One possible reconfiguration would be a faith-based union coalition.

We capture, in the figure below, a framework for identifying new sources and forms of power. We distinguish between three sources of power that trade unions can draw on; power that is embedded in the economy, power that derives from collective organizations, and power that derives from public contestation (Silver, 2003; Chun, 2009). Historically clothing workers have relied on structural and associational power. However the growth of MSEs in decentralised units have reduced these traditional sources of power and workers have minimal structural power, whether in the workplace or in the labour market. The question raised by our paper is whether a coalition with faith-based organisation would provide the union with a new source of power.

Chun (2009) suggests different organisational strategy that concentrates on building *associational power* in the community and on taking struggles into the public domain – mobilising *symbolic power* in mass demonstrations in order to focus pressure on the real powers in the industry. Adopting such strategies would require abandoning some of the formal elements of trade union organisation and practice which impose additional burdens on an unstable constituency in favour of a “lighter” more flexible community style of organisation and mobilisation.

Typology of Power

Type of Power	Source of Power	Form of Power
Structural	Embedded in the Economy	Workplace bargaining power
		Market-based bargaining power
Associational	Collective organization	Trade union
		Political parties
Symbolic	Public and symbolic contestation	Demonstrations, marches, pickets
		Alliances, coalitions, media

Figure 3: Taken from Webster et. al. (2008: 59).

Coalitions possess a number of attractive resources for the unions, one of them being that coalition partners themselves may also possess specialist expertise upon which unions can draw on. Tattersal (2005:154) elaborates on the make-up of coalitions by suggesting that the most appropriate partners to build a coalition are the unions and community organizations (which she notes has become a major part of union renewal). Religion is a potential complimentary source of organisation and power, not only for immigrants in times of economic and social exclusion, but also for local South Africans, many of whom are experiencing economic hardship. There is a large following of Pentecostal churches, and other religious organisations that provide spiritual, social and financial support and networks. These faith-based organisations can provide legal advice and job referrals, functions one would expect unions, labour brokers, legal advisors and other organisations to provide.

Standing identifies the emergence of a precariat and suggests two contradictory roles, the one progressive and the other reactionary. He suggests furthermore that this 'dangerous class' needs a voice and that the basic income grant is a way of providing this class with a degree of security. Our paper addresses a similar question and suggests the possibility of a faith-based union coalition as a way of providing the precariat with an institutional voice. Whether such a strategy is feasible, and how it could be implemented, is the subject of our current research.

Interviews

Clothing designers A-C: Interviews conducted in Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, August- October 2007

Desai, M. (Owner of Egoli Fashions): Interview conducted in inner city Johannesburg, September 2007.

Design House Owner A: Interview conducted in New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, 5 September 2007

Factory owners and managers A-F: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, August- October 2007

Factory owners and managers G-I: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, March 2011

Vlok, E. SACTWU Researcher. Interview conducted in Salt River, Cape Town, 8 November 2007.

Vlok, E, SACTWU Researcher, Interview conducted in Johannesburg, 7 April 2011.

Workers 1- 21: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner City Johannesburg, August- October 2007

Workers 22- 34: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner City Johannesburg, March 2011

Workers 36-39: Interviews conducted in the Inner City Johannesburg, August 2011.

CMT owners A-C: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, September and October 2007

CMT owners D-G: Interviews conducted in New Doornfontein and inner city Johannesburg, March 2011

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