

# **The Politics of Worker Rights in the Lesotho Textile Industry**

**By**

**Tim Gibbs**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AGOA	American Growth and Opportunity Act
BCP	Basotho Congress Party
BNP	Basotho National Party
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPA	Interim Political Authority
LECAWU	Lesotho Clothing and Allied Workers Union
LNDC	Lesotho National Development Corporation
LTEA	Lesothan Textiles Exporters Association
LWP	Lesotho Workers' Party
NUM	(South African) National Union of Mineworkers
UNITE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
US/USA	United States of America
VCO	Vendor Compliance Officer
WAB	Wages Advisory Board

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I first heard about LECAWU through Gary Phillips, formerly of the TURP, and must thank him first of all because, without his help, I would never have got to Lesotho. Thanks are also due to the members of staff within TURP whose archives I looked through. I stayed in Lesotho as a guest of LECAWU, who organised all my interviews. Willy Mat'seo, acting as chaperone, especially endured the quite gruelling interview schedule that had been arranged. Considering the hostility of union politics within Lesotho and widespread use of research as a political megaphone, I was fortunate to gain interviews from a wide variety of informants across a whole spectrum of opinion all of whom could have very easily denied me access to them. Whilst my views are plainly stated, I hope the concerns I raise are even handed, nor that I reduce the complexity and difficulty of the choices that all actors face. ("Those who can do, those who can't criticise".) Thanks to first Imraan Valodia then Vishnu Padayachee, who supervised the dissertation as it drifted ever further away from my original research topic. On a personal note, my brother endured (and hopefully enjoyed) being my flat mate during the period of research and writing-up. Thanks finally to Jude.

## **DECLARATION**

This dissertation represents original work by the author and has not been previously submitted in any form to another university. Where use has been made of the work of others this has been duly acknowledged and referenced in the text.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Intentions

With the decline of some of the heavy industries in Southern Africa, communities- even entire countries- have been thrown back to the margins<sup>1</sup>. Into these deprived areas has sometimes come new types of manufacturing investment, one of the largest types of investment being textiles factories owned by companies in the Far East encouraged by measures such as the United States of America (US/USA) bilateral treaty, The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). And the severe labour disputes that have often erupted, in Swaziland even leading towards a series of national strikes challenging the monarchy (Hall 2003), have thrown into sharp relief some of the severe social, economic and political tensions within the region.

These issues tend to be discussed as one of an economic global shift- a process of globalisation. Indeed the textiles industry is often suggested to provide an archetypal case study of the contemporary patterns of 'economic integration that take place against the background of receding governments and diminishing social obligations' (Rodrik 1997: 6)<sup>2</sup>. I intend, however, to move away from these substantive economic issues, that have been already been covered in great detail, to consider the political processes by which these relationships of inequality have been embedded. It is this making and negotiation of political culture ('the relationship between capitalism and state formation and the discourses and practises that reflexively give meaning to these relationships of consent and coercion within and between the state and social life'<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> James Ferguson (1999) account of the decline of the Zambian copper belt has perhaps provided the fullest account of this 'reversal of modernity', as he describes it (1999: 34).

<sup>2</sup> A range of arguments from various theoretical perspectives stressing the receding power of the state in the face of the expansion of global markets includes Amin (1994), Bienefeld (1996), Rodrik (1997). There are those, however, who claim that these last rites for the state are premature (Hirst & Thompson 1999). Weisfelder (1992) discusses contemporary economic trends as seen from Lesotho and provides a useful bibliography of related work.

<sup>3</sup> This definition of political culture comes from Eley's discussion on *Reading Gramsci in English: observations on the reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English Speaking World 1957-82* (1984). The notion of political culture can be troublesome for a couple of reasons. First, cultural analysis can be seen as a betrayal of an empirically knowable world, by ephemeral discourse. Gramsci is interesting because, whilst shifting emphasis to the process of manufacturing and resisting consent, he maintained

within the nascent textiles sector in Lesotho that is studied. Political culture, likewise, is very often assessed within the framework of an all-determining global transformation within or against which Africans have struggled (typically Southall 1994). Ferguson (1999: 206), writing about the social transformations that have followed the decline of the Zambian copperbelt, however notes how the region has ‘failed to keep to the progressive, linear script that modernisation demanded... [with populations] leading lives [that] will not be captured by the dichotomies of traditional and modern, African or Western’. Therefore, I have tried, by reference to the Taiwanese textile factories that have invested into Lesotho largely as a result of AGOA, to examine:

a complex Euro-Americo-African co-production... [This] growing out of the narrow possibilities of the colonial state... deepened by... cozy relationships of international enterprises with the... African regimes. But drawing as well on the political networks forged by... leaders and on the specific forms of political culture worked out... [within Africa] itself (Cooper 2000: 324).

Particularly, in discussing the means by which The Lesotho Clothing and Allied Workers Union (LECAWU) seeks to gain recognition and worker rights- the central question which frames the dissertation- I hope to, following Cooper, to provide some insight into ‘the strength and limits of Africa’s place in the world, and the strength and limits of old and new ways of defining connections and mobilising collectively’ (Cooper 2000: 327).

### **Framing political culture: debates on the legacy of colonialism and capitalism**

These issues lead one towards a large literature on the African state and political identities. A broadly Marxist inspired account has been hugely influential in accounting for the contradictions of the capitalist transformation in Southern Africa and the related idea of ‘the contemporaneity of the un-contemporary’<sup>4</sup>. Essentially it was argued that the simultaneity of colonial rule and industrialisation created a

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a reflexive relationship between object and subject. Second, the term could imply completeness, which is certainly not the case in the Lesotho textiles industry where volatility, open endedness and instability can be seen in the labour disputes that have been played out by an array of multinational groups.

fundamental contradiction between economic modernity and political backwardness. Apartheid in Southern Africa was an especially virulent form of this- an extreme, not an exception- in which white capital used state power to secure cheap African labour, an argument that was made exceptionally powerfully in Wolpe's article on *Capitalism and Cheap Labour* (1972). Hence Lesotho figured as a reserve of migrant labour, the nation dependent on remittances from S African mines (Speigel 1980). And Lesotho, like many rural, areas lacked the emancipatory experience of a political transformation, falling prey instead to the continued dominance of repressive forms of authority, sustained by the colonialists' invention of traditional rule (especially see Beinart and Bundy 1987). Thus Lesotho history was a site of political misdevelopment by comparison to the healthier trajectories of the West.

Lesotho's contemporary crises are seen to be the result of this unresolved contradiction. Lesotho is doubly oppressed in that with the decline in mining employment Lesotho is now a "new inner periphery" dependent on sweat shop factories. Countries are forced to 'take the Devil's rope' of foreign investment<sup>5</sup>. However the exploitation of cheap labour crucially occurs with elite compliance, the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC) seeking 'manufacturing investment, by referring to the low cost, docility and availability of workers' (Southall 1994: 565). Hence one sees the disastrous conjunction of a form of economic modernity with political backwardness in the perpetuation of a sub-capitalist, compradore elite and a super-exploited, unorganised working class<sup>6</sup>. A new level of sophistication to this type of analysis has been added by Guy Standing's argument for 'global feminisation' that charts the growth of 'the types of employment and labour force involvement traditionally associated with women- insecure, low paid, irregular' (Standing 1999: 600). He notes the intersection of this form of capitalist production with "traditional" social patterns of patriarchal control that tend to place women in such jobs. This theory has been applied to the Lesotho textile industry, in which 95% of the workforce are women, by Baylies and Wright (1992).

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<sup>4</sup> This is the pithy phrase used by a historian of the German Sonderweg (Bloch n.d. in Eley 1996: 3)

<sup>5</sup> A phrase used by a Swazi minister to describe textiles investment there (Phillips and Xaba: 45)

<sup>6</sup> Although there were agonized debates as to whether this trend represented comprador bourgeois 'development in dependency' or the perpetuation of pre modern social forms in the 'development of dependency'.

Political possibilities thus lie with the resistance of an organised working class, a movement that is formed when disparate working class elements identify themselves as a “class for itself”. Political mobilisation has been crucial in seizing hold of these currents. Southall argues that the return to Lesotho of former South African National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members, 7 000 of whom were dismissed from the Rand in 1987 following a turbulent series of strikes, has provided the vanguard of worker militancy. This is the case for LECAWU where a closely-knit cabal of ex-NUM miners have formed the office bearing, leadership cadre. ‘They were to play a key role in activating other members of the working class’ (Southall 1994: 578). For LECAWU, this consists of unionising women workers, many of whom are first generation industrial workers. This political movement has been given space with traditional Basotho society because of the emancipatory effect of industrialisation and urbanisation for the lives of working women (Wright 1999)<sup>7</sup>.

However, against the background of the global geo-political shifts of the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a more introspective analysis of politics of the African state that has moved towards new questions and theoretical territory<sup>8</sup>. Firstly, there has been the movement in theory from a focus on only economically based processes of exploitation to the broader creation of forms of control and domination. The reasons behind this change of analytical thrust can be seen most clearly in research on Lesotho in detailed micro-studies of household formation and the migrant labour system. A succession of studies had sought to analyse how patterns of accumulation within Basotho society was articulated through capitalism via the transmission of remittances from the migrant labour system, and was thus assumed to determine political dynamics (Speigel 1980; Murray 1981). These assumptions were subjected to Ferguson’s devastating critique of the “bovine mystique”. This detailed the complex links between social and physical capital, (to use Bourdieu’s precise definition of this

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<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that Wright is not discussing politics but social change, which she views as a process of proletarianisation.

<sup>8</sup> Politically, the project of the era of High Development- of which left wing radicalism was a part- was for the state to lead its citizens towards modernity and development causing many well documented crumbings and abuses of power (Ferguson 1990& 1997; and Leys 1996). All authors provide very insightful discussions regarding a range of possible responses to the need to reconstruct research agendas in the new world that had subsequently emerged. Following Cooper (2000 & 2001) and to an extent Mamdani (1996), this dissertation, by questioning forms of political identity and mobilisation, seeks to look at the re-articulation of global hierarchies as being more deeply implicated



term) and showed how cattle have a value that goes beyond mere economic price. 'Cultural rules define and valorise livestock as a special domain of property... and these rules are maintained and ordered as part of connecting forces articulated around the oppositions of men and women, senior and junior' and other such social identities (Ferguson 1990: 82). In one sense these differences are "class based", in that they concern relationships of inequality, but one cannot say that they are simply 'languages of class', social inequality is too multi dimensional and cross cutting to simply be a series of horizontal class boundaries<sup>9</sup>. The study of the microphysics of power thus moves towards an analysis of the construction of the social, in which forms of accumulation and power constructed through languages of identity lie beyond the volition and control of individuals and interests in the classical Enlightenment sense (Eley 1996: 25).

Second, this has brought about a more subtle analysis of the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and colonialism. From various theoretical perspectives, much closer attention has been paid to fraught process of establishing colonial control (for example, Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 179-203). In Southern Africa, colonial attempts to make the land a space of rational exploitation 'profited where they could from islands of mineral production, sustained through narrow communication channels' to "labour reserves". This created a series of African rulers who 'presided over gatekeeper states [such as Lesotho], able to control the interface with the outside world better than production and commerce within' (Cooper: 321). Therefore, thirdly, the emergence of these forms of state governance and regulation has been analysed in terms of the construction of political culture. This has:

Directed attention away from institutionally centred conceptions of government and state, away from the allied sociological conceptions of class domination, and towards a dispersed and decentred notion of power... [And to] the subtle and complex interrelations between power and knowledge, particularly in the modes of disciplinary and administrative organisation of society (Eley 1996: 25).

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in the contemporary power dynamics in Lesotho than that of a simple struggle between centre and periphery, tradition and modernity.

One of the earliest, and very influential moves in this direction was Benedict Anderson's (1991) discussion of the construction of nation states, his work being significant as it detailed the social processes which created the imagined community of the nation. This line of commitment continues in a variety of studies examining the invention of African political communities that were constructed during the expansion of capitalism and colonial rule<sup>10</sup>. David Coplan and Tim Quinlan have written most about these processes in Lesotho. They detail how more "democratic" understandings of chieftainship out of which Moshoeshe had constructed a Basotho nation was reworked into a much more authoritarian form of rule during the colonial encounter which created a chiefly aristocracy that was bound to land and relied on the patronage of the British state. This alliance coerced newly made commoners into colonial labour markets as migrant workers. Such actions were legitimated by the invention of tribal tradition of autocratic rulers over their commoner subjects (Coplan & Quinlan 1997: 30). Contemporary struggles in Lesotho are thus framed around these unresolved issues of social identity and political institutions.

Decades of colonialism... co-opted and distorted the upper chieftaincy in the name of "indirect rule" to such an extent that by the time of independence the Basotho were only prepared to let Moshoeshe II reign only on condition he would not rule. The Westminster system instead however proved possibly an even greater danger than a post colonial monarchy... Often the resulting structures provide more useful instruments for autocracy and self aggrandisement than even the patrimonialisms of Weberian theory insisted they should supersede... The political crisis [of the mid 1990s] reveals Basotho uncertainties about the state and, more immediately, how to accommodate an unruly army, a discontented police force and a somnolent democracy... lost in the to-ing and fro-ing are the voices of the citizens and their interpretations of the state, nation and democracy (Coplan & Quinlan 1997: 49, 55-56).

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<sup>9</sup> 'Languages of class' was a term used by Stedman-Jones' to update EP Thompson's description of class formation. He later abandoned this project (Joyce 1995: 14).

<sup>10</sup> Vail's (1989) analysis of 'the invention of tribalism', which self-consciously used Anderson's conceptual categories to describe construction of political communities, has provided the foundations for much of the subsequent research.

Industrial politics too has been caught within this idiom of politics in Lesotho. Southall writes that ‘the great curse of Basotho trade unionism proved to be its inextricable entanglement with party politics...’, in the 1960’s and 1970’s the Basotho Federation of Labour aligned with the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) pitted against the Basotho National Party (BNP) inspired Lesothan Congress of Workers. In the 1980s a new wave of independent unions were co-opted, under government pressure, into the Lesotho Congress of Free Trade Unions (Southall 1994: 576-7). Even today, the US Ambassador to Lesotho noted:

LECAWU is by far the largest but it is by no means the only union- you have 43 registered unions and labour union associations. [If the unions are to make headway] one of the first orders of business is to consolidate the union movement... and to stop the internecine conflicts... You really break down the union’s ability to bargain if they are fighting each other over members, over check off [union subscriptions], over who gets to be the big boys (Loftis 2002).

Whilst there tends to be concurrence on the broad features of an African political crisis, there are sharply differing interpretations of the trends behind this (and, by implication, “what is to be done”). One response to emphasise the significance of “authentic” African political communities and discourses at the expense of universal/Western values. Lonsdale has argued that an African mode of politics has so thoroughly penetrated formal political systems politics that, although some of the urban elites in ‘might conceptualise the state in the same manner as we [Westerners] do,... their thin layer of specifically political thought sits on top awkwardly, if not irrelevantly on top of a thick layer of popular thought’ (Lonsdale 1992: 18)<sup>11</sup>. Such arguments can also stem from the crisis of the state in Lesotho: where ‘political infertility began with conquest and superimposition... Democracy begins at the level of local government in rural Lesotho, among rural peasantarians [sic]...’ (Coplan & Quinlan 1997: 56). This line of argument can underscore the radical assertion that

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<sup>11</sup> Lonsdale writes of a Kenyan setting that is much less industrialised than Southern Africa. However, a series of writers on the mine labour have emphasised the continuation of ethnic forms of organisation

modern Europe does not offer the cures to old Europe: even “liberation” took place within boundaries cut by the departing powers themselves- the ideas of state, citizen framed politics in a constraining way. Whilst sensitive to these comments, alternatively, following Cooper, I would suggest that the crucial issue lies in what to do next. It is easy (to the point of being almost clichéd) to make a criticism of universal values that turn out to be Western impositions thus erecting a barrier between “the Western” and “the indigenous” in a manner which stereotypes both groups. Instead ‘Africans are actors on the world stage, and it is an engagement with these issues that vitally affect what it means to be free... Engagement and struggle have shaped what citizenship, the state and human rights actually mean’ (Cooper 2000: 298-9).

Such an argument is especially relevant to this time of ‘globalised’ textile investment. It has been through political discourses based on internationalist visions of labour that LECAWU has made claims on the state to provide its members with rights as workers by the union gaining an institutional role within industrial politics to bargain on behalf of its members. Mamdani (1996: 296-301) sees these demands as falling within a militant nationalism, perhaps a somewhat polemical idea, but one that recognises the significance of such claims of citizenship. He seizes on militant action from migrant labourers and first generation proletarians caught between colonially corrupted urban elites and rural chiefs to create a radical action that can reform both the urban and rural setting. Certainly these antecedents can be found in Lesotho. From the 1930’s, there was a period of around 30 years when such groups emerged within Lesotho that sought to challenge racially exclusive colonial rule and over turn corrupted tradition. Migrant workers, earning wages in South Africa, had the possibility to lay roots back home outside chiefly control. And in this period the South African Communist Party extended its organisation into Lesotho and there was a vibrant, critical press. However, the accession to power of the conservative BNP at independence in the 1966 elections and the 1970 constitutional crisis, checked these developments (Coplan and Quinlan 1997: 36-40).

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and political action even in this most industrial of settings (cf. Coplan 1994; Harries 1994; Moodie 1994 ).

Thereafter much Basotho radicalism was channelled into the NUM and anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa. It is these very same forces have emerged again in the 1990s Lesotho, with LECAWU arguably at the forefront (Southall 1994).

This argument in favour of a politics of citizenship has been very influential. The power of Mamdani's work lies in a strongly argued assessment of the problems of contemporary Africa as a legacy of the modes of rule used by late colonialism. In reformulating the issue of radical urban politics by switching from 'the labour to the native question' (1996: 23), he has given left wing radicalism a new mandate in a post-Communist era dominated by the bland liberal discourses on civil society and the failings of the African state. Indeed, Mamdani devotes part of his introduction to analysts who 'write history by analogy' (1996: 9-16), comparing a failed African state to the European achievement of modernity. In a modernising analysis, the weakness of the state is explained by the aversion of the peasantry to the state (Hyden 1980), and/or the African state that is eaten through by the pre-modern politics of patrimonialism (Sandbrook 1985). Such assessments can lead towards the rather bland analyses democratisation and civil society (Bratton 1994) and the strengthening civil society and social capital programmes so beloved by the World Bank.

The difficulty with his work lies in the strong distinction drawn between rural, tribalised "subjecthood" and urban "citizenship". One line of argument has been to critique Mamdani's notion of a bifurcated state; a line of attack that for now has been successfully defended (O'Laughlin 2000; Mamdani 2000)<sup>12</sup>. Alternatively, another focus for debate has been the issue of tribalised politics. To insist that this form of politics is intrinsically flawed and corrupted is an overly static notion that has 'little sense of the historical processes at local levels, vital for a thesis that places so much weight on the central possibility of local conflict' (Lonsdale 1997: 521). Indeed Lonsdale's work on political culture is interesting in that he studies Kenya that, under a relatively unchanged "tribalised" mode of rule, enjoyed both the prosperity of Kenyatta followed by the predations of arap Moi (Lonsdale 1992). Therefore there is some credence to his arguments that Mamdani cannot precisely explain the

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<sup>12</sup> One however feels that this line of criticism could bear fruit if properly explored. Lonsdale (1997: 520) notes that Mamdani's claim, 'to turn a fruitless dichotomy [between modernist and

possibilities and closures such a mode of rule. There is something of an irony that Mamdani used Uganda as a case study of the limits of tribal rule where (with significant caveats) Museveni has achieved the remarkable task of bringing peace and a degree of prosperity to a country that was ravaged by civil conflict for decades.

This dissertation addresses another issue, one of urban/industrial based politics and Mamdani's tending towards a somewhat hopeful embrace of the emancipatory potential of emergent, civil society groups. Bernstein (1998: 162), especially, has noted Mamdani's teleological definition of civil society. It is either technically defined as a separation of powers, and when defined substantively, it is seen as urbane and emancipatory (citizenship) in contrast to corrupted communitarian politics (subjecthood). This leads towards an argument that views post-colonial crisis being caused by rural subjecthood eating away urban citizenship (Mamdani 1996: 287). Instead this dissertation shifts emphasis to the fragility of emancipatory, urban/industrial based politics. On the one hand the building of a union that espouses an equality of individuals based around a common membership and seeks workers rights premised on universal principles, marks a fundamental transformation of workers social, cultural and political identities. Likewise, in seeking a bargaining position to defend its members and fulfil their mandate, LECAWU seeks to bring an institutionalised accountability into the corroded Lesotho state. In this sense one sees the politics of emancipatory citizenship.

However, this form of politics must be treated problematically as well as affirmatively. Solely defining a Weberian type of citizenship appropriate for a modern statehood, as opposed to the politics of tribal patrimonialism, flattens the complexity of transitions that move progressive change. Two general points that recur throughout the dissertation are, firstly, that Basotho political elites do not appear as stultified, "tribal" forces dependent on a rural power base. Indeed Lesotho is interesting in that power has tended to depend upon the control of externalised resources of migrant labour, foreign aid and latterly Taiwanese textiles investment which has resuscitated this ailing bureaucratic elite who continue to play the role of

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communitarian analyses] into a useful dialectic by reminding us that colonies were bifurcated states... is a somewhat paradoxical move.

gatekeeper controlling the extraversion of scarce resources<sup>13</sup>. Coplan (1995) therefore argues that ethnic identity has little structural power, as politicians whose bases of power are in the state, are able to manipulate chiefs ad hoc. Even though Letsie III showed something of an appetite for power in the mid 1990s, the speed with which he was quashed reveals the weakness of aristocratic power. Hence factions from the army, police and bureaucracy, whose power is generally centred in urban Lesotho, have dominated the troubles of the past decade. Secondly, a close analysis of the union movement and the reforms it has forced, reveals that the politics of citizenship is simply not a neutral site of rational, pluralist political exchange, but a place of contestation. An extremely idealised abstraction of the political culture that actually takes shape ignores alternative sources of an emancipatory impulse in popular radical traditions that have fed into the union movement. It also neglects the limiting manners in which elites have used more limiting definitions of citizenship to repress possibilities for a broader emancipation and participation (Eley 1996: 70).

In pursuing this argument, chapter 2 sets the backdrop to the labour struggles over these recent years. It is discussed how AGOA- a “growth and opportunity act”- has less brought about the “Enlightened” expansions of capitalist markets than allowed the establishment of quite a labour-repressive type of industrial politics in the Lesotho textiles industry. In this volatile industrial situation, chapters 3 and 4 depict the means by which LECAWU has managed to force wage increases and bring about pressure that has led towards the implementation of legislation designed to improve labour standards. Particular attention is paid to the dynamics within union politics. The former chapter looks at issues within Lesotho, especially LECAWU’s reliance on a cadre of experienced older male union officials to lead a younger, predominantly female membership. Also the seeming paradox that LECAWU engages in quite a

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<sup>13</sup> “Extraversion” and “the politics of the belly” were terms popularised by Bayart (1993), a book that has attracted an incredibly mixed press. Clapham’s review (1994) captures its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand in specifying the historicity of the African state, one moves away from ‘the moralisation and the tedious search for blame which accompanies much current writing on the “failures of African government”’ (1994: 434) and the imposition of a colonial state. Yet his Braudelian approach provides a Burkean vision of society that underplays the often disastrous changes in the post colonial years- famine, war, increasing population, economic failure, structural adjustment programmes- which have all been experienced by Lesotho. Coplan’s (1994) description of “cannibalism” in Lesotho, in which “power is eaten whole” provides a description of the ‘dynamic and often disastrous combination of the two [African and Western political traditions] which furnishes the dynamic of African political life’ (Clapham 1994: 429)

desperate, and sometimes coercive, form of militant politics in order to enter into negotiated politics. The latter chapter considers the means by which use has been made of ambiguous international political channels through which LECAWU, in conjunction with the Union of Needletrades Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), has sought to place pressure on the US government and The GAP to use their leverage to improve labour standards in Lesotho. In spite of the union movement's ability to cause persistent unrest within the industry which has brought about a degree of labour reform, LECAWU's politics remain inimical to many within government. Chapter 5 therefore suggests the possibility that the current round of labour reforms simply seeks to quell industrial unrest without significantly transferring the balance of power or mode of politics in Lesotho.

### Methodology

Having limited time for fieldwork, I chose to focus on two recent labour reforms that are agreed by all stakeholders to have had significant impact on the industry. These were investigated so as to provide insight into the changing 'discourses and practises that reflexively give meaning to these relationships of consent and coercion within and between the state and social life' (Eley 1984: 452) within Lesotho's textile industry. Firstly, I studied the process of building a union presence on the shop floor, focussing specifically on the Nien Hsing and CGM companies. Both factory groups have had a long association with Lesotho and are a significant presence, employing 7000 (due to rise to around 12 000) and 8 000 workers, respectively. And both have experienced violent strikes, in 1998 and 2001, that have marked crisis points in labour relations. It has been such crises that have hastened the implementation of the Directorate of Dispute Prevention and Resolution (DDPR), brought in 2001 under the auspices of the 1998 Labour Amendment Act. Nien Hsing and CGM have been among the number of Taiwanese companies who have responded to this act and to campaigns against them by recognising LECAWU and by introducing limited changes to Human Resources procedures.

Secondly, I looked at the improvements made in wage bargaining in the years 2001 and 2002. Because so few factories recognise LECAWU, the government Wages Advisory Board (WAB), that sets minimum salaries, was essentially setting the wages



of the industry at a rate below inflation. In October 2001 LECAWU, through a militant campaign that threatened the disruption of the industry, managed to bring pressure from the government and US Embassy onto the Lesotho Textile Exporters Association (LTEA). This resulted in the LTEA undertaking that its members would provide a 3.5% wage increase above the minimum 6.5% increase set by WAB to meet LECAWU's demand for 10%. This de facto recognition of LECAWU considerably smoothed negotiations in 2002, which have been held within legal channels.

The case studies were chosen because they give insight into the relationships between all the major players who play a role in forming industrial politics. An examination of the issues surrounding these reforms provides an insight into the discourses and processes by which LECAWU has managed to gain a degree of institutional recognition of its claim to be the body representing its members' claims for worker rights. As research was done within a year of both reforms, there is the possibility that a new set of circumstances might overlay these events and give the reforms a different set of meanings.

To examine these issues I constructed a closely-knit web of key informant interviews. The interviews provided a multiple, argumentative set of viewpoints that revealed the debates surrounding the reforms thus giving a deep insight into the changes in the political culture of the industry. It also allowed contradictions and uncertainties to be checked and counter-checked. (See Bibliography for a list of interviewees).

Interviews were conducted in English and were semi-structured, as questioning rarely could follow a pre determined set of questions because of the contentious subjects being discussed and issues had to be carefully approached. In the interviews I settled upon a strategy for avoiding abstract issues as, when touching upon controversial subjects, interviewees were liable to make unsubstantiated generalisations in favour of their beliefs. Rather I discussed the concrete issues of labour reform and tried to unravel the complexities of a situation by gently probing the interviewee about its more contentious aspects. Where possible, interviews were taped then transcribed and returned to the interviewee. They were also given the opportunity to state if they wished for their interview to remain anonymous. These agreements were all recorded in a document that both interviewee and interviewer signed. This procedure was

intended to prevent misunderstandings and also to provide a measure of trust between both parties.

Interviews were the primary research method used, but as I was being chaperoned by LECAWU for a fortnight, there was opportunity to observe the head office at work and to accompany officials to meetings and marches etc. I also had a chance to speak more informally to various LECAWU members. Dealing with this material poses more of a challenge, because some of it has been revealed at an unguarded moment and also the comments that are made are often more speculative. Therefore some of the more contentious opinions are not attributed to named members of LECAWU. I also cross-referenced surprising facts and opinions before recording them.

The subjects addressed in these interviews were based upon knowledge I gained of the subjects from primary documents related to these issues. Unlike, the carefully selected interviews, this material was not so neatly gathered for its primary purpose was to provide a foundation of knowledge on which to base the interviews. Particularly useful, was reading five years of back issues of two English language, Maseru based newspapers- *Mopheme* and *The Southern Star*. This provided some useful insights into recent political history and suggested some fascinating attitudes towards LECAWU. Much of the documentary material was written by biased authors, therefore questions of proximity, purpose and prejudice disentangled the provenance of this material. A majority of the documents could be down loaded from the relevant websites of government, media and non governmental organisations. The newspapers were read at the Cory Library, Rhodes University and a number of other documents were obtained during the course of fieldwork.

Finally there is the question of the extent to which I was able to understand the politics that I was investigating. This issue has most often been discussed as a matter of cross-cultural comprehension, and there are deep debates on this subject concerning research and the construction of knowledge. There is not space to discuss these matters fully here, but briefly: I hope that despite language barriers, there need not automatically be an cross cultural incomprehension between the stable categories of Self (white, male researcher) and Other (African, female worker, subject) if one examines the contesting of universal ideas by a diversity of stakeholders within a

global setting<sup>14</sup>. Misunderstandings therefore were not so much the result of an inexorable cultural divide, as a lack of familiarity with the bewildering and quite often Byzantine arena of union politics in Lesotho. Hence I chose to study a very small area of research from multiple viewpoints, having attempted to immerse myself thoroughly in the history and debates surrounding the people that I was meeting. One cannot judge one's failings here because, by definition, the unknown remains in the dark; but having managed to work my way through detailed and delicate interviews across treacherous subject matter, perhaps my compass was not completely disorientated.

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<sup>14</sup> Cooper (2000) discusses these matters in much greater detail and I follow with most of the conclusions that he reaches. He provides a bibliography detailing many of the significant interventions that have been made.

## CHAPTER 2

### PATTERNS OF TEXTILES INVESTMENT IN LESOTHO

#### Introduction

The impact of AGOA, which has brought much of the textiles investment to Lesotho, has tended to be discussed as an issue of economics. Its merit as a development tool that moves from “aid to trade” by encouraging the liberalisation of the market, is a subject of great contention. These issues are crucial in themselves, and play an important part in setting the bounds of governmental action. Yet so often, it is assumed that development is driven by these unilinear economic mechanisms. This produces an argument closely attuned with the lofty rhetoric that has accompanied AGOA. ‘AGOA establishes a new framework for US trade, investment and development policy... A strategy to expand free markets, trade and economic growth... will create... stronger, more democratic countries’ (US Dept Trade 2001: 1). The converse to the “liberal boast” is the “social democrat’s lament” for the decline of the nation state, in the face of mobile capital, which is no longer an effective mechanism of reversing/ameliorating the more predacious aspects of capitalism (Beinefield 1996: 415). This leads towards a debate regarding the claims of the state against those of the market<sup>1</sup>.

Yet within Africa, capitalism has never operated as an even field of global flows, nor has the nation state been the self-evident container of political identity and action. First, a body of writing, that has been called “the new economic sociology”, has considered the bounded structures of various capitalisms that allow production, accumulation and optimisation. This has emphasised the embeddedness of economic relationships within a variety of structures of social life and the means by which the organisation of production ‘informs not only business relations, but social relations within other institutions in society’ (Biggart 1991: 222 in Hart 2002: 169). These capitalisms that have touched Lesotho- British trade, South African mining and latterly AGOA led Taiwanese manufacturing- have been confined by these limits of

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<sup>1</sup> These terms of debate tend to go back to Polanyi’s analysis of the great transformation of society, in which the turbulence of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century caused by capitalism disembedding the very structures that held together society. See Stiglitz’s foreword to the latest edition of Polanyi (2000: vii-xiii).

history and geography. Second, a study of imperial history has closely examined the means and the extent to which colonised peoples were drawn into these capitalisms, particularly emphasising the adaptability of social systems and the reconstitution of African polities in relation to outside penetration (Cooper 2001).

Therefore I argue below that, when the politics of investment are studied, AGOA induced textiles investment in Lesotho has not been a “Great Transformation” driven by economic policy decided in metropolitan centres. Rather the framework set by AGOA, brought together two quite repressive regional groups, a Basotho political elite and a group of Taiwanese textiles manufacturers, following a period in which both groups had been waning. The inter related series of economic and social shifts, which consolidated the power of these groups, has set the terrain of struggle for unions and campaign groups attempting to improve labour conditions for textiles workers.

### **The American Growth and Opportunity Act**

The impulse behind much of the current rush of foreign investment in Lesotho has been the US AGOA treaty. Bilateral apparel trade treaties are not a new phenomenon for Lesotho. In the late 1980s Lesotho was a signatory to the Lome Convention which allowed duty free clothing into the European Union. However, because of both restrictive tariff rules and competition from vertically integrated textile producers in Eastern Bloc and North African countries with lower transportation costs, exports to Europe have stagnated at around 1 million Euro (\$1.05 million) per year. AGOA has transformed the economic and political terrain of Lesotho. Taiwanese textile companies secured a large slice of the US market because of the price advantage offered by the 17% tariff rebate under AGOA, and the economies of scale generated by the large orders that US retailers place. According to Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, in the period 1999- 2001, exports had increased from some 500 million Maloti (\$58.7 million) to 1.67 billion Maloti (\$196 million) (DFID 2002: 16-18)<sup>2</sup>. And Lesotho is one of an increasing number of regions around the world that have been beneficiaries of US trade treaties. The Free Trade Area of the Americas, spanning 34 countries will

be completed by 2005; a bilateral agreement was concluded with Vietnam in 2001, following agreements under the Clinton administration with Singapore; the Free Trade Agreement with Jordan in 2001 marks the beginning of a US push into the Middle East; and the US Department of Trade is seeking to expand the Andean Trade Preference Act, that supports Columbia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and shortly, Chile (Zoellick 2002b).

The rhetoric of the US government views these treaties as the means by which to lever open markets because ‘open markets and rules-based trade are the best engines we know to lift living standards, reduce environmental destruction and build shared prosperity’ (President Clinton 2000 in Phillips and de Hahn 2002: 1). Furthermore there is a foreign policy and even a moral imperative to these treaties. Robert Zoellick, the US Trade Representative who has been strongly pushing AGOA, recently delivered a speech to the US business press following World Trade Organisation anti-globalisation riots in which he stated:

For editors searching for that big post-Cold War concept ... [trade] offers a new model of North-South relations... In the period following September 11<sup>th</sup> ... there is a big opportunity to discover the connection between foreign and economic policy... Whereas it was once said that “trade follows the flag”, we hope that a world wired through trade and business networks will promote the spirit of liberty and opportunity that the flag symbolises (Zoellick 2002b).

Behind the high-flown rhetoric lurk tensions between a number of currents of self interest within US politics. Reducing US tariff barriers has affected a political calculation between US consumers- whom might benefit by up to \$2, 500 per year from lower prices on household goods; US retailers, such as The GAP who benefit from more flexible patterns of production; and US producers, especially in the textile industry who are due to lose hundreds of thousands of jobs (Zoellick 2002b). Hence UNITE, a US textiles trade union, has made the somewhat self-interested discovery of the apparel producing sweat shops in Lesotho and is engaged in a fascinating three way contest with the US government and producers such as The GAP. Within Africa,

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<sup>2</sup> The DFID report comments that statistics produced by the Government of Lesotho are somewhat

despite this trade agreement leading to a 19% increase in exports from eligible countries to the US, AGOA has not equitably restructured patterns of trade. 91% of total came from South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon; with 80% of total exports being from the petroleum sector (Brindle 2002b: 4). And there has also been a degree of self-interest in unlocking these markets. Phillips and de Hahn (2002: 2) stress the imposition of economic and social reforms that have accompanied the investment. On the one hand some have been positive, for example AGOA recipients have had to ratify International Labour Organisation (ILO) core conventions. But other reforms such as the removal of currency and exchange controls and the acceleration of privatisation programmes have been criticised for allowing more venal forms of capitalist penetration (Stiglitz 2002). And in the background to these encroachments lie broader questions concerning the projection of US power across the world<sup>3</sup>.

### Guaxani Capitalism

Ironically this act for “growth and opportunity” is less ‘stimulating new trading opportunities for the region’s businesses and entrepreneurs’ (Zoellick 2002a) in Lesotho, than leading to an influx of foreign, textiles investment, most of it from the Far East<sup>4</sup>. Taiwanese control 90% of the industry and about 97% of the labour force (DFID: 3). The labour regimes of these companies certainly indicate how globalised production has allowed the resurgence of quite repressive forces. Nien Hsing, one of the larger companies in Lesotho that currently employs around 7 000 Basotho, is perhaps an extreme example of these changes. Only a decade ago it was derided as a “sunset” company in Taiwan because it was engaged in low cost production process at a time of rising production labour costs. Chairman Ron Chen however managed to restructure Nien Hsing into one of the largest denim manufacturing companies in the

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erratic and US import statistics alternatively calculate the value of trade to be US\$140 million.

<sup>3</sup> This theme has been addressed by Kabemba C & Landsberg C (1998: 1) who argue ‘AGOA seeks to give the US the opportunity to broaden trade in Africa and create domestic jobs, thereby challenging the status quo in terms of which it enjoys less than 8 per cent of the African market share compared to the European Union’s (EU) 41 per cent. AGOA thus gives the US a means of challenging the historically biased ties between Africa and Europe. It is also an effort to challenge a potential EU monopoly in Africa resulting from the proposed EU-South Africa Free Trade Agreement and the renegotiation of the Lomé Convention with African-Caribbean-Pacific countries, a process subtly dominated by France. Put bluntly, AGOA has a lot to do with the ostensible antagonism between the US and France in Africa’.

<sup>4</sup> Although, considering the economic position of Lesotho, how could it be any otherwise?

world whose clients include The GAP and Walmart, and retails its own brand of jeans in Asia. This was achieved both by being one of the first companies to vertically integrate the entire process of jeans production and maintaining a low cost production process by moving production into the regions opened by US trade treaties (Wang 2001).

The low standard labour regimes in these textile companies is not simply an economic issue, as is so often implied in various arguments concerning “a race to the bottom”. In fact there are a number of industrial issues where “footloose practises” run against companies investment interests. If a water supply crisis is not resolved for example in Maseru, because denim factories are “thirsty industries”, investment could slump, approximately halving the number of jobs that are expected to be created. Already factories engage in work practises that increase operating costs and worsen labour tensions. Factory operatives are expected to work overtime at short notice when there is a surplus of the irregularly supplied water, which is even imported by lorry from South Africa to the factories. Even the largest investors into Lesotho, including CGM and Nien Hsing, remain extremely reluctant to invest in necessary water recycling facilities in which capital outlay could be recovered. Largely this is because the changes required in production techniques and relationships with utility providers would require a huge shift in the management culture (DFID 2002: Annexe 2).

It is therefore useful to see an intertwining of economic, social and political considerations viewing patterns of investment in terms of the “new economic sociology” that sees business relations falling within broader patterns of social relationships. This is especially seen in labour relations where a recent DFID report on the Lesotho garment sector notes in quite diplomatic language that:

Chinese supervisors appear to have been recruited from garment workers who have come up through the ranks for the garment industry... it appears they work very long hours and that they fall into a grey area of the law with no agency vetting their conditions of service. It is small wonder that they expect superhuman performance from the workers under their supervision... [And ] while able to understand the requirements of production laid down by their seniors, were invariably not able to communicate the urgency to the Basotho



staff under their control. This resulted in frustration, aggression and punishment in a manner that is contrary to acceptable standards in Lesotho (DFID: 43).

It would seem that the clannish, guaxani capitalism that Hart discusses in *Disabling Globalisation* (2002) is thriving in Lesotho. She describes the means by which ethnic Taiwanese who existed on the fringes of the KMT dominated state originally set up such textile factories in Taiwan. These factories flourished because of close-knit, guaxani family ties. A patriarchal style of management, that was harsh enough for the “apprentices” who rose to management positions through the ranks, underwrote an even more brutal treatment of workers (Liu 2000). ‘Taiwanese businessmen garnered family labour for their firms by promoting cultural constructions of enterprise work as part of family obligation... Building on “traditional” inequalities, they foster the formation of a highly stratified workforce’ (Greenhalgh 1994: 759 in Hart 2002: 186). According to Hart, labour militancy was rare in Taiwan. There would be considerable disputes, but it was negotiated in the idiom of familial obligation. Therefore ‘there is no need to strike over issues of corporal punishment, absence of a lunch period or washroom facilities, kickbacks to pay foremen or hiring agents and so on’ (Diamond 1979 in Hart 2002: 189).

Currently a second generation of managers who rose up through this closed system are launching themselves into international waters causing a rash of labour disputes in the countries where they invest (Dunne 2000; Liu 2000). These factories show great hostility to outside interference from labour legislation that attempts to regulate work practises. A typical example of such action was reported in the Lesotho newspaper Mopheme (3<sup>rd</sup> November 1998: 3), which detailed how LECAWU, having unionised 320 out of the 328 workers in Lesotho Clothing Factory, approached the management to sign the statutorily required agreement of union recognition. In response the manager locked all the workers out of the factory and demanded that they sign new contracts of employment revoking union membership. Whilst doing this he claimed he was a member of the LTEA, a claim found out to be untrue, in which time he had actually joined the LTEA. Having protested to the Labour Commissioner, LECAWU eventually entered negotiations with the LTEA that eventually stalled.

The consequence of this is that it is very difficult to enforce labour legislation and worker rights suffer. The tensions that this generates on the shop floor have been closely detailed in Phillips and Xaba (2002) account of the labour practises occurring in individual factories. At a “higher level” the strains induced within the field of industrial politics were very explicitly be seen in the ire the CGM Deputy Director drew in a report delegated by the Labour Commissioner in 2001. (Ironically CGM was having a relatively good relationship with LECAWU at this time.)

The fact that \*\*\*<sup>5</sup> is a deputy director of a very big company that has given jobs to thousands of Basotho who were jobless should not be misinterpreted to mean that he is free to undermine and marginalize the role of everybody or institution [sic] in the Kingdom of Lesotho, in particular the LNDC and the Department of Labour... The remarks he passed to us during the inspection were totally uncalled for. He was not only unco-operative but also rude, antagonistic and unprofessional (Labour Commision 2001: 24).

And in 1993, 1998 and 2001, labour incidents have intersected with more general unrest leading to widespread rioting in Maseru that has largely targeted Taiwanese property<sup>6</sup>.

### The politics of the belly

In one sense the recent changes in the global textiles industry has allowed a fundamental restructuring of relationships between employer, worker and state that has resulted in an increased elasticity of demand for unskilled workers, driving labour standards down. It has become an exceptionally footloose industry in which, because there are few sunk costs, employers have extreme mobility. Such movement is encouraged by “post-Fordist”, flexible patterns of production and trade in which Lesotho workers produce for globally mobile Taiwanese employers who receive limited orders from US retailers that change season by season. Nor has stability been

<sup>5</sup> Name deleted for purposes of the dissertation. See chapter 5 for the crisis that this report generated.

<sup>6</sup> My first indicator of how widespread this feeling was when, one evening in a restaurant, a 4 year old Mosotho boy ran across the room and karate kicked me before bursting into tears. His parents told me that the child had been frightened of me because he thought I was “Chinese”! A game of football restored detente.

encouraged by the “catch-22” strategies by which Southern African governments have attempted to encourage investment by reducing sunk costs yet further. Factory shells for new investors tend to be constructed by the government and Botswana even subsidised 80% of workers wages in the first year only to lose the majority of the textile investors after 4 years. Also, the uncertain period the AGOA agreement that provides preferential access to US markets again leads to insecure patterns of investment<sup>7</sup>. Labour standards are further compromised by a labour market structured against workers. For example short-term contracts are a feature of the textile industry in Lesotho and LECAWU members have been fired to be replaced by another worker who is quite literally waiting at the gates<sup>8</sup>.

However multi-national investment does not simply impact on Lesotho. In part labour relations have been so volatile because it has aggravated severe tensions that have been present in Lesotho throughout the 1990s. The limited opportunities brought by textiles investment have come to a country where the political elite have had a history of parasitically thriving on foreign investment. Lesotho’s political elite had survived the apartheid era within a web of relationships of patronage, a situation described in Ferguson’s (1990) description of development as the anti-politics machine. Aid, initially from S Africa then latterly from “The West” after Lesotho became a “front line state” accounted for half of recurrent spending and all of capital expenditure. Such aid funded the expansion of a fairly inefficient bureaucracy whose numbers increased by a factor of 1.5 from 1976 to 1986, at which time a peak of 354,000 were employed. During this period an incredibly weak economic hand compounded by government mismanagement crippled productive forces within Lesotho, for example agriculture production was reduced almost threefold in the period from 1965 to 1982 (Cobbe 1988: 75).

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<sup>7</sup> The initial phase of AGOA was originally due to expire in 2004 after which, to qualify for tariff exemption, apparel had to be assembled using fabric woven in AGOA countries. Many of the investors in Lesotho currently use fabric woven in non-AGO countries. After 2004, fabric could be sourced from Durban or from Nien Hsing, the largest investor in Lesotho, that is building a textile mill in the country. However it is being mooted to extend phase one of AGOA until 2008 (DFID 2002).

<sup>8</sup> For a very good and detailed account of the footloose investment practises and resulting labour standards issues in Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland see Phillips and Xaba (2002) and Phillips and de Hahn (2002).

Politics also stagnated. The government, acting as gatekeeper over these external sources of revenue, revealed its brittleness in a series of coups, that tended to occur at times when external revenues were squeezed by foreign donors and the South African government. Despite a series of regime changes, political opposition rarely managed to break away from the corroded politics of patronage. Governments attempted to cramp other bases of political mobilisation, seeking to extend its power even down to village level and co-opt 'traditional' rule (Coplan & Quinlan 1997). And, although migrant labour continued to provide a channel of political and economic aspiration, attention was largely fixed on South Africa in the 1980s where Basotho dominated the militant NUM. Political opposition tended to be equally caught within this web of patronage politics. But if there was a stability of sorts during apartheid then in recent years disengagement with these external sources of power and production have brought Lesotho to the brink of disaster. Employment in South Africa, especially in the lucrative mines has been declining since the mid 1980s and halved between 1994 and 2000, raising levels of unemployment to around 45% (DFID 2002: 12-3). Also donor funding has declined, ostensibly because of despair in the inefficiency of aid projects, but also because Lesotho was no longer a "front-line" state.

As this web of patronage collapsed Lesotho moved through a decade of crises. Some of these movements, driven by unrest from below during this period led to tentative hopes for a new era of "African democratisation" (Southall 1994). Though fuelled by unrest from below, politics continued to play out in a series of elite coups, revolts and intrigues (Southall 1996; Coplan & Quinlan 1997). Matters came to a head in 1998. Not only were there a series of violent strikes in the garment industry in late February that almost lead to the withdrawal of the only industry that was in good health. But political unrest following a national election in this year led to South African military intervention. Following this *annus horribilis*, Lesotho seems to have pulled away from the brink. This is not to say there has been a sea change in political culture, but it seems that conflict is increasingly played out through legal channels. The 2002 elections, for example, were held without serious incidents, however the parliament only sat for a few months before it was suspended, and the ruling party has been embroiled in a series of internecine, factional struggles throughout 2002.

One cannot emphasise enough how public debate in Lesotho has fixed on the nascent textile industry as being an integral part of the stabilisation of Lesotho. Headlines following the 2001 National Dialogue on development, which produced Vision 2020, included *Basotho must choose between survival and extinction* (Mopheme 15/9/2001: 3) and later that year *Future lies in the textile industry* (Mopheme 9/6/2001). 38 textile companies are now based in Lesotho, and following AGOA, in the past 2 years 7 existing companies are seeking expansion and 12 new companies have expressed strong interest in investing in Lesotho. Employment rose by 56% in 7 months from 20,500 in March 2001 to 32,200 in November 2001 (DFID: 3, 15, 23). There has been a re-orientation of government attention towards this latest externally derived source of revenue. The LNDC has been expanding in size and scope as it has played a significant role in bringing investors into the country. In 2001 for example it controlled a budget of approximately 150 million Maloti (\$17.6 million) for its largest project, to upgrade utility supply for its latest industrial area at Tikoe (DFID 2002: 40-1). Higher government ministers have been involved in more informal networking. Ron Chen, head of Nien Hsing, set to become the largest investor in Lesotho when its textile mill is completed, is on close terms with senior members of government and the king (Mopheme 15<sup>th</sup> May 2001: 1). LECAWU has made claims that the state, in adopting close ties with the investors, is again acting as a comprador class, alleging that senior figures within government have significant shares in these companies<sup>9</sup>.

This investment has been accompanied by major tensions in industrial politics. Labour militancy has not been received well by a conservative political elite who see unrest as a disorder that will drive away investment. A recent report into *The Four Ugly Faces of Poverty and their Scars in Lesotho* argues:

We adorn the one cheek of the economic face [sic] with promises of economic partnerships... while slapping the other cheek with xenophobia. We want foreign investment, but we readily harass and plunder the property of foreigners. [The] acquisition of this new character by the Basotho does not augur well for poverty reduction and eradication. It kills the goose that lays

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately these claims are practically impossible to prove, many of the documents in the company records office, for example, being both incomplete and missing. A mark of both the lack of

the golden egg. Behind it all politics rears its ugly head (Ministry of Planning 2000).

A brief discussion of labour law in Lesotho indicates the restricted framework within which LECAWU operate. On the one hand it needs to be noted that labour law is relatively stringent compared to some of the other countries engaged in similar manufacture. Even before becoming a recipient of AGOA, the core ILO conventions that were a prerequisite of receiving the bilateral treaty had been ratified. In 1994 a labour code was drawn up with the assistance of the ILO following the first free elections held in two decades. This legislated for basic labour standards including working conditions, freedom of association and right to strike; and provided the institutions of a Labour Court, a Labour Commissioner and a WAB to enforce the legislation. And, in June 2000, Lesotho ratified ILO Convention 138 concerning minimum age of employment (Southall 1994: 581; US Bureau of Democracy 2000). Furthermore, whilst there are many cases of non-compliance, the Lesotho government often does attempt to take action to ameliorate the worst cases of labour abuse<sup>10</sup>. This lays the foundations for the repeated insistences of US embassy and government officials in Lesotho that factories are not “sweat shops”, as LECAWU and international labour groups have suggested in campaigns.

This notwithstanding, LECAWU has found it exceptionally difficult to operate within legal channels. Since 1966 there has not been a single legal strike and demonstrations that have occurred outside the law have occasionally been repressed forcefully, on occasion leading to death<sup>11</sup>. One issue is enforcing established law upon companies who are reluctant to comply. The other is of the law itself. For example, until last year, freedom of association in relation to the right to strike remained a “qualified right” by which employees on strike could be dismissed under common law. The authoritarian undertones in these measures were drawn out in an article in *The Lesotho Law Journal* which commended: ‘this will permit the necessary flexibility

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transparency within government but also general bureaucratic inefficiency which makes such allegations very dangerous for LECAWU who run the risk of libel.

<sup>10</sup> An account of one of the more confused government interventions following unfounded allegations of child labour was reported in Africa Online vol 6(3).

<sup>11</sup> In the fortnight alone of my fieldwork, UNITE researchers documented two incidents in which factory guards beat up workers who were protesting outside a factory (Brindle 2002a). A number of the most well known and largest strikes are discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

which is necessary for a healthy investment climate. A statutory entrenched right to strike with no fear of counter action... can have extremely disastrous consequences for developing countries like Lesotho' (Lethobane 1997: 106; also see Madhuku 1997).

Underlying these laws one can more generally see continuities in a mode of rule; a style of a government that Cooper has more generally described as falling within an African type of "gatekeeper" state, 'able to control the interface with the outside world better than production and commerce within... distrustful of autonomous initiative and tempted to brittle authoritarianism' (Cooper: 321). The government has tended to be very suspicious of LECAWU's demands for union recognition and its claims to represent worker rights. At times this has been cast in a discourse of benevolent paternalism. Speaking at the LNDC in 2001 Prime Minister Mosisili said that he knew that entry into factory work was hard and, in the words of an old adage, young girls were crying at the time of their initiation. But, promising to intervene on behalf of the workers, he appealed to factory owners to remember that 'a happy worker is a good worker' (Mosisili 2001b). It is also suggested that Lesotho trade unions have a responsibility to nurture the 'egg that the golden goose has laid'<sup>12</sup>. Labour action is therefore unpatriotic action of an irresponsible union: 'Beware the boys in red caps are leading the young girls astray' was the phrase used by ministers in a campaign against LECAWU last year (Lebakae 2002). The description of LECAWU members as 'boys' and 'girls' and the mention of the 'red cap' in this saying also suggests that LECAWU's politics is disrespectful and subversive<sup>13</sup>.

At times there is an even more repressive edge within the Lesotho government. In a series of profiles written up in *The Southern Star*, the Minister of Labour, Major Leseteli Malefane, gave a stern message to the readership. Having reminded them

<sup>12</sup> This is a phrase repeatedly seen in government documents. It would not be stretching the metaphor too far to suggest that the government's use of this phrase seems to imply that the "golden egg" of textiles investment was sired by the father Taiwanese capitalism and the mother of the Lesotho government for the benefit of the people of Lesotho.

<sup>13</sup> The Basotho hat is not only a common item of clothing worn by young men, but is a continuing symbol of national unity, and has even been used for the design of a couple of buildings in Maseru that have been constructed in the process of investment following the destruction of the capital in the 1998 riots. LECAWU's distinctive red t-shirts and caps, however, have become something of a cult too. At the time of fieldwork I was politely but forcefully told that I could not give my LECAWU cap to non-LECAWU members as they were quite admired and demand had to be controlled.

‘that you must toil in order to reap’, a homily he had learnt from his experience as a factory worker, he then told the interviewer that his most admired leaders were Margaret Thatcher, General Pinochet and Dr Leabua Jonathon (the first prime minister of Lesotho after independence who, after losing an election in 1970, usurped power through a coup) . ‘These are people who took over power when their respective countries were in a hopeless state but transformed hopelessness into hopefulness... Funnily enough they were all on the conservative side of the spectrum...’ and gained their reputations by confronting unions (15<sup>th</sup> March 2002: 8).

### Conclusion

Textiles investment has come into Lesotho at a time of crisis, one that has been played out against the backdrop of changing global political and economic trends. Lesotho was an extreme example of a state that had managed to freeze an exploitative mode of rule through the extraversion of labour (although commentators in the 1980s were already detailing how tensions were building within the country amongst migrants<sup>14</sup>). Economic decline at a time of political transformation in Southern Africa in the early 1990s decisively broke this pattern and the political fabric of Lesotho has been ruptured since then. Textiles manufacture, currently growing at a rate of 16% per annum, offers the promise (as long as the notoriously footloose industry stays in the country) of offering a solution to the dramatic rise in unemployment and decline in Gross National Product (DFID 2002: 5).

These changes have also brought a time of volatility in the nascent textiles industry. Within these developments, I seek to consider the carefully specified question of the relationship between these changes and the attempt of LECAWU to build a labour movement that seeks to improve working conditions- a question that touches the complex relationship between capitalism and the processes of state formation within Lesotho<sup>15</sup>. Here, one can broadly speak of a two-way struggle between LECAWU<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Especially Coplan’s (1994: 160-77) discussion of the dilemmas faced by females within Lesotho.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately a closely specified question also leaves beyond its margins some fascinating issues, some of which were raised implicitly in this chapter. One issue that I cannot adequately explore is a close examination of the global politics of this textiles investment. Another are the relationships between trade unions in this rapidly growing sector, and the broader political sphere within Lesotho. I was told a number of intriguing stories including one regarding LECAWU’s support from one of the larger players in the small yet quite influential media scene that reports on and shapes Maseru politics.



that seeks to mobilise and mould these discontents into a movement that identifies its challenge as one of confronting the uncertain authoritarian alliance of the government and investors.

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When I asked why LECAWU no longer received their support, it was intimated that LECAWU had fallen from favour as they had refused to support the political party that this media consortium had cast its weight behind.

<sup>16</sup> Although there are numerous unions in the textiles sector, LECAWU dominates this industry and the entire trade union movement in Lesotho.

## CHAPTER 3

### BUILDING UNION POLITICS

#### Introduction

Within a quite unstable and repressive industrial setting, LECAWU has sought to build an emancipatory movement based on international visions of labour. This chapter takes a close examination of some of the internal processes of constructing the union within Lesotho.

In much of the literature on workers politics in Lesotho, the axis of engagement is seen to be a self evident, two-dimensional struggle between an emancipatory, popular movement and an authoritarian elite. The spectrum of political possibilities is argued to lie along an axis of modernisation whereby rural migrants, previously subjected to “traditional” rule, have an opportunity to be transformed by the urban, industrial experience into emancipated citizens. The core of their urban identity and political hopes is often argued to lie around their position as waged labourers in opposition to a hegemonic elite. The first section of this chapter however suggests the complexity and uncertainty of the patterns of proletarianisation, that as much rework readily adaptable social ties, as generate new urban identities. This therefore points towards the kaleidoscopic possibilities for political action out of such shifting grains of social intercourse.

The second section therefore describes the means by which LECAWU, through micro-political processes on the shop floor is involved in shaping a union movement out of sometimes-disparate parts. In one sense this follows construction of a militant, urban politics identified by Mamdani and his description of the crucial ‘role of political leadership and political choice in translating social facts into political ones’ (1996: 219). Mamdani, however, sees this choice playing out within a single dimension of rural-urban sociological change that can be translated into a congruent political choice between subjecthood and citizenship; citizenship being a neutral set of modern values unlike the ethnicised subjecthood linked together by ties of blood. Underlying this vision is a view of the construction of a rational “modern” politics

that lies opposed to the deficiency of the African state, corrupted by ties of patrimonial allegiance. Whilst sensitive to the emancipatory potential of the radical demands for workers rights, it is another matter to draw a sharp distinction between a regressive communitarian politics set against the demands of a progressive citizenry. Building a union movement, especially within a repressive industrial context, is very much a process in which community-based and citizenship-orientated politics co-exist within LECAWU. Therefore the final parts of the chapter investigate how some of the tensions that lie within LECAWU's politics can be discussed as being more than simply a regression to the patrimonial politics of subjecthood.

### **Employment and proletarianisation**

Many analyses of the largely female workforce who are being employed in the new textiles factories that are cropping up in Southern Africa point towards a process of proletarianisation<sup>1</sup>. Here, the language of class is also one of gender because class relationships intersect with patterns of patriarchy. The dynamic of making a class of textile workers is argued to turn upon the entrance of women into the workplace and the urban world. To a certain extent, this is seen as being an emancipatory experience giving women a limited degree freedom from the rural areas, from which they often migrate, where patterns of subordination and capital accumulation are based around households structured along patriarchal lines. In the town they have more control over their own income, which they gain as an individual wage. And often they have "a room of one's own", living in *maleana* (single roomed tenancies) in shanty areas on the fringes of an 'urban space' (Wright 1999: 76).

This urban emancipation, however, is claimed to be pincerred between "traditional" and "modern" patriarchal forces whose interests closely correspond to their control of forces of production. On the one side, there is great conflict within "traditional" households as women gain a degree of autonomy by going into waged employment. The rearticulation of female identities '...are generally unmatched by shifts in masculinities... Masculine identities in Lesotho appear outdated in comparison, remaining rigid and responsive in the face of change' (Wright 1999: 97). Such

unbending attitudes have resulted in increased domestic conflicts as men attempt to assert their control over female income earners. On the other side sits a repressive, patriarchal, “modern” alliance of capitalist manufacturers and a state elite. Employment within Lesotho textiles factories, where 95% of employees are female, fits within world-wide patterns of “feminised”, insecure and menial labour, a result of the penetration of global capitalism. Wright argues that, moreover, ‘female labour is rendered “cheap” by patriarchal ideologies concerning women’s suitability for work... [in particular the] skills of dexterity and docility...’ (Baylies and Wright 1993: 89). This pattern of employment is connived at by the government of Lesotho that speaks of its duty to ‘the tearful women standing outside the factory gate, pleading to me [the prime minister] for employment’ (Mosisili 2001b).

Whilst sensitive to such investigations that provide detailed descriptions of the means by which women workers are placed on the margins of the political community, these analyses often elide a straightforward analysis of class formation. I would suggest that patterns of proletarianisation are more complex. Whilst a class analysis places an emphasis on women’s identity deriving directly from their position as workers<sup>2</sup>, research suggests that their position as textile workers fits in a within broader patterns of social formation in a more complex manner. Firstly, examinations of women’s position in Lesotho before this time of widespread female employment in the textiles industry indicates that many existed on the fringes of an urban world, thus entering the workforce has not been the straightforward journey from patriarchal households to urban capitalist control (Coplan 1994: 160-77)<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, women enter the workforce in ways that are not emancipatory, but within a complex rearticulation of patterns of social control. For example, in an interview in *Mopheme* (26<sup>th</sup> June 2001: 2) a chief, whose land was lying adjacent to a new investment initiative in Ha Nyenye, thanked the investors for providing idle, unemployed men with construction work, older women who could rent out rooms and be the aunties of the working women moving into *his* area (cf. Ferguson 1999: 50-81). Thirdly, there are a range of

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<sup>1</sup> Wright (1999) provides such an analysis in her study of *Female Singlehood and Urban Space in Lesotho* which also contains a bibliography of other such studies in Southern Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Wright for example argues ‘the arrival of world market factories reliant on cheap female labour has facilitated the occupation by some women of a physical urban space distributed by the market... Single, independent women have thus found a space beyond private, patriarchal relations’ (1999: 76)

<sup>3</sup> Similarly see Ferguson (1999: 166-206) for a similar discussion of how male migrant labour cannot be simply viewed as a circulation between the rural and the urban.

factors leading towards women keeping ties with social formations outside the industrial and urban setting. With employment being insecure and wages low, it is likely that women will keep a range of livelihood strategies open. As younger women tend to be employed in this sector, waged employment may simply form a stage within a woman's lifecycle. It has been documented elsewhere, for example, how young, unmarried women take employment for a short spell in urban factories so they can contribute to the costs of marriage and a setting up a household, on their return to rural homes. Similarly research has suggested that a worker remits, on average, 46% of their wage to dependents and 30% of single, urban women leave children with rural relatives (DFID 2002: 18; Wright 1999: 90). Quite how these processes rearticulate relationships is unknown. Therefore, a better appreciation of worker's identity would move beyond seeing women as migrating between patriarchal rural (tradition) and emancipatory urban settings (modern), but investigating the more complex articulation of patterns of social control in themselves<sup>4</sup>.

Rather than entering a detailed discussion of these social and economic patterns, this dissertation instead focuses on the means by which political experience plays a very important part in creating social identity. The sociological terrain of a rapidly growing industry is, by definition, confused and shifting. Workers can therefore enter a wide range of possible relationships within the textiles industry that lie beyond a description of self-evident class interest<sup>5</sup>. Firstly, relationships within a "class" of factory workers are complex and often antagonistic. Brindle's research on the numerous informal savings and loans groups that exist amongst groups of workers

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<sup>4</sup> This is therefore to question the general arguments for feminised labour, a hypothesis that argues that 'the era of [labour] flexibility is also an era of more generalised insecurity and precariousness' which correlates with 'the type of employment and labour force participation patterns associated with women' (Standing 1999: 583). Firstly, from a perspective that considers the net effect of global economic shifts this is probably a trend causing 'more generalised insecurity'. However, from the perspective of Lesotho migrant workers, especially women, who have been entering insecure and often highly repressive employment in South Africa for at least a generation, textiles employment is not necessarily worse. And today, textiles employment tends to be a step up from an even more peripheral existence in informal urban work in Maseru that women typically take upon migrating to the town (Wright 1999: 88). Secondly, there is a tension, when trying to fit economic patterns with the "feminised" experience of workers: between Wright's deft examination of the complexity of household relations, with a blunt analysis of 'regressive' patriarchy and 'emancipatory', 'modern' female singlehood (1999: 91,97). Both Ferguson (1999: 50-81) and (Coplan 1994: 160-77) provide a much more complex appreciation of such patterns of subordination.

<sup>5</sup> To use Marxist terminology, group relationships are therefore not between latent "classes within themselves" destined to experience a transformatory moment of crystallisation into a "class for themselves".

and supervisors in factories provides an insight into some of these relationships that involve intricate degrees of co-operation and exploitation (Brindle 2002a). For example, one of the major factors in causing the in strike at C&Y factory in 2002, were tensions over a set of loans in which unbeknown to management, one of the supervisors was skimming money from the salary envelopes of workers within one section, who found themselves unwittingly paying for the funeral of a worker in another section (Lebakae 2002)!

Secondly, whilst there is a fault line between workers and factory management who tend to be supported by the Basotho political elite, alliances between groups need not necessarily divide along these lines, nor be understood as class relationships. This again can be seen in the politics surrounding the CGM strike of 1998. Initially protestors took management hostage as a strategy of directly petitioning the Labour Commissioner. Such strategies of appeal seeking a relationship of patronage are relatively common in Lesotho at this moment (Likoti 2002). Dismissed workmen quite often try to accost the Labour Commissioner in her office, and a hostage taking strategy was also unsuccessfully used in a strike at O River Textile Factory in 2002 (Matsoso 2002). It was only on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> February that police were sent in to clear the workers from the CGM factory at which stage they lost control and opened fire, killing 2 workers. This action was not the jackboot of a hegemonic bloc, but a very controversial action that divided the Maseru elite. The army immediately publicly criticised the police force, and in the weeks of violent picketing outside the factories, often forcefully intervened to prevent police brutality. Editorials and letters to the press also saw the police action as an indictment of the authoritarian mode of government rule. The killings also stirred a week of anti-“Chinese” riots in Maseru thus moving the government of Lesotho to place pressure on CGM. An article in *Mopheme* (3<sup>rd</sup> March '98: 3), *CGM threatens to close*, contained an interview with the bristling manager of the factory reacted against government demands.

### **Building LECAWU**

In a situation where no single, clear pattern of sociological or political identity is inscribed in the industrial setting, analytical focus therefore switches to the means by which LECAWU has sought to provide political direction and build a united

movement by self consciously creating an emancipatory form of politics. This section suggests the means by which militant union politics in Lesotho generated a distinctive union political culture.

The foundations of LECAWU lie in NUM, where the present leadership of the textile union were socialised. This taught a distinctive form of union politics that is greatly different to the political culture operating within Lesotho, and has played a large role in their success. On the one hand it fits very closely with Mamdani's description of the potential of a radical politics of citizenship.

In the NUM [in the 1980s]... we were always armed with the experience we got underground. And then, although we were [only] personnel assistants, we got the training from the international bodies, especially the Danish bodies were committed to training the shop stewards in the mining sector. So with that training, although some of that was very limited under apartheid, we were aware.... we were in [a broader movement of] the Struggle ... We attended so many workshops, from the ANC and so on, so our experience helped us as trade unionists. So when we came home, it was not hard to build a union... The biggest challenge when I was building the union in 1994 was that there were unions that were in place before I came in and a union [Lesotho Clothing and Textile Workers Union] collapsed... The workers... were always doubting whether they trusted us or not because they have seen a big union collapse due to financial mismanagement. So they ask 'what is the background of this guy' and they realise I'm from the mining industry, so they think maybe he is hungry. There were so many ideas.... [Therefore] I had to sacrifice first. I helped them on their dismissal cases by helping them freely, and I tried to talk to the employers, without any contribution... And then the people realise this guy is really meaning business... You have to build democratic structures so that no one will be hijacking the union. So, I had to build a structure that will control me (Billy 2002).

It has been through this combination of circumstance and choice that LECAWU has gained strength by stressing an accountable form of union politics. Union officials, until recently, were only granted a small stipend because membership fees barely

covered the cost of business. This had caused the resignation of a couple of officials who moved towards richer pastures elsewhere. One of them especially was seen as a “sell out” as, in his new position as Personnel Manager in a factory, ‘he is trying to show his bosses how tough he is, that he can deal with LECAWU’ (Lebakae 2002)<sup>6</sup>. LECAWU had however managed to avoid financial crisis by gaining funding from UNITE whose influence has further kept them wedded to militant and transparent politics<sup>7</sup>.

However LECAWU does not simply built a neutral politics of citizenship, but this coexists with a politics of community and identity. This political culture was built within the distinctive patterns of political socialisation in NUM that have carried across and been remade in LECAWU. In numerous conversations, office bearers would mention that, despite providing relatively high wages, mine workers were often stigmatised in Lesotho for their work was quite often seen as an unruly occupation pursued in morally corrupting urban places<sup>8</sup>. The experience of forming the NUM and, through collective militant action, gaining the respect of apartheid government was a powerful moment of political awakening, which also was seen to have provided personal maturity.

When men worked [in the mines] they were called boys, and women [working in textile factories] are called girls. They are playful, they joke around, not respecting each other. Therefore [when building a union], for them to respect themselves they must respect each other (Lebakae 2002).

In 1982 we formed the NUM and I was a shop steward and I rose to other committees like branch official chairperson and we worked very hard to make sure the union succeeded. In 1987 we have national strike in South Africa and we have a very successful national strike. So much that the Boers were so

<sup>6</sup> Although such resignations were not necessarily tantamount to ‘selling out’. The other ex-unionist, now in government, was regarded by LECAWU as being very sympathetic towards them.

<sup>7</sup> One of the comments to a UNITE delegation from the LECAWU General Secretary being: ‘and here is our new book keeper: we bought him with the money you gave, so we can spend our funds wisely’.

<sup>8</sup> Even in urban, Maseru newspapers, one sees far few articles suggesting that ‘living in Maseru these days gives one the feeling that one gets when listening to Hugh [Masekela] singing about the good old days in Sophiatown’ (Southern Star 21<sup>st</sup> July 2000: 3), than worrying about the corrupting effects of the totsi-tal that is beginning to spread within urban spaces.



angry because the economy was in the mining sector and we were quite aware of that and we wanted to disrupt that. We realised we could not change the mind set of the national government. All the NUM leaders were dismissed and so I was deported.’ (Billy 2002)

This distinctive attitude that linked citizenship-orientated and community-based politics has carried over into LECAWU where, again, the process of building a committed rank and file was incredibly difficult. In circumstances where the repressive and uncertain nature of employment militated against a well-structured, assertive membership the process of building a union was very much a political practice carried out by a core of committed LECAWU shop stewards. At C&Y factory (owned by Nien Hsing), for example, LECAWU membership consisted of a core of 70 led by 3 shop stewards who had been infiltrated by LECAWU during a period of recruitment, all of whom had endured a great deal of verbal abuse. In the wake of gains following a successful action in 2002 (detailed below), membership now is estimated to stand around 1,700 and LECAWU signed a recognition of agreement with C&Y. Yet such action is incredibly risky. The Second Vice-President of LECAWU in 2001, along with 11 other workers, wore LECAWU t-shirts as part of the union’s strategy to show their strength in Sun Textiles factory, where management is very hostile to any form of organisation. The workers were dismissed immediately and black listed, only re-entering factory work, after a long period of unemployment, by changing their names (Lebisi 2002; Phillips & Xaba 2002: 12). In the midst of such battles it was very noticeable how the political atmosphere surrounding the union seemed, for many participants, to be something akin to a religious revival. With phrases that seemed to have been appropriated from the churches that many members attend, a number of shop stewards in interview spoke of ‘being in the dark’ before ‘we learnt about LECAWU and our rights’ (CGM 2002). One popular chant amongst the strongly religious membership even transforms a hymn line ‘Jesus is our Messiah’ into ‘Billy is our Messiah’, a phrase that suggests the preminence that the leadership enjoy<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed there are quite a few scurrilous rumours poking fun at the alleged pretensions of LECAWU leaders trying to gain demi-prophet status. The line of enquiry here pursues the predominance of LECAWU leaders. With more time, an interesting line of enquiry would have been the links between religious feeling (community-based) and labour (citizen-orientated) politics. Indeed, despite agnostic cynicism from some of the office bearers, there seemed to be a strong Christian element within the

### Manufacturing hierarchy

A discussion of the process of building a political community leads towards an assessment of the hierarchical schisms within LECAWU based on divisions of gender and generation<sup>10</sup>. Both politicians and intellectual analyses often conceptually divide these bases of political identity. In Lesotho a common claim against LECAWU was that the leadership was isolated from its members, and was likely to develop into a self-serving cabal, especially as such a patrimonial style of politics is seen to be the norm in Lesotho<sup>11</sup>. Likewise Mamdani differentiates between an ethnicised subjecthood eating away a politics of urban citizenship. This section however discusses, how in building LECAWU, a politics of citizenship- the idea of union members as individuals stripped of cultural markers- coexists, albeit in tension, with other arguments that emphasise culturally determined boundaries within the political community.

One of the most crucial tensions is the division between older, male, ex-NUM office bearers in LECAWU over a junior tier of organisers and a predominantly female membership. From the point of view of the leadership their time in the NUM equipped them with skills and experience that places them above the other members of LECAWU. This can be seen in Shaw Lebakae's story of how he joined LECAWU

I started working in the mining industry in 1983 and I left in 1997, due to retrenchment. I was recruited as a footballer so I worked on the surface and I took a job as an administrative clerk. That was for 1 year. I then worked in the bar up to being a bar supervisor. In 1989 I changed to being a personnel

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membership. Various Churches play a major role in Lesotho politics and Biblical passages to justify political principles are continually invoked by Maseru newspapers.

<sup>10</sup> This was an issue that came to the surface repeatedly in jokes, conversations and interviews. Even in daily greetings, office bearers were greeted by the oxymoronic term of "comrade-ntate" (comrade-father). A quite dramatic incident that underlined these tensions was a meeting that one of the international researchers attended, in which the office bearers of LECAWU greeted the ex General Secretary of LECAWU in quite an ingratiating 'traditional' manner. The younger organisers then mimicked their elders an ironic display of disgust.

assistant. As a personnel assistant, I was trained at Carltonville at Western Deep levels, the centre for Anglo-American training. And we did report writing, minute taking, personnel management, interaction management, [and] industrial relations. Personnel management took 2 weeks, the rest took one week... I translated for the shop stewards committee in the hostel. I was a NUM manager and I was a shop steward for the personnel [department]... [Soon after dismissal, and his return to Lesotho] one of my neighbours was part of the 1998 [CGM strike]. He asked me to go to court [because CGM summarily dismissed the entire workforce] ... I wrote down that procedurally it was incorrect to summarily dismiss everyone. He took that to the LECAWU officials and they asked me to come here [and start work]. I didn't know that Daniel Maraisane was here, because he used to work there [on the mines]. And I find [Macaefa] Billy and Willy [Matseo, old NUM colleagues] were working here too (Lebakae 2002)

This has produced a style of unionism in which the office bearers see their political maturity as being congruent with their position as older, experienced men; an attitude that in many ways resembles and remakes other common patriarchal ideas that exist in Lesotho politics. A common comment from the office bearers was that 'In NUM we were not just only ordinary shop stewards [implying that they were unlike LECAWU stewards]' (log 2002). Likewise there were sometimes tensions between the office bearers and younger organisers who were believed to lack the requisite skills. 'I have to accompany them everywhere, you cannot leave them alone' (log 2002). And when asked how far a younger generation might be able to progress within LECAWU, office bearers' answers invariably were along the lines that emphasised a gradual process of education of a longer period of time.

I always highlight ... I address them [LECAWU workers] as leaders, I am not addressing them as females- [but] as leaders of the people... [However] we need to screen them on committees and educate them first... Through this, that is how we change their mindset (Billy 2002).

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<sup>11</sup> Even from within the government there are many complaints about 'predaciousness, the compulsive desire to prey on the poor... [by] lazy, unaccountable politicians whose aim is to sponge from the poor at all costs' (Ministry of Planning 2002).

Secondly, the militant, evangelising politics that LECAWU engages in is seen to necessitate type of leadership that has tended to be culturally equated to the attributes of young men. Generational distinctions surface in all political communities but perhaps have been an especially important dynamic within African politics (see especially Delius 1996). Certainly in Lesotho most political parties have an active “youth” (which tends to be seen as the provenance of younger predominantly unmarried males) wing and tensions between youth and adult wings have furnished some of the most severe strains within a number of political parties in the past few years. Within LECAWU, charismatic leadership is seen to be a key attribute of “youth” necessary for organisers, all of whom are younger, often unmarried men. One of the international researchers who had accompanied an organiser on a recruiting drive- in a half ironic, half amazed aside- told me he had just seen ‘the behaviour you would expect from James Dean’. And certainly there were jokes around the office that women joined the union because of his charismatic presence. Apparently there had been an experiment to train women organisers a year or so ago, but ‘the members, their own kind, did not like them!’ (log 2002). Furthermore the bruising politics that LECAWU engaged in was seen to require male strength<sup>12</sup>. For example, on the day of the illegal march against wages in October 2001 ‘we elected male marshals who were shop stewards to stop workers going into work- by all means [laugh]’ (Lebakae 2002) And organisers themselves were proud of their occasional arrests.

This militancy that was predominantly the provenance of the younger members of LECAWU, contrasts to the more considered bearing of the office bearers. Billy especially liked to emphasise a symbiotic relationship between a militant rank and file and a shrewd leadership capable of pursuing negotiations.

It is good that they are militant because this pushes you and forces you to keep going.... Say like they [the members] wanted 25% and they would not change that. And if I change I will be beaten at the back [by the rank and file]. So when I add holiday leave and whatever, I will make sure the whole percentage

is bring to 25%. You have to be very tactical. As a leader cannot always be militant, you have to compromise at times but you need a strong watchdog [in a militant membership] (Billy 2002).

Yet, despite such a controlling idea of membership that emanated from the office bearers, the militant and confused nature of shop floor politics in fact allowed space for there to be independent, often militant, action by rank and file members. In the time I was with LECAWU, there was almost one incident a day in which a line/section of a factory embarked on a wildcat strike or go-slow. (Although, as the fieldwork was conducted during the period of wage negotiations, this was probably the most volatile period of the year.) Organisers, even officials, would dash over to the factory, but might only be allowed into the factory to immediately negotiate with management perhaps half of the time. On other occasions shop floor committees—sometimes shop stewards, at other times workers elected on the spur of the moment—would deal in the initial, decisive round of dispute resolution. Furthermore there were significant undercurrents of female-initiated violence in these actions<sup>13</sup>.

These factors are perhaps most dramatically seen in strike at C&Y in 2002 that made international headlines. ‘They [shop stewards] were holding weekly meetings [because there were problems on the shop floor]... So we went to the Labour Commissioner, we went to the management and nothing was happening’ (Lebakae 2002). Because matters were not resolved, pressure built up within the factory leading to a group of 50 or so women workers deciding to down tools and demonstrate in the main factory building. As they toyi-toyed through the middle of the factory, the manager managed to stab one of the leaders in the neck with her scissors. Following this, the workers shop floor broke into pandemonium, smashing machines and apparently injuring one of the management quite badly (Phillips 2002). Interestingly, despite this assertive dimension of labour unrest, it would seem that many of the membership continue the idea that they are junior members within LECAWU. One of the favourite songs of the Second Vice President, whose courage

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<sup>12</sup> See Coplan (1994: 96-7) for an account of how rural patterns of male socialisation in Lesotho that encouraged aggressive self-assertion have carried over into the bruising circumstances of urban living.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that females workers “gave as good as they got”, but there were more than a few stories of women striking back.

and leadership has been described above, when she leads workers at rallies is: 'We want strong men who will take us forward'<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately there was not the time during fieldwork to try to investigate this matter further.

### Bounding union action

There are perhaps two pertinent issues where tensions between the ideals of workers rights that the union espouses (especially to foreign visitors) and the more messy business of building a political community forcing change in quite a repressive setting are evident.

One arises over the militancy that is very much part of the style of politics that LECAWU pursues. This strategy is incredibly ambiguous, in that to make gains, LECAWU sometimes threatens severe action that could destroy the industry, and engage in actions that sometimes contain more than a tinge of coercive force to cajole reluctant members into support. In one sense these tensions can be overplayed<sup>15</sup>. This political channel is typical of union politics in that the road to negotiated, legal political channels is achieved through an exhibition of force. The union is engaged in a game of bluff by which it hopes to bring about negotiations that will allow long lasting institutionalised gains. Indeed the same could be said for all participants where- despite newspaper headlines being full of vitriol, unionists being regularly arrested for provocative actions and members occasionally being beaten up by security guards and police- in recent years, violence has been kept at relatively low levels and a display of force often been a preliminary to entering negotiations. For example an illegal wages march in October 2001 was threatened to be a prelude to a devastating general strike that would start later that month. Moreover in organising this, the leadership of LECAWU ran the risk of arrest and imprisonment. Fortunately the impasse was broken by the intervention of foreign embassies and consulates who were pressured into action by this threat. And it was this that prompted the LTEA to make its first ever acknowledgement of LECAWU by offering a wage increase. And, despite the breathless reporting of the confrontations that occurred on the march in

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<sup>15</sup> Eric Hobsbawm (1999: 299-307) discusses the problem of conceptualising political violence, noting the fetishisation of violence (both by moderates who fear it, and radicals who idealise it), by those who have not encountered significant levels physical coercion in their lives. Certainly LECAWU's "violent" and "irresponsible" politics was a pre-occupation of the US Ambassador (Loftis 2002a), an attitude that in many ways was the flip side of the views of those sympathetic to LECAWU that deplored violence against vulnerable women workers (cf. Lesotho News Online vol. 5(2); Schakowsky 2002). The crucial matter, perhaps, is understanding the social uses of violence and the means by which it is deployed. These are matters that the LECAWU leadership will be very sensitive to, having "cut their teeth" in the violent NUM politics of the 1980s (cf. Moodie 1994 for a discussion of this world) before experiencing the political turbulence within Lesotho in the 1990s.

newspapers intended for foreign audiences<sup>16</sup> the violence seen in these demonstrations was not entirely one sided nor was it used in an unrestrained manner by either side. This is seen in Shaw Lebakae's description of the day:

We organised a meeting on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2001 [that was held without a permit]... At C&Y, [strike breaking] workers snuck in at 2am. Around 7am stones were thrown onto the roofs and those women had to come out running and they had to join the procession [laugh]. In the Maseru West area we physically stop workers going in... And at 8am the police came ... and they started beating up people [they had been called in by employers because of intimidation]. So we got to the meeting place and all the workers wanted to beat the police up but we cooled them down... There were around 35,000 people... To calm down the police we addressed them as comrades and suggested they deserved rights and should even have a union too (Lebakae 2002).

Following the successfully concluded wage negotiations in 2001, in 2002 the LTEA pre-empted LECAWU action making initial offer of 13% (3% above the mandatory increase set by the Wages Advisory Board). Subsequent negotiations have been conducted within legal channels; LECAWU's wages protest being held peacefully, having received a permit, on a Sunday so as not to disrupt production. And the negotiation strategy LECAWU are pursuing seeks to gain an institutionalised leverage by which to press for claims for a living wage.

Yet this strategy should not be idealised as a stable, rule-based (albeit brutal) form of politics. It is a result of and plays upon the immense frustrations within the factories. This is seen in the low level violence that occurs fairly regularly on the factory floor that can spark into intensely violent and destructive actions for instance seen at CGM in 1998 and C&Y in 2001. And with the union wielding such coercive power, this leads to a second issue of democratic control of leadership within the union, for militant politics does press the union towards a political culture that entrenches a dominant, male leadership. In many senses the tensions of gender and generation

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<sup>16</sup> For example *Africa News* vol 5(6)



within LECAWU are very similar to the attitudes of the political elite. It is possible that these could open into fractures and lead LECAWU towards a patrimonial politics that replicates some of the worst forms of Basotho politics. Yet this is not to say that there is a two dimensional distinction between subjecthood and citizenship. From the viewpoint of the leadership, the claims of union democracy are not at odds with the historical circumstance that has given them the experience that has brought them into office through democratic elections. Therefore unionism becomes an issue of providing political goods to a membership to whom one is accountable. Whilst there are occasions when the dominance of the NUM cabal is resented and symbolically resisted, the situation seems to have largely been accepted for now. Furthermore LECAWU office bearers, to an extent, seem to have realised the potential limits and dangers of this form of organisation. Some of the donor funding is being used to pay the salary of a newly appointed education officer, who has taken on the task of securing USAID funding for a shop steward training programme. But for the foreseeable future, the leadership style of LECAWU will remain unchanged.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**LECAWU AND THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL**  
**LABOUR STANDARDS**

**Introduction**

Having considered the means by which LECAWU has established self as a force within industrial politics within Lesotho, this chapter considers LECAWU's engagement with the politics of international labour standards. In Lesotho this has been a vital political channel for LECAWU, so it is ironic that this is a subject that has tended to be treated with much suspicion. It has been suggested that labour standards clauses, at best, employ a neutered discourse of individual rights that offer little opportunity for the radical transformation necessary to bring poor countries out of poverty. At worst international labour codes are seen as a self-interested political tool. The labour codes in AGOA are viewed as a capitalist fig-leaf belying the very exploitative forms of sweat shop production. And labour groups such as UNITE's offer of internationalist trade union alliances is seen as a Trojan Horse, cloaking the protectionist interests of powerful US producer lobbies in a language of cultural imperialism (Lee 1997: 175).

Arguments, however, need to be chosen carefully. Self interested alliances and mutual misunderstanding is common in all politics. And suggestions of imperialist interests lying within the discourses of universal rights are stalemated, as the reverse to this coin is the selfish interest of local elites who appeal African to custom<sup>1</sup>. This dissertation does not study the arena of US politics so cannot assess the issues at stake there. But in studying the means by which LECAWU has sought to win gains through the channels of international politics, it is suggested that 'Africans have not had equal voice in determining what "universal" values are, but engagement and struggle have shaped what citizenship and human rights actually mean' (Cooper: 299).

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<sup>1</sup> Essentially this was the impasse that a recently edited collection of essays of rights and custom came to (Mamdani 2002: especially the introduction)

### International campaigns, cultural imperialism?

LECAWU have had close relationships with a loose network of international labour and campaign groups, including UNITE, who have pursued campaigns against retailers such as The GAP. Yet the form of some of these campaigns, undertaken by groups such as UNITE on behalf of LECAWU, force uncomfortable questions.

UNITE was formed in 1995, during a time when the North American textiles industry was beginning to face severe competition from other regions of the world. It merged the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, two of the oldest clothing workers union in the USA, to become one of the largest textiles unions in the region with approximately 250,000 members in the USA, Canada and Puerto Rico. In 1996 the union launched the original "Stop Sweatshops" campaign to link union, consumer, student, civil rights and women's groups in the fight against sweatshops at home and abroad and it has become one of the pioneers of this new form of publicity driven, labour protests (UNITE 2002). Not only is UNITE a powerful American producer lobby for whom AGOA signifies the destruction of the 400,000 jobs employed in the US textile industry, but this form of political pressure uses emotive media campaigns centred on a US public almost entirely run by UNITE<sup>2</sup>. It is very tempting to sneer at UNITE for having these tensions within the core of its operation. For example, in autumn 2002 UNITE looked to run a campaign on environmental issues essentially to use as a bargaining chip to improve the "living wage". Their continual focus on this issue is largely because, as a researcher told me, 'slowing the "race to the bottom" can only be good for workers in the USA' (log 2002)<sup>3</sup>. In this campaign, they were hoping to organise a news report, fronted by a US actor, to fly to Mexico because it was closer than Lesotho and the sight of evaporated blue, textiles effluent falling as coloured rain

<sup>2</sup> UNITE are not alone in having such a support base. Most of the other lobbying or research organisations who have helped LECAWU also received funding by groups with protectionist leanings.

<sup>3</sup> Another example of the means by which anti-sweat shop and protectionist strategies are linked can be seen on one of UNITE's web pages that allows on line purchasing of apparel claiming that 'by purchasing from these union suppliers [made in the USA], individuals and organizations can support decent jobs and help in the fight against sweatshop conditions... Union members, college students, and all kinds of folks are doing the right thing by deciding to wear clothing made under decent conditions, in union shops instead of sweatshops' (UNITE 2002).

is more telegenic than a water supply crisis in Maseru that threatens to cripple the textile industry in Lesotho if swift action is not taken (UNITE pers. comm.).

Yet limited as these political channels are- and many who are involved in this form of politics do realise its ironies and limitations- they do bring gains for LECAWU. UNITE, in particular has established great leverage over The GAP, who are very nervous of the “Kathy Lee Gifford effect”- a brand of clothing that in 1996 was bankrupted by a labour standards campaign that called attention to the use of child labour. Therefore UNITE has repeatedly managed to draw attention to moments when The GAP fails to live up to its labour code. In March 2001, for example, following the stabbing of a shop steward at C&Y factory- a subsidiary of Nien Hsing, which is a supplier to The GAP- UNITE mounted a very effective campaign against The GAP. The centre of the campaign was in USA and included a press release by UNITE affiliated US Congressmen and Congresswomen in which they revealed an open letter they were sending to the Chief Executive Officer of The GAP. UNITE also brought Daniel Maraisane, the LECAWU General Secretary, into The GAP annual shareholders meeting where, during the open session, he read a prepared statement detailing worker rights abuses in Lesotho<sup>4</sup>:

Workers in GAP factories have no right to organise, no right to demand better living conditions, fair treatment or living wages... they have no hope of climbing out of poverty. American consumers across the country want to know that the clothes they buy are not being produced in factories that engage in sweat shop practises (Schakowsky 2002)

This generated headlines in the US press and even led to the Washington Post running a half page feature on *Growing Pains in Lesotho's Textile Biz* (Wales 2002).

These scandals have worked to LECAWU's favour because they have forced a shift in the constellation in the political culture in Lesotho towards the implementation of

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<sup>4</sup> This form of action, in which a campaign organisation holds shares in the company it wishes to expose and uses meetings as a forum by which they protest their case, is known as “shareholder activism”. It attempts to pass resolutions at shareholder's meetings that press companies towards adopting more stringent labour and environmental standards.

existing legal procedures<sup>5</sup>. UNITE campaigners believe that the Chair of Nien Hsing, Ron Chen, wrote warning letters to the C&Y factory warning them to comply with the basic labour laws of Lesotho<sup>6</sup>. Also it seems The GAP Vendor Compliance Officers (VCOs) based in Durban, were sharply spurred into action following the scandal. The VCOs now visit Lesotho around once a month and LECAWU call them to report problems perhaps twice a week. Their role has, again, largely has been one of pressurising factories into complying with procedures established within Lesotho law. For instance, it was quite common for factories to attempt to postpone indefinitely the process of signing Recognition of Agreement with LECAWU, after they had achieved the legal requirement of 50% + 1 of union membership within the factory. (This document acknowledges the union's right to negotiate with management, and defend members' rights that are enshrined by law)<sup>7</sup>.

The effect of such campaigns on the Lesotho government is more problematic. Such campaigns are a calculated risk because they cause great anger to the government who believes that maintaining a good image is crucial for the country gain crucial foreign investment. Therefore there is a chance that "provocation" will draw an authoritarian

<sup>5</sup> As discussed in chapter 2 Lesotho, like all AGOA countries, has been required to ratify ILO core conventions under the terms of the trade agreement. However it is extremely difficult to force the shift in political culture necessary to bring such laws into effect. The US government's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practice* (1997-2002) particularly brings out the tension between legislating and implementing law.

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted however that it is difficult to specify the exact institutional mechanisms by which this scandal worked to LECAWU's favour because these are quite delicate issues (indeed The GAP VCO's for Southern Africa, based in Durban, refused me an interview). Therefore much of the information in these few paragraphs is based on an interview with an international researcher (log 2002) who had a number of meetings with them following the breaking of the Nien Hsing scandal. Also, there is an intriguing international dimension to these political issues that this dissertation cannot cover adequately. For example the same campaign that successfully worked against The GAP, caused the Canadian retailer, The Hudson Bay Company to withdraw all its orders from Lesotho.

<sup>7</sup> The power that VCO's have over supply factories is debatable. UNITE claims such retailers, because they place such large orders, are in a monopoly position and therefore have a significant leverage that they choose not to use (UNITE pers. comm.). The GAP, however, claim that it is impossible for them to have significant leverage over much of their suppliers behaviour (GAP Inc. n.d.). Also it must be noted that a number of the factories boasted that they paid little attention to monitoring by The GAP 'they come here irregularly, their methods [of inspection] only repeat those of the government, they are not large customers [of ours]' (log 2002). It was difficult to tell whether this was simply bluster, but other international researchers have quite low opinions of the capability of the VCOs to provide adequate inspection regimes both because they have a huge area to monitor and are 'Westville [a rich suburb of Durban] suits without a clue' (log 2002). Unfortunately I was unable to properly examine this relationship, because the VCOs refused me an interview. I would tentatively suggest international pressure works best when it forces government to legislate for improved regulation, as these matters are largely a matter of local politics thus local capacity is key. This was seen in a similar situation in Cambodia (ILO 2002), and in chapter 5 I discuss how union pressure has led to the Lesotho government, aided by the ILO, to begin a process of labour reform.

response and close off opportunities for LECAWU to gain institutionalised positions by which they can pursue negotiations with the state. Following the breaking of the C&Y story, the Minister of Trade closed negotiations with LECAWU, which were on the matter of instituting a process of government recognition of the union, and also issued a writ threatening libel. (The threat of libel is quite a common tactic to quell dissent, for example government ministers bankrupted a newspaper editor, Candi Ramainoane in 2000). But certainly, the threat of libel indicates the extent to which the campaign shook the government, and it seems that LECAWU won this round. Before the campaign took effect LECAWU were making little progress in tripartite negotiations between them, the government and the factory over the issue of compensation for the worker who was stabbed by the factory manager of C&Y. Soon after, the perpetrator was arrested and the company speedily agreed to a compensation package equivalent to 6 months of the worker's wages, an outcome that greatly satisfied LECAWU. Therefore, from LECAWU's immediate perspective, the benefits of the relationship- that a vulnerable trade union has found financial support from UNITE and has made significant campaigning gains through an appeal to universal worker rights because of the US union's campaigning networks- has considerably outweighed the latent tensions over the issue of protectionism. And this has forced a shift in Lesotho political culture towards a respect for union recognition and rights enshrined in labour laws.

Intrinsically related to this issue of "interest" within the above labour campaigns, is one of "portrayal". One could even see UNITE's sensationalising campaigns as examples of "the West" constructing a stereotype that completely misunderstands "the Other"<sup>8</sup>. Although there are examples of international campaign groups and development organisations engaging in such behaviour, I would suggest that this is not entirely the case of the relationship between LECAWU and UNITE. Firstly, it can over emphasise the asymmetry in the relationship between the partners. Certainly this was appreciated at a personal level by one of the international researchers who had made a couple of visits to LECAWU.

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<sup>8</sup> Ferguson's (1990) diatribe against the development as an anti-politics machine, recorded the politics of the construction of knowledge surrounding "development" by an earlier wave of Western interventions in Lesotho.

One thing I've learnt is that politics [in Lesotho] are Byzantine... I've seen quite a few unusual things that can never go in my reports... To be honest I don't fully know what we achieve here... [But] my attitude is: these guys [LECAWU] are smart, they're shrewd... they'll play with us because they're getting what they want from it (log 2002).

I would secondly argue, that despite there being much miscomprehension, the discourses of universal workers rights provides a language of mutual understanding for LECAWU and UNITE through which LECAWU can press its cause. This can be analysed by comparing the manner in which abusive treatment of women workers has been reported on by Basotho and international researchers. On the one hand there is a tension between "outsider" and "insider" understandings of work-related, sexual exploitation. Brindle particularly appreciated the power that images of factory workers 'forced into prostitution because they lacked a living wage', would have in the US media (Brindle 2002). This idea was, to some extent, quite rarefied in the LECAWU office. It is quite commonly accepted in Maseru that factory workers were "girls" likely to engage in multiple sexual relationships involving varying degrees of material gain and coercion. For example, one newspaper takes a prurient view towards urban women believing that:

For many young working women at the factories, taking risks has become part of their daily excitement... This goes beyond venturing into a pub full of men... Mary is one of those girls who falls victim to men driving nice cars and picking women up from factories. Her contention is that men love them and raise their status (Mopheme 19<sup>th</sup> September 2000).

These attitudes grow out of cultural understandings of relationships that are quite specific to Basothan trajectories of social formation. Coplan notes the women who crowd to border towns, in some quarters outnumbering men by 4:1, arrive because a distorted social system no longer provided social security in return for continuing social subordination [to one's husband or father] made migration... an attractive and sometimes necessary alternative. Such women become known as "matekatse" (prostitutes), a word derived from "ho teka" (to roam about) and "ho tekatse" (to abandon one's husband). These women themselves protest they go to "phelise bana

baka” (to support my children) (Coplan 1994: 170). It has been this quite conservative discourse about women’s respectability and responsibilities, which is closed off to outsiders, that has informed much of debate in Lesotho around abuse of women workers. In an interview Billy complained:

Even in government office they are not ashamed to call them [the female workers], girls and ladies without nice titles... In this situation it is difficult [for the government] to respect them because... [the government] believe they are young, they don’t have husbands, they don’t have families. Well we do have such young [workers] as a majority [of LECAWU’s membership] but they do have husbands, they have kids, young as they are... They [the government] say... “we helped the workers, just as a favour...”. Not because we [workers] have rights (Billy 2002).

Likewise an editorial in the *Southern Star* noted which was part of a campaign that successfully lowered taxi fares argued:

Basotho women are the backbone of the family, the household and industry... their responsibility is often life threatening but they accept it with dignity... Who cares about how they get home, nobody! In winter they become prey for unproductive men lurking to pounce on them (25<sup>th</sup> May 2001: 4).

Therefore, at times, UNITE and LECAWU’s discussions about “sexual exploitation” appear to be a dialogue of the deaf. Yet this is not to say that there is, per se, a fundamental disjuncture between Western discourses of rights and Basotho customary understandings of a women’s subjection. As discussed in the previous chapter, there can be co-existence between community and citizenship orientated understandings of rights and responsibilities within a political community. One can see these various understandings of women’s exploitation co-existing within a LECAWU song that was popular during my period of research at the time of the 2002 wage negotiations.

The labour minister is full of surprises  
 And surprises us very much  
 Why doesn’t he do his job [as a circumcised man]



And come between us and the Chinese [a phrase that connotes preventing rape]

This song reveals perhaps three interwoven political discourses that LECAWU was using in their attempt to gain moral leverage over the minister as part of the 2001 campaign to raise wages. On the one hand this song originated within a classic situation of worker militancy in October 2001 when the Labour Minister was refusing to raise salaries at the WAB. LECAWU supports women workers within the universal language of worker rights and union recognition. Sexual exploitation is viewed as being caused by exploitative relationships that, to a large extent, derive from women's positions as marginalized workers. UNITE therefore filmed the song being sung in a demonstration and used it to portray the common themes of workers struggle when broadcasting the song in a video as part of their international "living wages" campaign (UNITE pers. comm.). Secondly, ideas of workers rights were also articulated within Sesotho concepts specific to the women's situation. At a time when marginalized female workers are called "myakatse", the song asserted their strength by subverting gender roles, for it was a satirisation of a men's song that is used at circumcision schools. But thirdly, within the Sesotho discourse, there was an ambiguous relationship between these themes of worker self-assertion, and a more conservative mocking of the minister, which called on him, as a man, to prevent the exploitation of his female kin. In this situation one sees the complex means by which the discourses of workers rights can be infused with ideas that are specific to a locale, whilst maintaining their universal relevance.

### **Liberal capitalism and left wing militancy**

Another political channel through which the union movements have sought to improve labour standards, is through worker rights mechanisms within US bilateral treaties. Section 104 of AGOA states:

The president is authorised to designate a sub-Saharan African country as eligible... *if* [my italics] the President determines that the country... [has the] protection of internationally recognised worker rights, including the right of association, the right to organise and bargain collectively, a prohibition on the

use of any form of forced or compulsory labour, a minimum age for the employment of children, and acceptable conditions of work with respect to minimum wages, hours of work and occupational safety and health (Trade and Development Act 2000: 4)<sup>9</sup>.

Typically there are a couple of stages of enforcing these regulations. Firstly, in the process leading towards the granting of a bilateral treaty, the USA looks for the recipient to legislate laws that cover these core labour standards. Therefore, in 2000 there was a stand off over Swaziland's granting of AGOA status because of the Swazi government's initial refusal to reform its law accordingly. Second, under the AGOA agreement, every year the president submits a report to Congress on AGOA including a section that details, country-by-country, compliance with 'labour/child labour/human rights' (for example, US Dept of Trade 2002: 71). The Ambassador of the AGOA receiving country has the largest input in compiling this report, though 'it is reviewed by the Department of Labour, the Department of Commerce, and the Trade Representative's office, including the State Department and the watchdogs within our bureau of human rights, democracy and labour' (Lofis 2002a)<sup>10</sup>. And there is a precedent of intervention set by the Clinton Administration<sup>11</sup>. In 2000, an international labour standards scandal at Chentex, another Nien Hsing factory in Nicaragua, 64 US Congressmen wrote a letter to Bill Clinton. This pressed the US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky towards writing a letter to the Nicaraguan government demanding that conditions be improved in the factory and setting a deadline demanding a successful conclusion to a US-Nicaraguan discussions on worker rights. Therefore severe tension in Swaziland surrounding a range of labour and rights issues has recently led the US Ambassador to threaten the government to, in the words of the headline in *The Weekend Observer*, *Swaziland to Conform to AGOA or lose its benefits* (Dlamini 2002).

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<sup>9</sup> Similar regulations have been made in other US trade agreements.

<sup>10</sup> This report appears to be a summarisation of the country reports compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (cf. 2001).

<sup>11</sup> A pertinent question therefore being the extent to which the contours of US politics has changed under the Bush administration. For instance 68 Democrats signed a letter regarding labour standards in Nicaragua in 2000, but only 6 signed a similar letter in 2002, which included complaints about Nien Hsing in Lesotho.

However, engaging with these mechanisms has been a much more fraught issue in Lesotho and these political channels have barely been used. The issue has been less loaded for the unions. On the one hand there is great suspicion of capitalist investment and therefore there are dim, abstract concerns that attempting to make gains using AGOA (and The GAP) labour codes is an accommodation to the forces of capitalism (Brindle 2002a; Lebakae 2002). However force of circumstance leads campaigning to centre on attempts to reduce the exploitative aspects of foreign investment. 'I am not an unpatriotic Basotho. We need foreign investment to avoid a national crisis. LECAWU asks for decent work and living wages' (Mopheme 14<sup>th</sup> March 1999: 3) commented Billy, when he was the General Secretary of LECAWU.

Rather it has been the US Embassy in Lesotho that has largely blocked this channel. Interestingly, the position of the ambassador is not immutable. Despite LECAWU and UNITE's mistrust of him, he does indicate a fair degree of sympathy for their position. In interview, he alluded to his recognition of some of the labour standards problems that are fully detailed in the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour reports on Lesotho, which he has a degree of oversight over. These reports provide a fairly comprehensive description of the major difficulties that unions face in Lesotho. And he saw some the political hopes of LECAWU falling within the emancipatory possibilities offered by AGOA.

Though not officially affiliated to LECAWU, the Lesotho Workers Party (LWP) owes virtually all its support to that union. This is an interesting phenomenon in that LECAWU has grown because of AGOA and the LWP exists because of LECAWU... [So] politics has changed in a number of ways in that most of the people who vote for the LWP are women. And if they had stayed at home, under the influence of fathers and husbands they would not have voted for the LWP. And so, in a sense, you're seeing a greater independence- of particularly young women- that wasn't there before in a society where women do not have full equal rights with men (Loftis 2002a).

Despite these sympathies, the US Embassy in Lesotho has chosen to define its Section 104 responsibilities in a narrow manner. Firstly enforcing labour standards is argued to be a matter being largely outside the Embassy's jurisdiction. As Lesotho has

legally instituted the basic ILO labour codes required by AGOA, the issue is therefore one of implementation. And the US Embassy has seen need to de-emphasise its influence in Lesotho that it has gained by AGOA. *US does not dictate Lesotho labour policies* was a headline that appeared in *Mopheme* (21<sup>st</sup> March 2001: 1) in the first year of the AGOA agreement, reacting to possible claims of imperialism. It was also seen to be an issue of capacity and role: ‘we are not the Department of Labour here, we are not labour arbiters... There are only 5 US staff here. Our role here is to provide advice to all sides, the ways by which they may bargain together and the consequences if they do not abide by the terms of AGOA’ (Loftis 2002a). Yet the Embassy has not been shy of using its considerable influence at times.

[Unlike the 1998 elections] this time [in 2001] they [the losing parties] kept their protest within legal channels. [At least in part, this was because] I told everyone that if there was an unconstitutional change or retention of government that they would lose their AGOA eligibility so fast that their heads would spin as 40,000 people would be out of a job (Loftis 2002a).

Therefore, one would believe that, although the Ambassador must play a fairly even handed role and Section 104 is a fairly clumsy mechanism for improving labour standards because the threat of revoking AGOA cannot be used lightly<sup>12</sup>, there still is a great deal of opportunity for the US embassy to exert its leverage over labour disputes. Furthermore, there are opportunities to use their influence in a more subtle manner. There are labour standards capacity building clauses within AGOA that have, so far, only been sporadically used (US Dept of Trade 2002: 6-7). For example, as part of the preparation for AGOA, the former US Ambassador sent employer and union representatives on labour courses in the USA. Such opportunities would provide valuable organisational building for LECAWU that is desperately short of this capacity.

Secondly, a view of labour relations is taken that stymies opportunity for the unions to positively engage with the Embassy. Acknowledgement is made of difficult situation

<sup>12</sup> The wittiest description of this clause referred to Section 104 as a nuclear deterrent: ‘“pressing the button” leads to Mutually Assured Destruction of Lesotho and the Ambassador’s career’ (Phillips 2002)

LECAWU faces, but these concerns are placed within a particular type of liberal discourse that serves to neuter the debate. A common argument is that labour disputes can readily be resolved by the rule of law:

The union says these things [i.e. makes complaints of labour rights infringements] and in certain cases I'm sure they are true. But the distinction has to be is that [these factories] are not sweat shops... I take these [complaints] as part of normal union-employer discussions. I don't take this as evidence that all companies are being abusive' (Daniel Bellegarde, Deputy Chief of Mission in the US Embassy in UN 2002)<sup>13</sup>.

Partly these comments are made because of the dictates of *realpolitik*: an admission to "sweat shop labour" would immediately be seized upon by campaign groups such as UNITE, whom the US embassy is incredibly suspicious of. However, behind such comments is the suggestion that such troubles are the inevitable growing pains of a nascent textiles industry. Certainly LECAWU have made gains in the emerging industry in the past couple of years. But such comments verge towards a view that sees Lesotho pained by the birth pangs of the modernity offered by the enlightened, liberal capitalism that AGOA brings. Sometimes this is styled as being a cultural clash of the type that occurs when inscribing industrial working relations onto a first generation of workers. In response to the LECAWU allegations 'that our culture is not respected', a UN report sympathetically juxtaposed the reply Deputy Chief of the Mission to Lesotho: "People here don't like working weekends. They say that Saturday is for burying relatives and Sunday is for church" said Bellgarde, who at one stage in his career worked in a textile factory in the United States. "These... are the basis for on-going discussions.' (UN 2002).

[Yet] generally things are moving in the right direction when it comes to labour relations and labour standards in this country. There are labour negotiations for the next round of wage talks and *one of the things we have been very encouraged about is the somewhat growing sophistication of*

<sup>13</sup> Similarly in interview the US Ambassador stressed 'Please don't misinterpret me and say that this [the issue of labour standards] is all sunlight. It is not. There will always be tension between the union

*LECAWU* [my italics]. One of the demands they have put forward is that they would like to see the books and to see if the employers' claims that what the employers are offering is what they can actually afford (Loftis2002a)

This severely constrains *LECAWU*'s political opportunities to use AGOA to lever better working conditions. For they are arraigned for their unsophisticated, militancy that plays into the hands of lobbying groups, whose protectionist interests oppose both *LECAWU* and the US government.

They [*LECAWU*] also need to understand that in today's environment, you have to be careful about the things you say about the opposition. For example there is slave labour, the Minister of Trade is a secret stockholder and therefore sides with the employers [a reference to the claims that came out of the SOMO research]. This may be fine, just within the context of Lesotho, but in today's age these statements get picked up and there are any number of groups outside Lesotho who are more than happy to organise boycotts against Lesotho and destroy the industry and destroy the union in the process. [A jibe at UNITE] (Loftis 2002a)<sup>14</sup>.

And there have been occasions when the US embassy has stymied the channels of international campaigns, for example refusing the worker who was stabbed at the C&Y factory a last minute temporary visa so that she could take part in a UNITE campaign in New York. However, in a situation where *LECAWU* is regularly denied union recognition and worker rights, it is precisely such uncertain allies and militant tactics that allow *LECAWU* a seat at the bargaining table. Furthermore (as will be discussed in the next chapter) there are some overlaps between the US Embassy's view of *LECAWU*'s "irresponsible politics" the quite repressive opinions of the Lesotho government. Therefore it has taken bursts of extreme union pressure to force the US Embassy into acting upon Section 104 requirements. It needed violent wage protests in November 2001, following deadlock in negotiations for them to intervene. 'We said please sit down and work things out. Because if you don't there's going to

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and management. That is part of what happens in industrial relations... Are wages low? Yes. Would I want to work as a machinist? No. But it is not oppressive' (Loftis 2002a)

be a lot of damage to everyone's interests', - including the US Embassy's reputation (Loftis 2002a).

This is not to say that this situation is irreversible for politics is an arena of unlikely allies and US government officials have built a politics of labour reform in other countries with the support of unions- albeit under a different set of circumstances (ILO 2002; Dlamini 2002). Likewise, despite tensions inherent in the relationship between LECAWU and UNITE, both unions have been able to find a platform of common interest and understandings. Similarly the campaigns against The GAP have managed to provoke a positive response from the VCOs for Southern Africa<sup>15</sup>. One would presume that similar accommodation could be found between the embassy and the unions, and there are moves within UNITE to create a programme that will regularly catalogue Section 104 violations and lobby the relevant members of the US government to enforce the Act more stringently. However, it remains to be seen how this stifling pattern of politics will be reversed whilst UNITE and the US embassy in Lesotho maintain such a poor relationship<sup>16</sup>.

### Conclusion

Chapters 3 and 4 have touched upon various aspects of the processes of building a union movement and the means by which LECAWU has pressed for improvements within the limited spaces that have been available. The former chapter, rather than distinguishing between community-based and citizenship-orientated conceptions of politics based upon coherent patterns of sociological change, tried to show the interweaving of various social and political identities when building LECAWU and some of the tensions engendered by this process. The latter considered the murky politics of international labour rights and suggested that the politics of labour rights is not a neutral site of rational, pluralist political exchange, but that these struggles

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<sup>14</sup> SOMO is a Dutch based international campaigning group on labour that conducts research, similar to UNITE, in Lesotho.

<sup>15</sup> The irony being that whilst (or perhaps because) UNITE conducts a bruising campaign against The GAP in the USA that draws an equally robust defence, LECAWU have a good working relationship with the Southern Africa VCOs.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed a meeting between representatives from UNITE and the embassy during my period of research were incredibly frosty. UNITE appear to be seeking to build a relationship with the US Labour Attache to Southern Africa, though quite how this might improve US government-union relationships in Lesotho remains to be seen.

reveal an area of contested interest where various groups compete to define the nature of citizenship. By treating LECAWU's politics based on an internationalist vision of trade unionism problematically as well as affirmatively, I have attempted to move away from:

an extremely idealised abstraction from the political culture that actually takes shape... [that] ignores alternative sources of an emancipatory impulse in popular radical traditions... [and can] neglect the ways in which elitism blocked and consciously repressed possibilities of a broader emancipation and participation (Eley 1996: 70).



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **REFORM IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR**

#### **Introduction**

The unrest that the union movement has created within the industry has thrown into sharp relief some of the severe social, economic and political tensions within Lesotho, and the first section discusses the problems LECAWU has posed to the brittle and authoritarian political culture that surrounds the industry. The remainder of the chapter goes on to examine the nature and scope of the labour reforms that the Taiwanese employers and Lesotho government are tentatively moving towards in an attempt to quell the unrest. Mirroring trends in the wider political arena, the turbulent events of 1998 in the industry has moved some parts of the government towards a realisation of sorts that genuine reform is necessary. However the intent of both government and industry is questionable. It is suggested below that, despite the government revealing a degree of malleability, they have tended to try use “reform” to sue for industrial peace without granting LECAWU meaningful recognition by which it can strive for worker rights. Therefore labour conditions remain difficult even in textiles factories where manufacturers have instituted a degree of reform to labour relations. In this sense Mamdani’s discussion of the politics of subjecthood is questioned because the state, though undoubtedly patrimonial, does not appear as a rural-centred, anachronistic foil to LECAWU’s politics of urban citizenship. It may well be able to seize ILO technical assistance to remake its hegemony in the industrial sector.

#### **Industrial unrest and crisis**

Labour unrest has forced change by exposing the fragility of the authoritarian political culture in labour politics. LECAWU has a significant force in Lesotho politics as it has a large, militant membership that is situated in the strategic sector of the economy. And this has created a volatile, militant politics in the industrial sector that has pushed the government towards reform. The past couple of chapters discussed the politics

that LECAWU has built in some detail. From the viewpoint of government and employers, they have created a persistent level of unrest within the industrial sector that has forced great discomfort. The continuous round of informal, low level disputes and wildcat strikes on factory lines was described by an international researcher as, 'like dousing a never ending round of fires, because management are always throwing the matches into the tinder' (Brindle 2002). This is seen, for example, in a labour dispute, typical of many within the sector at Likum Fabrics, a factory owned by CGM, that occurred in October 2002. Management, needing to move a large order quickly through the dispatch section, decided to withhold the workers monthly wage until they had completed the order. In protest, most of the workers in this section went on a wildcat strike without even consulting their shop stewards. The management issued an ultimatum that strikers had to sign a final warning to avoid dismissal. (Some of the more progressive factories have a developed a personnel policy that issues a limited number of official warnings before dismissing a worker.) Those that refused this were locked out for half a day but eventually, with union pressure, allowed to restart work without signing that document. So the section started work again, with the shipment delayed by two days' stoppage (CGM 2002). Similarly the government's system of dealing with disputes was also grinding to a halt because labour law was unable to arbitrate this welter of disputes:

Before the DDPR was established the labour department was handling disputes in the form of mediation and conciliation, there was no arbitration and we were inundated with a lot of disputes... [Also] the labour offices did not have powers [of adjudication]... [so] decisions were not binding. So even if labour officers intervened in disputes, the employers had a right not to heed their advice and the cases would still be referred to [the labour] court as a result of which the labour court was also inundated with a lot of disputes that the labour department could not resolve. And so there was a backlog of cases that were not resolved (Labour Commissioner, Mamohale Matsoso 2002).

LECAWU's militancy has also found resonance in wider discontents at the nature of politics in Lesotho. In the strong political currents that flow around urban areas this can cause great discomfort to the incumbent elite. Most noticeable, in their

demonstrations against textile factories, predominantly owned by Taiwanese owners, LECAWU has struck a popular, almost xenophobic feeling<sup>1</sup>. UNITE-LECAWU campaigns have also managed to provide persistent international embarrassment for the government. The deposition for libel made against LECAWU this year thus stated:

The Minister of Trade & Industry Mr Mpho Malie has filed a Law-suit of Half a Million Maloti (M500,000) [\$58,700] against The General Secretary of LECAWU Daniel Maraisane and LECAWU for “defamation” in the article styled “*Growing Pains in Lesotho’s Textile biz...*,” The aftersaid [sic] article was published in several newspapers in the United States of America and on internet. It was read by thousands of people including investors in Africa, Asia, Europe (Malie 2002).

Furthermore, the suppression of LECAWU militancy has raised latent concerns within the wider body politics about the authoritarian nature of government rule. Following the shootings at the CGM strike the editorial of the relatively conservative *The Southern Star* noted ‘The Basotho nation was reminded of the true nature of politicised industrial relations’ noting that the government’s action was reminiscent of colonial brutality. In the same edition, a reader’s letter complained:

This incident at Thetsane [industrial estate] has been going on for many years now... I wonder why the Lesotho government hasn’t formulated a better plan to deal with it,... this ignorance and corruption in different [government] departments as well as the unnecessary and offending incidents [of state brutality] in the country... It is a well known fact that Basotho people never organise demonstrations as they’ll simply get hurt... When they finally do...

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<sup>1</sup> Only LECAWU can climb Thaba Bosiu [a mountain in Lesotho of immense importance as a national symbol]/ The Chinese cannot climb the mountain because they are not of LECAWU... run the opening lines of a LECAWU song that plays upon xenophobic feeling and also answers government charges of irresponsibility by implying that LECAWU are patriotic defenders of the national interest (log 2002). Indeed the “Chinese problem” has become a fixed term of debate, even being used by reformers who argue that labour unrest is largely caused by cultural misunderstandings (DFID 2002: 43; Ntlhabo 2002).

these things [referring to the riots that followed the shootings] are done out of anger and desperation (The Southern Star 15<sup>th</sup> February 1998: 4)<sup>2</sup>.

This has produced a situation of stalemate that has exposed the brittle authoritarianism of the government. On the one hand unsuccessful attempts to harass LECAWU- arrests for marches that have gone ahead without a permit, trespass on factory property, threats of libel and so forth- have so far rather encouraged the boldness of the officials. However an attempt of the previous Labour Commissioner in 2001 to position his office as a strong paternalistic guardian of the workers also failed disastrously. Following a report, published by the international campaign group SOMO that appeared to draw the conclusion that ‘slavery, abolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the rest of the world is alive and kicking in the Lesotho textile industry’<sup>3</sup>, the LNDC undertook an inspection and report of the factories under Labour Code Order No. 24 of 1992 (Labour Commission 2001: 2-3). However the report’s authors had no power to enforce its recommendations on the employers who were deeply unhappy with the inspection. The report’s recommendations veered between a threat of firm action that it would be unable to carry out and a tone of conciliation. On the one hand:

[It was] requested that the Labour commissioner should instruct companies failing to comply with provision of the Labour Code to do so by the end of the month... If they refuse they should be called for conciliation and finally Arbitration or Labour Court on an urgent basis to make a final and binding decision (Labour Commission 2001: 73)

These are the very same labour courts that, at this time, had a backlog of cases of sometimes over a year. Therefore most of the conclusions attempted to place the Labour Commission in the role of a paternalistic reconciler, a function that is

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<sup>2</sup> Although this scandal occurred during the turmoil of political events 1998, even in more recent years the issue of repression has found wider resonance. For example the 2001 wages march was swelled by a large body of informal sector workers who complained about police harassment (Lebakae 2002). One however should note the caveat that the police have undergone a process of reform and are considered by researchers to be much less brutal and politicised than they were in 1998 and compare favourably with other police forces in the region (Phillips 2002).

<sup>3</sup> In actual fact, although the SOMO report had detailed widespread abuse of workers, the inflammatory claim of “slavery” was made by the former General Secretary of LECAWU, who has a fine eye for media moments (Phillips 2002).

impossible to play in the deeply antagonistic culture of labour relations<sup>4</sup>. Not surprisingly the report backfired explosively and the Labour Commissioner was quickly transferred and the report hushed up. The new incumbent of the post telling me:

It [the report] was not to be seen by anybody other than the Labour Commissioner and it nearly brought us into trouble... I objected in the manner in which the inspection was carried out- I was Deputy Labour Commissioner at the time. The union decided to publish it in the newspapers and according to our legislation, whatever is discovered in the inspection is confidential and can only be reported to the Labour Commissioner. And most of the things reported in the newspaper were pure exaggerations, so the employers were threatening to sue us (Matsoso 2002).

### **Limits to reform within the factories**

Because of such intractable disputes, the government has therefore sought to break this stalemate and calm industrial unrest by implementing the provisions of the 1998 Labour Relations Amendment Act. Certainly the significance of these reforms should not be underplayed. They lie within the greater shift in political culture in Lesotho, where there seems to have been a collective realisation of the severity of the political crisis of 1998, and a need to quell future unrest through reform<sup>5</sup>. This act had been drafted by a tripartite commission in the period leading up to 1998, was passed by the parliament in May 2000 and aspects of its provision have been implemented since 2001. Centrepiece of the Act has been the establishment of the DDPR and Labour

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<sup>4</sup> One of the more simpering passages recommended 'the Labour Commissioner should again remind all companies that... employees should be free to form or join trade unions. These rights must be known to all the employees... and documents [to this effect] placed on the walls of companies and translated in Sesotho for every employee to read and know. It is further worth remembering that some of the requirements for implementation of AGOA include respect for human rights... Trade unions in particular LECAWU should also promote harmonious relationships between employees and managers... Some of the employers have confirmed that they are reluctant to recognise it [LECAWU] because of its antagonistic approach... Thus it should also reconsider its approach in handling the matter of workers grievances (Labour Commission 2001: 58-9)

<sup>5</sup> Indeed much of the debate within the Maseru newspapers turns upon quelling the crisis of 1998. See especially the New Year speeches and editorials printed in *The Southern Star* (7<sup>th</sup> January 2000) and the edition that followed the peaceful election of 2002 (31<sup>st</sup> May 2002). Likewise the Lesotho government website is anxious to show the active role it is playing in seeking peace through seminars, reports and inquests (cf. Ministry of Planning 2002; Tsekoa 1999).

Appeal Court, which was been gazetted in April 2001 as an independent, tripartite organisation. Although handling a high volume of cases having inherited 200 cases from the Department of Labour, and a having received a further 550 disputes, 'progress has been made in clearing the backlog [of cases]... [It] is staffed adequately and handled most complaints within the one month period' provided by law' (US Bureau of Democracy 2002). Furthermore it provides training and induction for all stakeholders, especially targeting factory management. From 2003, the Labour Commission also intends to undertake a factory inspections project with the assistance of the ILO, which intends to conduct unannounced inspections in factories four times a year (DFID 2002: 55). Even those within the labour movement temper their criticisms of industrial politics within Lesotho with a realisation that this round of reforms compares favourably with events in other countries in the region and is a sign that further change is possible<sup>6</sup>.

The crux of the reforms lies in changing working conditions within factories and here, within a number of factories, there has been a modicum of improvement in industrial relations. CGM and Nien Hsing, are among the foremost of the companies in Lesotho to reform their management of labour relations. Both have signed a Recognition Agreement with LECAWU that, following the unionisation of over 50% of their workforces, accepts LECAWU's right to represent the interests of unionised members. They have also upgraded their personnel departments. For example CGM has a Personnel Manager for each of its factories who are placed under a Deputy and Senior Personnel Manager of the Company. Both companies have also devised a three-stage system to deal with labour disputes within the factory. And there have been workshops for management and supervisors on personnel relations held in consultation with LNDC and The GAP labour compliance officers. In interviews conducted with Personnel Managers, I was assured that the system was not just a tool of management discipline against workers. The Company Personnel Manager at C&Y said he had issued approximately 4 written warnings to supervisors in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2002 and had dismissed 1 supervisor for misbehaviour in the past year

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<sup>6</sup> Even LECAWU speak well of the present Labour Commissioner, when compared to previous incumbents, and see these changes as a 'step in the right direction' (Billy 2002). Gary Phillips, who researched the textiles industry in Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho, also pointed me towards research in Lesotho because in other countries 'you will as like get arrested as get an interview' - a joking hyperbole, but a serious comment nonetheless (Phillips 2002).

(Ntlhabo 2002). ‘Shop stewards were seen as a threat, they now need to be seen as a social partner because labour laws are adequate, but implementation is crucial. Our law is [now] strong enough to support any employer that seeks to harmonise labour relations’ was the comment of another Personnel Manager (Makhasane 2002).

But beneath this rhetoric lay more than a suspicion that many of the worst management practises continue as, despite recent labour legislation, companies continue to act with a great degree of impunity and there are few signs of change within management culture. The institution of personnel departments often appears to be largely a public relations exercise. It seems that these departments have little influence on the management of the factory. LECAWU claimed ‘[Most Basotho Personnel] Managers... [left school] having only [completed] standard 7. They can’t do anything... [and] are just messengers. They are just there for securing their salaries. We don’t see sound personnel departments in our industry’ (Billy 2002). Though unable to verify these claims, I had one very surprising interview in which I spoke to the Taiwanese Assistant Manager who turned out to know almost nothing about personnel issues in spite of regularly sitting on the management panel that arbitrated labour disputes and presumably having received personnel training<sup>7</sup>. Therefore the conversation was conducted largely with the Mosotho Company Personnel Manager who had accompanied him to the meeting. At the end of the interview the Personnel Manager seized an opportunity to almost make an appeal to his superior to take a firmer stand on personnel issues: ‘We are [i.e. the pace of reform is] crawling. I would like to see us walk, but if we jumped we would break our ankles. If the management start to learn we can change things. If me and you [indicating to the Assistant manager] push too hard, they will get rid of us’ (Ntlhabo 2002).

Secondly, the Basotho personnel department managers are often reputed to be very unsympathetic to LECAWU demands. Even the motives of the Personnel Managers more conducive to LECAWU, were viewed with suspicion by office bearers.

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed shop stewards made many allegations that the due process required by company personnel policy and Lesotho law was rarely followed in practise. Therefore bad labour practise continued to be largely unchecked (CGM 2002; Nien Hsing 2002)

That [Personnel Manager] was a politician, he was in the Interim Political Authority (IPA) and he hadn't been to the factory that much... He used to say: "people may have been dismissed at C&Y, unfortunately the Personnel Manager has to attend IPA every day". So in the morning he would sign the dismissal letters and when we want to meet him, he was nowhere to be found. He once went to the radio and he explained himself and he said "look I haven't that time right now". [However] he lost his seat in 2001... Politically he feels the pressure from the union right now and he finds himself squeezed... I feel... he is OK right now... but he may just be waiting his time (Billy 2002).

Interviews with shop stewards in both these factories therefore produced quite a sobering picture of labour relations even within these "reformed" factories. Although agreeing that there had been some positive changes they detailed examples of personnel procedures routinely being flouted. One of the most memorable anecdotes that reveals the chaotic, brutal nature of shop floor relations that still continues concerned a worker at one of the CGM factories who was in detailed by a supervisor to leave her post and help another lady who was delaying the entire production line through her slow work because she was feeling ill. Near the end of the shift, the Filipino Line Manager who had not been informed of the problem told this worker to return to her post. There was mutual misunderstanding and in a heated exchange that followed, he kicked and punched her resulting in the dislocation of her shoulder. A delegation of shop stewards asked the Personnel Manager to give her money so that she could see the doctor and mend her clothes. But this was refused and she continued working with an injured shoulder (CGM 2002).

### **Limits to reform within the government**

Factories are able to continue with such practises in part because the government has thwarted its own reforming efforts by remaining largely hostile to LECAWU. Although some departments of the government are seeking industrial peace, there is a sense in which industrial reforms are seen as being a technocratic modernisation that can quell unrest in the textiles industry whilst closing off LECAWU's claims to represent the rights of workers. Even government officials whom LECAWU officials



describe as relatively sympathetic towards them have quite a technocratic, authoritarian slant to their reforms, which ironically coalesces with some of the US government's more disparaging discourses concerning LECAWU. It is emphasised that, although there are problems in the textile sector, the labour regime within factories is not oppressive. 'I never hesitate to mention that other independent researchers have looked at the textile sector. Most of the things that have been said are exaggerations' (Matsoso 2002). The law is believed to be sufficient to allow the labour relations to take place on an even playing field.

On the contrary [to a suggestion made by the interviewer that it might be necessary to revise the legal code further] we are usually accused of having a law that is more favourable towards workers than employers. The employer has economic power over the worker so the law tends to protect the labourer more... The only time you get into trouble with the police is if you are unruly or the march is not permitted, or when some workers do not want to participate have been forced into the march [a reference to the October 2001 wages march]... If you behave then they have no reason to cause you problems (Matsoso 2002).

Labour conflicts are therefore the result of cultural backwardness (that modernising technocrats presumably have). 'Our people's sense of productivity is underdeveloped. It will take some time for this aspect of our culture to mature' (Labour Commissioner quoted by Wales 2002). And in this LECAWU play an inflammatory role:

[Mrs] Matsoso believes that LECAWU's negotiating tactics are "too arrogant" to achieve a positive solution. And Cee Bee's [factory manager Mrs] Boch seems to agree. "The people at LECAWU have no sense of how business is to be done. They're completely ignorant when it comes to these matters" (Wales 2002).

Problems are therefore styled as turning on a technocratic improvement of procedures. LECAWU are 'social partners' who only need 'consultation'. Outside pressure was not conceded to have had any influence in determining change. 'They [LECAWU]

are important in the sense that... whatever ever policy that government comes up with must be “owned” by the people who use it’ (Matsoso 2002).

This is not to say that in some over-determined Marxian manner, the political elite act as a comprador bourgeoisie. There is genuine frustration within government departments at the poor labour conditions within factories and their inability to force the recalcitrant Taiwanese textile managers to heed labour laws. The DDPR devoted two issues of its Information Bulletin (March and May 2002) to detailing awards issued against companies that had flouted their procedures, concluding ‘An award issued by the [DDPR] arbitrator is final and binding and enforceable as if it is an order of the Labour Court’. This hint, among others, was not taken and in late June 2002 a show of force was made. 24 “Chinese” businessmen were arrested and one briefly imprisoned for non-compliance with the DDPR arbitration decisions (Mopheme 30/7/2002: 3). But five months later during the course of my fieldwork LECAWU’s use of DDPR arbitration and the Labour Court remained obstructed by the impunity of many Taiwanese investors who refused to comply with these procedures. This situation is unlikely to change whilst the Lesotho government remains largely opposed to LECAWU’s attempts to act as the representative of workers’ rights, thus hindering efforts to reform the quite repressive political culture within the industry.

### Conclusion

Although LECAWU has exposed the fragility of the authoritarian political culture within the textiles industry, the recalcitrance of both industrial and government reformers suggests it is unlikely that LECAWU will make a strong an indentation on the politics of the belly<sup>8</sup>. Though the urban press routinely criticises the government in sharp terms and decries the state of Lesotho, their demands barely resemble LECAWU’s advocacy of a politics of citizenship. Even D. R. Phororo, one of the more noteworthy columnists in *Mopheme*, a paper generally sympathetic to LECAWU, has a somewhat interesting version of African democracy. Writing on the textiles industry he claims:

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<sup>8</sup> The LWP, the political offshoot of LECAWU did not win any of the 3 constituencies that it contested in the 2002 election, winning anywhere between 4-11% of the vote in each region. It thus gained a

The products that find their way to Thetsane hell-pit are disposables mainly coming from the homes of the rich and wastes from commercial and industrial enterprises... These inequalities, reflected in income inequalities, will ever blur any Vision... The rich as certain as death will always be reluctant to meaningfully redistribute to the majority poor their... unjustly acquired wealth... These rich will never be the key architects of Vision 2020 (The Southern Star 16<sup>th</sup> January 2001: 4)<sup>9</sup>.

In spite of this “class” invective, elsewhere he advocates a distinctly Basothan solution. ‘Our problem in developing countries derives from our belief in applying complex borrowed solutions... advised decision making at every level of politics and governance are fundamental to control, security and progress.’ He further goes on to compare the various leaders of Lesotho claiming ‘as a scholar he [Mosisili, the prime minister since 1998.] attempted to rule the party and country scientifically, but the modules foundered... he appears to need a strong panel of advisors.’ On the other hand Major General Ramaema who, as the second leader during the time of military rule from 1986-93, was ‘...the most well advised of all... A modern soldier with ears to listen and eyes to see, but above all with an absolute mind to perceive... An unrepentant decision maker who employed capable advisors’ (The Southern Star 14<sup>th</sup> January 2000: 5)<sup>10</sup>.

One can speculate that the frequent appeals in both media and government to renew ‘a Basothan democracy of transparency and consensus’ (Southern Star 27<sup>th</sup> October 1997: 3) and appeals to ‘the oneness given to us since Moshoeshoe the Great gathered us together as a nation’ (Mopheme 29<sup>th</sup> August 2000: 3)- this variation of a vision of an African consensual democracy in which wise old men talk under the baobab tree

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solitary seat in parliament from a tranche of so-called “compensatory seats” that were contested through a system of proportional voting system (The Southern Star 16<sup>th</sup> May 2002: 4-5).

<sup>9</sup> Vision 2020 is a national development strategy, essentially a World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Planning exercise, taken after a series of National Dialogues.

<sup>10</sup> D.R. Phororo is quite an interesting character. Agriculture minister under Major General Ramasane (hence his strong defence of this controversial regime), he now has taken the role of sage and commentator in Lesotho politics. He is incredibly well connected, runs a successful political/economic consultancy, publishes the journal, *The Lesotho Monitor* and is well known in media circles. His patrician style and beliefs make him a favourite target for radicals, however his views certainly seem to be well respected within Maseru politics and rival Maseru newspapers often republish his articles.

until they agree- masks a political culture within Lesotho that is ‘characterised by the poverty of its material resource base and by the need of those who have political power to gain control over economic resources’ (Clapham: 435). Thus the repeated calls for ‘transparency’ and ‘consensus’ emanating from government with regard to the textile industry is part of a process that Bayart terms “the reciprocal assimilation of elites”.

By this [is meant] the fusion of potentially competitive elite social groups [whose squabbles have played out dramatically in Maseru’s political crises on the 1990s] to form a single dominant national class, centred on the control of the state that is internally factionalised, but which do not divide into distinguishable social groupings. Any distinction between “modern” and “traditional” elites is belied by the usefulness of local authority structures as a basis for competing for national power (Clapham: 436)<sup>11</sup>.

Thus the elite attempts to reconstruct its power base, and potentially quite a venal type of politics, around the investment associated with the textiles industry that has come into the country in the past couple of years. And LECAWU’s claims for citizenship are therefore fragile as they remain inimical to the dominant political culture within

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<sup>11</sup> There was not time to thoroughly analyse the politics of labour reform within government institutions to allow a proper exploration of these suggestions. However there have been an overwhelming number of articles in *Mopheme* and *The Southern Star* have been written in favour of a politics of paternal reconciliation and responsibility numerous government speeches seminars on this theme be it in the language of democracy and transparency, a theology of political reconciliation, or an appeal to Basotho values. These pieties lie in sharp contrast the venal patrimonial politics that are so often bannered in newspaper headlines. For example, during my time of research it was exposed that politicians from the Interim Political Administration of 1999-2002 were being paid off long after this body had been dissolved (*Mopheme* October 29<sup>th</sup> 2002: 1). Other academic articles have alleged financial misappropriation in investments surrounding the textile industry (Baylies and Wright 1993). Admittedly it seems that even academics cannot sustain the claims they make. Most researchers have looked for evidence of back room deals being made between businessmen and government, but I still cannot see how researchers hope to gain access to such information. And even if Taiwanese businessmen are greasing a few palms, it cannot be significant for there is much unrest emanating from government regarding the treatment of workers and they have been striving hard to put through labour reforms in the past few years. A more fruitful line of research into labour issues would be, instead of looking for bribes, to systematically investigate how the government’s reforms institutionally stymie LECAWU’s attempts to improve labour relationships. If proof was wanted of textiles investment being used as a means for a statist elite to consolidate their control resources at the expense of others, I think a focus on infrastructure investment would be much more revealing. Such investment is much more readily seen and there is a faint stench of corruption around utility provision in industrial and urban areas. D.R. Phororo’s diatribe against Vision 2020 highlighted these issues in the national press, and the US Ambassador also admitted ‘yes there can be a certain amount of government manipulation [of infrastructure investment], but they have to realise that if they completely ignore the rest of the country then they have to pay a price at the polls’ (Loftis 2002a).

these treacherous waters of industrial politics in Lesotho<sup>12</sup>. An editorial in *The Southern Star*, affirming a comment made by government sources thus argued:

Trade unions and workers have been propagating intense power struggles with practically no benefit to themselves or the nation as a whole. In essence organised labour remains unorganised... How can they serve themselves and the nation through disunity<sup>13</sup>? (The Southern Star 10<sup>th</sup> May 2002: 3)

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it remains possible that LECAWU with its internal tensions and fragile international alliances could adopt the politics of self aggrandisement.

<sup>13</sup> This editorial appeared in *The Southern Star* (10<sup>th</sup> May 2002: 3) in the same week that an anonymous “open letter by some factory workers to LECAWU” was leaked to the press, which praised the government and factory owners whilst denigrating LECAWU (Mopheme 10<sup>th</sup> May 2002: 4). *The Southern Star* editorial even uses some of the letter’s phrases verbatim. The letter appeared a week after an article on the Nien Hsing scandal appeared in the Washington Post (Wales 2002) and was therefore widely believed in union circles to be a plant (Phillips 2002).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Writing about the perplexing problem of famine within a globally connected world, Dreze and Sen argue:

The countries with which we will be concerned with... have enormously divergent political systems and social balances of power, and the forms that public action can take will undoubtedly depend upon these political and social parameters... [These] important complex questions that call for careful scrutiny of the backgrounds against which these experiences take place (Dreze & Sen 1989: 12)<sup>1</sup>.

This is perhaps a question that is equally important in the world engendered by changing forms of global production. These issues have often been analysed in terms of their economic consequences at a global level and the resulting geo-political shifts, an analysis of “globalisation”. Without denying the importance of these debates, such a perspective can also be limiting. Whether for or against, much of this debate assumes that the central issue at stake is a “Great Transformation” engendered by the expansion of free markets from the centres of capitalism (Cooper 2001). Chapter 2 argued that, seen from Lesotho, capitalism has never provided a unified, global field of flows. The capitalist productive forces that have penetrated Lesotho- be it the commodification of agricultural production by English traders, South African mining capitalism or latterly Taiwanese textiles manufacture for US markets- have been embedded in wider social and political relationships that have been delimited by the bounds of history and geography. Furthermore these forces did not stamp a regular pattern upon pliable African clay, but dynamically interacted with and rearticulated pre-existing adaptable social, economic and political networks. Following Cooper (2000), it was suggested that Lesotho is an extreme example of an African type of “gatekeeper” state produced by the disastrous interaction with colonial and apartheid capitalism, in which politics is based around the control of the interface with the

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<sup>1</sup> This attempt to account for ‘divergent political systems and social balances of power’ is very different to Sen’s (1999) later endorsement of development as freedom offered by a benevolent type of liberal capitalism.

outside world, tempting political leaders towards a brittle and authoritarian “politics of the belly”.

Therefore the textiles investment that has followed AGOA has not led to a straightforward, enlightened expansion of markets. Rather a quite exploitative type of Taiwanese textile manufacturers has seized the opportunities to remake their ailing businesses by transplanting to countries that have made bilateral apparel treaties with the USA. And in Lesotho their investment has allowed the resurgence of a Basotho elite, that have a history of quite a venal and authoritarian form of rule, and who had been shaken by a decade of economic and political crisis. However, the social upheaval that has accompanied this moment of investment has exposed the fragility of this repressive mode of politics. And, within the growth of LECAWU and the subsequent labour reforms that have been forced by union pressure, one sees tentative steps towards a change of sorts. It is this remaking of political culture- the relationship between capitalism and state formation, and the discourses and practises that reflexively give meaning to these relationships of consent and coercion (Eley 1984: 452)- that was discussed in subsequent chapters.

The labour disputes that have erupted in the explosively repressive industrial sector have fuelled a fascinating form of industrial politics. In terms of power politics, control of the textiles is quite significant within wider Lesotho politics because the textiles sector is a strategic sector of the economy, accounting for around 38% of GDP<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, anti-Taiwanese feeling has generated popular urban feeling that has been of some significance in generating the political crises of 1993 and 1998. Theoretically, the form industrial politics has taken is equally interesting. The demands that LECAWU has made for union recognition and worker rights have been attractive to a range of groups across the political spectrum. These opinions have been underlined by academic writing. “Liberal” writers on African democratisation in the 1990s have discovered the seeming potential of civil society politics (Bratton 1994). “The people” have been ascribed a more radical potential in left wing literature, with the potential of union activism in providing a transformatory form of

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<sup>2</sup> The impact of textiles investment is even larger than this figure suggests because a high proportion of the agriculture and services sector, accounting for of 18% and 44% GDP, comprises of, respectively, subsistence farming and various aid programmes (CIA world fact book 2002).

politics. Southall (1994), writing within this Marxist tradition, has recently affirmed the potential of militant action of an organised industrial working class in Lesotho. And, even in this era of a significant body of literature on the crisis of African political identities that has tended to shift attention away from class themes, some analyses of “feminised sweatshop labour” elide personal identity into a straightforward language of class (Baylies & Wright 1993). Likewise, though in a more subtle manner, Mamdani’s (1996) influential writing on citizen and subject has discussed such themes of political identity in a fashion that confirms the significance of the working class as an agent of radical change.

Whilst not questioning the power of this radical vision- the idea of the creation of the politics of citizenship in which equals act in a direct relationship with the state- these analyses however share with the liberalism that they often denigrate, a teleological approach to politics<sup>3</sup>. A two dimensional distinction is made between the potential offered by the politics of citizenship and the corrupting patrimonialisms of ethnicised, political communities. However this analysis is vulnerable to a subaltern studies critique that rightly identifies Western-centrism in:

A rejection of history that confines the zig-zags of time into linear pathways, privileges “modern” state forms over other forms of human connection, tells a story of “progress”, leaving Africans on the side lacking crucial characteristics to obtain the otherwise universal... The question stemming from the critique... is [therefore] not so much the validity of the criticism, as what to do next. One can use it to erect a platform that continually deflates “the West” or one can try to engage with the dynamics of that history... not only of one particularity set against other particularities, but the possibility of examining the interconnections and the changing means of contesting universal ideas of citizen, rights and statehood.’ (Cooper 2000: 300, 302).

In studying the issues surrounding industrial unrest and labour reform, I have attempted to uncover these matters. Chapter 3 suggested that the processes of building a labour movement within Lesotho are more complex than a straightforward

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<sup>3</sup> This theme was discussed more fully in the introduction.



construction of an emancipatory politics of citizenship. Indeed a teleological division between a progressive and regressive form of politics so often produces a conclusion of failure. In a questionable conflation of categories, the failure of emancipatory politics is causally linked to the weakness/peculiarity of class formation.

Alternatively, through a series of compromises and defeats (in current South African political terminology, “selling out”), a progressive movement is corrupted by authoritarian politics of subjecthood<sup>4</sup>. Such an approach flies in the face of the actual sociology of workers in the textile industry who are complex and heterogeneous rather than straightforwardly working class to begin with.

Of particular interest were the tensions within the union between ideals of equal representation, and the cultural, racial and sexual limits to the political community. It was argued that there was not simply a schism between community-based and citizenship-orientated conceptions of LECAWU, but rather that these two types of politics intersected in a complex manner. Two points of particular tension were mentioned: firstly the paradox that, within a restrictive political arena, the road to a negotiated civil politics lay through a sometimes-coercive politics of militancy. Secondly the dominance of a cadre of ex-NUM leadership was discussed. It was argued that this could not be seen simply as the politics of patrimonialism, rather community and citizenship types of politics had intertwined such that patriarchal discourses were remade in an urban situation. This has produced a style of unionism in which the LECAWU leadership see their political maturity, which had them elected as office bearers, fitting with their position as older, experienced men who have the right and responsibility to watch over their junior membership. These issues are particularly important because LECAWU operates on incredibly unstable political terrain, in which the integrity of many other unions has been dissolved by the politics of self-aggrandisement. Moreover their style of politics treads a fine line between negotiation and a militant and confrontational style of politics, so often seen as irresponsible strategy that threatens to drive away investment and/or replicates the worst forms of politics that wracked Lesotho in the 1990s.

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<sup>4</sup> Many of the ideas in this paragraph come from (Eley 1996: 4-5. 83-90)

As Lesotho has ratified many of the basic ILO conventions, one key strategy by which LECAWU has made gains has been to use international pressure to push towards the effective implementation of Lesothan labour law to defend worker rights and union recognition. In chapter 4, a discussion of the international political channels through which LECAWU have attempted to make political gain uncovers some of the fault lines hidden within this politics of citizenship. On the one hand LECAWU have made significant gains through their alliance with UNITE, sometimes seen as a protectionist US trade union cloaking its self interest behind the cultural imperialism of their demands for universal labour standards and worker rights. Naturally self interest and uncertain alliances are inevitable in all politics, and there is a degree of vested interest in UNITE's campaigns. Therefore debate over union rights and recognition is not a neutral site of rational political communication of a tolerant pluralist politics (in a Habermasian sense), but an area of contested meaning where various groups compete to define the meaning of citizenship (Eley 1996: 89). From LECAWU's point of view they have made huge gains through their alliance with UNITE, despite there being latent tensions within the relationship. The self interest of UNITE's politics could not be fully assessed in this dissertation, but I was able to discuss the extent to which international campaigns have benefited LECAWU. Publicity in New York has resulted in The GAP making moves towards upholding its labour code in supplier factories in Lesotho by pressuring Taiwanese factories to abide by Lesothan labour law. Although there are sometimes tensions in international researchers and LECAWU understandings of, for example, women worker rights the ideals of international labour rights largely provide a means for shared understanding and common political purpose.

Whilst the chasms in the relationship between UNITE and LECAWU have generally been successfully traversed; the unions have, however, been less successful in resolving their differences with the US Embassy in Lesotho so as to use Section 104 (labour rights) of AGOA to improve their position. Despite the use of Section 104 to make significant interventions in other countries, it has been the embassy's much more limited definition of worker rights that has so far prevailed. The crux of the embassy's position is that although labour conditions are not ideal in Lesotho, disputes can be resolved within normal legal procedures as they stand (a somewhat contentious belief). Therefore a liberal regard for human rights stands quiescent

against equally liberal arguments concerning responsible citizenship, with LECAWU's militancy and some of their more inflammatory comments being seen as an unsophisticated strategy outside the bounds of sensible politics that benefits trade protection lobbies who are set against the expansion of freedoms offered by liberal capitalism. They are therefore very suspicious of LECAWU's alliance with UNITE and have on occasion worked to stymie international campaigns.

In spite of such fragilities, LECAWU has managed to create an organised movement that has forced reform of the textile industry in Lesotho. Chapter 5 therefore examined the labour reforms that have been recently introduced. On the one hand LECAWU's action has sharply exposed the shallow reach of authoritarian control of labour relations in the textile industry. International campaigns, especially at times when labour unrest has bubbled over into newsworthy incidents, have generated severe pressure against the Lesotho government, mindful of the need for good publicity in order to gain further AGOA investment. The US Ambassador too has intervened once, when a threatened national strike threatened to disrupt any semblance of cordial labour relations. On a daily basis, continued labour unrest has disrupted factory production. Although it seems that many factory owners are more willing to have this state of affairs continue rather than seek even minor reforms that would likely provide a mutually beneficial improvement in labour relations, the welter of labour disputes has exposed the inadequacy of the institutions of government designed to arbitrate over labour relations. The government of Lesotho therefore have made significant moves towards reforms that channel labour disputes into legal forums, in an effort to strive for industrial peace.

One would not want to underplay the improvements that labour law amendments have made nor the distaste that the Labour Commissioner's office may have for the repressive labour relations within factories. However it is the limits of these movements, so often seen as a scheme to "modernise" or "normalise" labour relations towards international standards, which are highlighted here. In Lesotho, the political culture engendered by the encounter with colonialism and capitalism has turned around a "gate-keeper" state's control over the extraversion of scarce resources. In Lesotho, patrimonial politics is not the mode of rule of a regressive, "tribalised" politics of subjecthood in opposition to an urbane citizenship, as Mamdani would

suggest, rather technocrats with their base of power in the state have dominated (Coplan & Quinlan 1997). Thus textiles investment resulting from AGOA, though bringing urbanisation and industrialisation into the heart of Lesotho, has potential to consolidate this form of the politics and the political elite remains incredibly suspicious of LECAWU's attempts to provide an alternative base of political identity. In an environment where LECAWU's claims lie outside this dominant political culture, even more "reformist" government officials appear to be attempting to sideline LECAWU. The implementation of ILO labour reforms shows not so much a regard for international worker rights as citizens, but rather a policy decided by technocrats that may 'strive for industrial peace', but intends to change little else.

The central question that has held this dissertation together has been: what does it mean for a trade union to build a political movement based on international visions of worker rights, union recognition and democracy within the arena of global and Basothan politics? The predominant analyses emphasise the all-determining power of the world system against either the vision of the manifest destiny of a national democratic revolution and/or the self contained-integrity of particular social groups. Against these sweeping designs, I have tried to suggest a more varying and ambiguous means of defining connections and mobilising collectively which determine the manner in which LECAWU engages with the politics of citizenship and worker rights. An arena in which the common rallying cries that so often are used, have been clichés used to mask deceit and self-interest; but also a terrain rich with opportunities for mobilisation. One in which incremental change, in this most desperate and volatile of situations, can be made through the most unexpected of alliances, and can give women workers the hope of the rights of citizenship.



○ Represents Industrial Estates with textile manufacture

Mafeteng

Maseru - Maseru West

- Thetsane

- Tikoe

Ha Nyenye (just south of Leribe)

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Ntlhabo Justice, Personnel Manager
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Lebakae Shaw, Deputy General Secretary  
Lebisi Seroala, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Likoti Sam, Regional Organiser  
Matseo Willy, Researcher  
4 shop stewards from CNY factory (identities remaining anonymous)  
3 shop stewards from CGM factory (identities remaining anonymous)
- Labour Commission: Matsoso Mamohale, Labour Commissioner
- LNDC: Mahase ‘Mampho, Senior Projects Manager, Operations Division  
Tsukulu Justice, Industrial Relations Manager (2000-), various positions in Lesotho trade unions (1989-1999), National Executive Committee of NUM (1982-89)
- Nien Hsing: Makhasane Maxwell, Deputy Personnel Manager
- TURP: Phillips Gary
- UNITE: Brindle Luke
- US Embassy: Loftis R, US Ambassador to Lesotho

Note on referencing: Interviews were conducted in October- November 2002 thus named informants are referred to as “(Name: 2002)”. As a speech from Ambassador Loftis made in 2002 is also referenced in the text, his interview is referenced as “(Loftis 2002a)”. More informal conversations with these interviewees and other informants are referenced as “(log: 2002)” because many informants’ comments were made in unguarded conversations, it did not seem ethical to detail my sources. I was also in communication with a number of people from LECAWU and UNITE. These emails and telephone conversations are recorded as “(Organisation 2002: pers. comm.).

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