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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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by: Elsabe Brink

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THE GARMENT WORKERS AND POVERTY ON THE WITWATERSRAND, 1920-1945.

Introduction - The Seductive Swindle of the City.

The inter war years in South Africa witnessed a massive migration of rural Afrikaners to the cities. The white rural population of the country declined steadily, as a average of some 19-20 000 whites poured into the urban centres each year.[1] The Witwatersrand acted as a magnet to vast numbers of these migrants, and as a result nearly doubled its population during this period from 230 657 in 1921 to 547,836 in 1946. As most of these arrivals were Afrikaners, the Afrikaans speaking population on the Witwatersrand doubled itself in the first decade and again in the second.[2]

A number of theories have been advanced to explain the attraction of the city for the inhabitants of impoverisied rural areas. These explanations have centred on such factors as the impoverishment of the rural areas, the continuing capitalisation of land and agriculture, the increased employment opportunities of the city, the well organised and rich welfare organisations and the 'bright lights' of the city.[3] Die Kerkbode, official mouth piece of the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa, graphically captured the 'urban pull' school of thought when it spoke of the "'blink-bedrog' van die stad" - the seductive swindle of the city - that attracted hopeful migrants to the city. 'The opportunities in die city are great', it warned, 'bit its seduction is twice as great'.[4] The bustle of the city, its entertainments, bright street lights

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1 C.C. Nepgen, November 1931, as quoted by E.J.P. Stals,ed, Afrikaners in die Goudstad, HAUM, Pretoria, 1986. p.32.

2 Total White Population of the Witwatersrand 1921-1946.

1921	1926	1936	1946	Total
230 657	254 362	402 223	547 836	

Source: Population Census, 1921-1946. UG 51. E.J.P. Stals, op cit, p.19.

3 E.J.P. Stals, op cit, HAUM, Pretoria, 1986. vol II, chapter 1. See also vol I. The standard work on the subject rural exodus and influx into the cities is the Carnegie Commission, The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Pro Ecclesia, Stellenbosch, 1932, especially volume I, chapters 5 and 6. Other contemporary studies include for example, P. du Toit, (compilier), Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem, Kimberley, 2-5 October 1934, J.R. Albertyn, ed. Die Stadwaartse Trek van die Afrikanernasie, Volkskongres, 1947, Minerva Pretoria, 1947; C.W. De Kiewiet, A History of South Africa, Social and Economic, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1941; and F.A. Van Jaarsveld, Die Afrikaner se Groot Trek na die Stede, Perskor, Johannesburg, 1982. R. Morell, De Lagersdrift, M.A. Univeristy of the Witwatersrand, 1982. I.J. Van Eeden's thesis 'Interne Migrasie Patrone van die Blanke Bevolking van Suid Afrika met besondere verwysing na die Transvaal, MA, RAU, 1975, deals with the question of migration from a demographic point of view.

4 Ds. P. Du Toit, Stedelike Bearbeiding, in Die Kerkbode October 1938, p.653.

and shop windows the magazine saw as contributing to urban social and moral decay. In the spirit of the 1938 Voortrekker centenary celebrations, which strove to unite all classes of Afrikaners into one 'volk', the church felt itself obliged to act rapidly and sympathetically take the lead. It had to save impoverished, recently urbanised Afrikaners, threatened by the disappearance and disintegration of their traditional values, and subject to the changed mores, customs and morality of the city.

Other recent accounts present a similar perspective. Stals for example in his recent history 'Afrikaners in die Goudstad' says that;

> "die regering (het) die pad vir die versnelde verstedeliking van die Afrikaner gelyk gemaak en verbreed."[5]

Along with other authors he argues that [6] the Pact government after its election victory in 1924, did much to initiate attractive employment opportunities in the urban areas of the country. A Ministry and Department of Labour was founded and employer and employee relationships were smoothed and eased by the acceptance of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. A 'civilised labour policy' set out to protect white unskilled labour in face of competition from the vast unskilled black labour market. With these measures the government wished to smoothe the urbanisation process of the Afrikaner. Mr. A.J.P. Fourie, then Minister of Mining and Industry assured the electorate in November 1931;

> "Die nasionale regering is van oomblik tot oomblik besig om omstandighede so te skik dat die mense hier in die stede 'n bestaan kan maak vir hulle huisgesinne." (The national government is from moment to moment busy to arrange circumstances thus that the people here in the cities can make a living for their families.)[7]

Each of these approaches are profoundly misleading since what they all imply is that poverty was primarily rural issue. While opportunities did exist in the city, poverty and unemployment remained rife and urban existence was a struggle, especially during the economically depressed times of the early 1930's when work was not plentiful and vast numbers of people arrived in the city. Here men, recently arrived from the country side, settled only to find themselves unemployed and unemployable for a variety of reasons ranging from a lack of skills, education and ill-health. As farmers who has lost their land, these men did not have any industrial skills, they were rarely educated beyond st.6 and often arrived in the city un a debilitated and unfit state of health. They had to compete on an already oversupplied white labour market to find em-

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[5] E.J.P. Stals, op cit, p.8.

[6] For example. R.H. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960. The Harvester Press, Great Britain, 1979. p.225-227.

[7] E.J.P. Stals, op cit, p.8.

ployment and within the field of unskilled labour had to face competition from a much larger and cheaper black labour force as well.[8]

Living conditions were particularly sordid. During the twenties and thirties the white poor mostly congregated in highly congested areas such as Vrededorp and Fordsburg in Johannesburg and George Town in Germiston. These suburbs in which the poor of all races lived, were considered the worst slums of the city. Vrededorp was a slum;

> "said to be one of the worst slum areas in existence, harbouring as it does in its sea of iron shanties the flotsam and jetsam of low class Coloured peoples, Chinese, Indians and Natives - many of purely criminal class", acting Standard Bank inspector Mr. J. Mac A. Leash stated in 1921.[9]

George Town, which Mrs. Spangenberg as described a suburb of 'beroerde sinkkrotte' and as 'sommer 'n gemors', (just a mess) did not provide any better accommodation than Vrededorp.[10]

In these cramped slums a distinct white working class culture of poverty emerged which centred on the family unit as the basis for survival. Within this unit, moreover the female members of the family commenced to play an increasingly crucial role in the existence of the family. These young women had to work to help to relieve the poverty in their homes. This poverty, not the seduction or the opportunities of the city caused the social and moral crisis that so alarmed Die Kerkbode.[11]

It is this poverty and the way it framed and intervened in the lives of Afrikaner women garment workers that is subject of this paper. First their efforts as young mothers with dependent children to care for will be analysed. The garment workers' role as daughters will then be examined to further gauge the extent of their involvement in the economic survival of the family in the city. Finally the garment workers' plight as single immigrant in the city will be looked at, especially in view of the ever

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[8] E. Brink,'Maar 'n Klomp 'Factory' Meide, Family and Community on the Witwatersrand',1920-1945, History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, January 1984.

[9] The Branch Generally, Standard Bank Inspection Report by acting Inspector M. Mc A Leash 14/4/1921, Standard Bank Archives, (hereafter SBA), INSP 1/1/214.

[10] Interview 26.

[11] In a similar vein Sachs claimed that the garment workers did not come to the Rand "for adventure and romance, but to earn a few shillings for themselves and their parents." S. Sachs,Garment Workers in Action, Eagle Press, Johannesburg, 1957, p.18. Studies done on migration elsewhere observed a similar pattern. Cf. I. Bertaux-Wiume,'The Life History Approach to the Study of Internal Migration,' in D. Bertaux,Biography and Society - The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences,SAGE Publications, London, 1981 and T. Haraven, "Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700-1930, New Viewpoints Division of Franklin Watts, New York, 1977, p. 121.

present spectre of prostitution in the city. The incidence and threat of prostitution in Johannesburg for young single girls arriving from the rural areas will be examined to see whether indeed it constituted the danger it was made out to be.

The Garment Workers as Mothers.

The labour of the garment workers as mothers became crucial to the survival of the family, because the fathers and sons of the family were not always able to bear the responsibility of the economic survival of the family alone.. The Carnegie Commission remarked on the crucial role of the women in the survival of the Poor White family. In Vol I Grosskopf expressed the opinion that:

> "on the whole the female members of the poor rural families in the bigger towns command our highest respect... Not only the mothers, but the daughters as well, greatly contribute to the advance of such poor families in the towns... it depends very largely on the womenfolk and especially the mother, whether the family sinks lower or rises".[12]

MER, co-author of vol. V concurred :

> "It seems that a family with a sterling father but a weak mother is more liable to sink than one with a worthless father but a respectable mother."[13]

Wives and daughters therefore had to provide when their menfolk earned very little or nothing. Said Mrs. Spangenberg of women whose husbands had low earning power;

> "Ons moes werk. Daar was nie anderste nie. Sy salaris was klein...Ons moes almal uitspring om by te bly....vandag werk vir more se pap om te eet."
>
> (We had to work. There was nothing else for it. His salary was small....we all had to jump in to keep up.....work today to have porridge to eat tomorrow.)[14]

To which Mrs Viljoen added;

> "Daai jare was daar nie so 'n ding dat 'n vrou kon bekostig het om by die huis te bly nie. Sy moes werk, want die man het ook maar baie min geld gekry. "
>
> (Those years there was no such a thing that a woman could afford to stay at home. She had to work, because the man also earned very little money.)[15]

The same experience is reproduced in the life histories of scores of other families. Mr. G.C. Beetge, a passenger transporter, earning £ 1.5.0 £ 1.5.0 per week and having to pay four pounds per month in rent, was

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[12] Carnegie Commission, op cit, Vol.I, p.219.

[13] Ibid, Vol.V, p.34.

[14] Interview 26.

[15] Interview 31.

heavily dependent on his wife's wages and sorely missed them when she lost her job with a tailor also in Germiston.[16]

Other women whose husbands for a variety of reasons lost their jobs, had to see their families through extended periods of unemployment as well. The Martins family provide an example. They had migrated from the Orange Free State to Germiston where Mr.Martin had become a mine worker, employment which he lost during the 1922 strike. They were then supported by his wife who was employed by a tailor.

Ill health of the male providers of the family caused similar problems. Mrs. Durandt of Fordsburg, who had a new-born baby and a husband confined in a home for the chronically sick dependent on her, wrote to the Garment Workers Union (GWU) in 1931 that since she did not have an income any more:

"We have absolutely nothing in the house to live upon."[17]

Mrs. Spangenberg recalled a Swanepoel family arriving in Germiston in search of a better life. Mr. Swanepoel, a sickly man, had failed at farming in the Pietersburg district and had come to the city in order that his wife and five daughters might find employment in the clothing factories. On the same day, Mrs. Spangenberg related, all six Swanepoel women succeeded in finding work in the local factories.[18]

Finally women, whose husbands were employed in occupations which were subjected to economic fluctuations, such as in particular the building trade, were the mainstay of their family's economic survival. The work record of Mrs. van der Westhuizen whose husband was a bricklayer, was closely related to her husband's erratic pattern of employment. She would work for some nine months and be home for 3-5 months when her husband was fully employed. However, she would always return to work at the same factory; at first the Alexandra and later the Pax in Germiston. The work record of Mrs. Harmse, whose husband was a furniture maker, indicated similar intermittent rest periods.[19]

Mrs. P's. husband combined these disabilities. He was a builder who was often ill with a lung complaint during the winter months. Due to his health and the precarious nature of his trade, he could not always work. Consequently, she became a major provider of the family. Once during the late thirties when the building trade was more prosperous and her husband was fully employed, she could stop working.

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[16] 'Slumvegters', Ons Vaderland, 5 June 1923, Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit. History Project Archive.

[17] Application for Confinement Allowance, Affidavit, Mrs F Durandt, 1931, Church of the Province of South Africa Archives, University of the Witwatersrand, Garment Workers Union Archives, (Hereafter GWU), AH1092, Bbc 1.29.

[18] Mrs. Spangenberg, Interview 26.

[19] Interviews 30 & 12.

"Nee wat, ek was moeg. Ek wou 'n bietjie gaan rus. My man het goeie werk gehad, toe het ek gaan rus. " (No, I was tired. I wanted to rest a bit. My husband had a good job, so then I rested.)[20]

Not all garment workers could afford to stop working. An analysis of the occupations of the husbands of the women who had been interviewed reveal that only four of the garment workers did not return to the factory after their marriages. They were married to miners, a teacher and a stock exchange worker. The majority of the other women were married to railway workers mostly employed in unskilled positions. The rest were married to men employed in the building and related trades, transport and other occupations such as butchers, artisans, or post office workers. A closer look at the distribution of the average annual wages in the manufacturing and mining industries reveals that the garment workers were mostly married to men employed in the poorer paid occupations and those most subject to economic fluctuations. Table 1 reveals that miners occupied the best paid positions at the time, followed by men in the metal engineering industry and those employed in the provision of energy on the Witwatersrand.[21] Although building and contracting workers seemed to have been well paid, their profession, as has been indicated, was often hit by slumps and recessions.

Generally the garment workers married young, much younger than the average marital age for white women in South Africa at the time.[22] A breakdown of the marital age of the informants reveals that the majority married at 19, with 5 marrying at 20 and 4 at 21. Two each married in the later age groups.[23] Most had children within the first years of marriage but, so precarious was the economic situation of the garment worker mother that most went back to the factory after their marriage and the birth of their children. The standard practice for a married garment worker would be to work until a month or two prior to the birth of her child and return to work three to six months, or even a year after the birth.[24] In contrast to the large families into which the garment workers were born, mostly 10-12 children, the marriages of the garment workers themselves produced fewer children, mostly three or less. Only Mrs. Deysel had 10 children,

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[20] Interview 22.

[21] For this reason relatively few garment workers were married to miners. cf. E. Brink, 'Factory Meide....' Table 1.

[22] M.J.M. Prinsloo, Blanke Vroue-arbeid in die Unie van Suid Afrika, Nasionale Pers, Kaapstad, 1957. p.353. Marriages per 1000 in the Union 1921-1944.

Year	per 1000	av. age of bride
1921-25	8.04	25.11
26-30	9.28	24.72
31-35	9.30	24.89
36-40	11.50	25.24
41-44	10.39	25.25

[23] Only two informants remained single and seven had remarried either as divorcees or as widows. See table.

[24] Eg. Interviews, 26, 12.

but she had had them whilst not working, and only returned to the factory after the birth of her youngest child. Mrs. Spangenberg was the only woman who had had more than three children whilst fully employed in the clothing industry.[25]

Garment workers usually left their children in the care of their mothers or mothers-in-law, and sometimes in the care of women in the neighbourhood or domestic servants.[26] When her child was born, Mrs. Bosch usually took her across the street to be looked after by her mother. In winter she used to leave her to sleep there as well, to prevent taking her out early in the morning.[27] Mrs. Lategan's mother and later her mother-in-law, who lived elsewhere in Johannesburg, looked after her child during the week whilst she was at work, returning the child on weekends. Mrs. Lategan described her feelings on leaving him to go to work for the first time;

> "Ek was gewoond om self agter my kind te kyk en hom self skoon en netjies te hou en als, en dit was vir my swaar om hom te los bedags."
>
> (I was used to looking after my child myself and to keep him clean and neat and everything, and it was hard for me to leave him each day.)[28]

Mrs. V., a widow with three small children, whose family still resided in the Pietersburg district, used to leave her children in the care of a neighbour and later in the care of her landlady when she went to work. Mrs. Spangenberg, whose mother spent 17 years with her, clearly outlined the division of labour in the home between mother and daughter. Her mother was

> "....net verantwoordelik vir die tyd wat ons as werkvrouens uit die huis uit is." (...responsible only for the time that we working women were out of the house.)[29]

It would seem that although she was absent the whole day, Mrs. Spangenberg still retained the female authority in her home. Mrs. Viljoen, whose mother ran a boarding house in Hillbrow used to look after

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[25] Interview 7. These findings correlate closely with studies of migration which maintain that amongst other factors, fertility decreases with migration. I. J. van Eeden, op cit, p.161.

[26] Interviews 32 and 13. These women as working class women themselves were able to afford domestic servants. This could be attributable to the extremely low wages paid to black female domestic workers at the time. In comparison to a weekly white female wage of up to three pounds per week, eg. Elizabeth Tshayinca, a Johannesburg domestic worker earned between one and two pounds per month during the early thirties. S. Gordon, A Talent for Tomorrow, Life Stories of South African Servants, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1985. p.71.

[27] Interview 2

[28] Interview 17.

[29] Interview 32 and 26.

her child whilst she was at work. Mrs. Harmse in contrast, used to take her child to the creche in Fordsburg, one of the very few in Johannesburg.[30] Mrs. Viljoen also recalled women working with her who would make the journey to Fordsburg to deliver their children at the creche before returning to the centre of town to take up their work in the factory.

In some cases domestic servants would be entrusted with the care of the children. Mrs. Herman used to employ women who used to live on her parents' farm in the OFS on a rotational base of six months.[31] It would seem that some mothers who were still breast feeding would also sometimes leave their babies in the care of domestic servants in the cloakroom of the factory. They would stop work long enough to rush to feed the baby.[32] In addition, Dulcie Hartwell also recalled having to leave her child in the care of a domestic servant to attend trade union conferences.[33]

A child's illness created especially stressful times. Mrs. Nel who as a widow had to leave her child ill in bed gave insight into the situation;

> "....dan vat ek vanmore a fles met melk en ek sit dit voor die bed en ek sit toebroodjies en goed, kos (neer) ...ek het 'n dierbare ou buurvrou en as hulle siek is stuur sy sop."
> (.....then I take a bottle of milk in the morning, sandwiches and things, food and put it next to the bed have a sweet old neighbour and when they are sick she sends soup.)[34]

Anna Scheepers, addressing the GWU Commission of Inquiry, indicated that this was a relatively common problem in the lives of women garment workers.

> "....the women are worried.....there is nobody to care for the children when they are ill and it disorganises production in the factories."[35]

Besides problems in child care, marital difficulties frequently beset the lives of the garment workers. Of the 35 women interviewed five were divorcees or separated from their husbands. From 1921 to 1946 the divorce rate in South Africa skyrocketed with the number of divorced women in the

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30 Interviews 31 & 12. By 1944 there were only 6 nursery schools in Johannesburg which could cater for only 220 children and cost 8 000 pounds per annum to maintain. Minutes meeting Shop Stewards Committee, 7.2.1944. GWU, Bcf 2.1.

31 Interviews 13 and 31.

32 D. Eiberg, Life was a drudgery, A garment worker looks back. Garment Worker/Klerewerker,(GW/KW), July/Aug. 1945. Unfortunately no more evidence could be located.

33 Interview 34.

34 Interview 19.

35 A. Scheepers, witness GWU Commission of Inquiry, p.2291, GWU, Bca 4.

country doubling from 1926 to 1936 and doubling once again in the period surrounding and during the Second World War.[36] In Johannesburg in 1937 alone Die Kerkbode cited 787 divorces and 758 orders for the restoration of conjugal rights in contrast to some 400 in Cape Town for the same period.[37]

In Johannesburg, the garment workers whose marital problems were not solved by divorce took it to the GWU where the committee members would make every effort to assist them Dulcie Hartwell maintained that an estimated 25% of the garment workers had trouble with their husbands.

> "They would come up with blue eyes and bruised all over and sometimes they had obviously been bleeding from the battering they had had and tell us that they were scared for their lives and what must they do. The husband comes to the factory drunk and starts demanding to be allowed into the factory and all this sort of thing and the boss threatens to sack her if the husband comes in."[38]

It appears that adultery, abuse, desertion and drink were major causes for the break up of marriages in the factory. Anna Scheepers recounted how union officials once helped a woman who had been locked in her flat by her husband, to escape through the fan light. In addition, the union would often give advice on marital problems. They often took abused and neglected women to the union doctor to have their cuts and bruises treated and provide assistance in divorce proceedings.

In the case of death, divorce or desertion, some informants who had no one else to care for their children and were forced to commit their children to an orphanage temporarily so that they could earn a living. Mrs. Fitch, for example after her separation, temporarily put her child in the St. Mary's Orphanage and found accommodation for herself in the Lionel Leveson Hostel for low paid girls so that she could take up employment at the Alba Clothing Factory. She was accepted as inmate because her child's boarding fee of 10/- per week and divorce expenses brought her net income below the maximum wage limit of some two pounds per week imposed by the hostel.[39] Even Peggy Sachs, a middle-aged prostitute also put her only child into the Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg. She received no support from the child's father and had to make arrangements regarding the care of her child in order to pursue her rather insalubrious

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[36] Total number of divorcees in South Africa, 1921-1946

1921	1926	1936	1946	Total
4 787	5 270	10 900	23 343	Union Statistics for 50 years. Bureau for Census and Statistics, Printed on Authority, 1960.

[37] 'Mense Trou vandag te maklik', Die Burger 31.12.1937 as quoted by Die Kerkbode, January 1938.

[38] Interviews, 35, 36, and 34. No much research has as yet been done on the causes and prevalence of divorce during this period, but it could prove to be an interesting avenue for exploration.

[39] Report of the Matron, Lionel Leveson Hostel, 8.3.1940. Central Archives Depot, (CAD). VWN 480.

profession.[40] Dulcie Hartwell explained these measures taken by garment workers to survive;

> "They had no choice. They couldn't afford to pay servants. Unless they were lucky enough to live with family then it wasn't necessary. Much the same as what happens amongst the black people today, who send their children home to the country. They didn't, couldn't send their children home to the country."[41]

At the time, it was a relatively common practice for single working parents, in times of unemployment, illness or lack of care, to use orphanages, eg. the Langlaagte Orphanage, as a temporary refuge to which to send their children. As soon as they could help to contribute financially to the family economy, they were retrieved and came home again. For example one informant was committed to the Langlaagte Orphanage at the age of eight when her father died and her mother could no longer care for the children. She remained there until she could find employment at the age of sixteen.[42]

A more final solution for unmarried mothers or destitute parents who could no longer cope, was formally giving children up for adoption. Anna Scheepers recalled many young unmarried women coming to the union for help;

> ".....partykeer is 'n meisie swanger en sy weet nie wat om te doen nie. Dan het ons probeer, jy weet ouers kry vir die kind...dit het heelwat gebeur."
>
> (...sometimes a girl is pregnant and she does not know what to do. Then we tried, you know, to find parents for the child....this happened often.)[43]

As is evident from the efforts of the GWU, apart from the existing channels for formal adoption, more informal processes of adoption seemed to have existed in the working communities in Johannesburg. Mrs. Nel recalled being instrumental in one informal adoption of an illegitimate child in the neighbourhood by a rural family, and knew of another case of informal adoption in the neighbourhood. Mrs. DT.'s husband, the youngest of a very large family had himself been adopted, and met his own family when he was 21. Hester and Johanna Cornelius and Dulcie Hartwell also adopted three children from the same family whom they found destitute on Johannesburg station. The mother was an alcoholic and the father, a

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[40] V.P. Steyn, Senior Probation Officer, Prostitution and Houses of Ill Fame in Johannesburg, 1939?. CAD, VWN 2017.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Interviews and R. Krut, Maria Botha and her sons; The making of a white South African Family in the 20th century, Unpubl. paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1.11.1983.

[43] Interview 35.

railway worker could no longer cope with the young children. Not all links were severed, for the father regularly visited his children.[44]

It is therefore evident that the garment workers as married women were faced with the persistent problem of poverty. In most cases they were married to men who could not support their families adequately. Due to impediments such as their low earning power, ill health, a poor education or economic fluctuations, these men had to relinquish their role of chief breadwinner of the family. The garment workers who had married young mostly had to avail themselves of mothers, mothers-in-law and at times domestic servants to enable them to find employment themselves in order to contribute to the family income. When they did not have kin or friends to fall back on, and could not afford hired help, they were forced to use the various orphanages in the city to as centres of child care. In extreme cases they would make use of not only formal but informal channels of adoption as well to solve their problems of child care.

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[44] Interviews, 10, 34, 35.

The Garment Workers as Daughters

Until such time as dependent children reached an age when they could begin to earn a living, impoverished white families in the city found themselves in very straightened circumstances. However, once children could begin to work, officially at the age of 16, but mostly at the age of 14 or even younger, the family became better equipped to combat the poverty they experienced in the city. Sons and daughters, especially the latter, became key factors in the economic survival of the family in the city.[45]

Single garment workers still residing with their families in the city, carried a burden comparable to that of the mothers of the poor white family. The Carnegie Commission elaborated on the role of the daughter in the Poor White family:

> "The daughter's earnings in the Poor White family are of great importance; particularly in the cities the family forms a wage earning unit. Hence there is a natural supply of female labour. Although factory work still sometimes takes place under undesirable conditions it offers a steadily improving field of employment to the Poor White girl, and the excess of womenfolk in the cities is directly connected with the attraction exerted by the opportunities so offered."[46]

These opportunities although offered under appalling conditions of overcrowding, poor ventilation, filth, noise and heat, provided incomes with which a large number of women supported their families.[47]

These young girls contributed extensively to the family budget, even though it meant hardship for them.[48] According to Miss O'Reilly;

> "We all had to contribute - we had to live - I gave all my wages, all of it and then my mother used to give me money back again."[49]

Mrs. du Toit also gave all her money to her mother who was a widow and when she ventured to buy a few books with the money she was often scolded by her mother.[50] Mrs. Labuschagne did not receive any pocket money solely because;

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[45] Not much is as yet known about the son's role in the economic survival strategies of the family. Cf. E. Brink, 'Factory Meide....'

[46] Carnegie Commission, op cit, Recommendations 84, Vol.II, p.xxiii.

[47] H Pollak, op cit, p.102-111; p.171, 176.

[48] Ibid, Addendum p.49 and 53.

[49] Interview, 20.

[50] Interview 9.

"Jy weet daar is nie - dis die groot ding - jy weet daar is nie." (You know there is none -- this is the big thing -- you know there is none.)[51]

In her evidence before the 1932 Conciliation Board, Anna Maria Swanepoel (albeit motivating for higher wages and echoing Solly Sachs), maintained that about three quarters of the young girls in the clothing industry supported their families and had a hard time making ends meet.[52] Johanna Petersen, also present at this investigation, testified that she gave her father, who was too ill to work, a pound per week to support himself and her little sister.[53] Of her weekly wages of £2.10.0 £2.10.0 Maria Johanna du Plessis contributed five pounds per month to the family budget. Her father, at a monthly wage of nine pounds, earned less than she did and had to keep a family of eight of whom only four were employed. Nellie Murray's father earned a pound per week whereas her sister, a dressmaker, earned six pounds per week and she earned £ 2.10.0 £ 2.10.0 per week. Together they had to support a family of 7 in Brixton.[54] In 1931 Ivy Rebock, an 18 year old machinist, helped her father, a telephone exchange worker, to support their family of fourteen.[55]

Further evidence is provided in Hansi Pollak's study. Of the 16 case histories she used to illustrate the economic responsibility of the women she investigated, 5 related how young girls between 17 and 20 were the sole support of large families ranging from 6 to 13 members. One girl (18), the eldest of a family of 8 which she was supporting on £1.2.6. £1.2.6. per week remarked;

"We have to struggle very hard to keep the home going. My father is an invalid and unable to work... Often when I get home from work I feel as if I'm too tired even to lift anything".[56]

When her father became too ill to work, Mrs. Britten also, contributed her weekly wages to the upkeep of her family. Usually two or more of the 12 children in the Britten's family worked to support their parents and the younger children who were still at school. The older brothers and sisters who had left home, in most cases to get married, no longer were able to contribute. This trend was observed in the USA during the De-

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[51] Interview 16.

[52] Evidence of A M Swanepoel to Dept of Labour, Conciliation Board, 22.9.1932. CAD, ARB.559.

[53] Evidence of Johanna Petersen, Ibid.

[54] Evidence of Maria du Plessis and Nellie Murray, Ibid.

[55] Statement of I.Rebock to GWU, 1931, GWU, Bbc 1.23. In June 1932, just prior to the general strike in the clothing industry she lost her job. Notice for termination of employment, June 1932. GWU, Bbc16.1.

[56] H Pollak, op cit, Addendum, p.56.

pression as well, where married daughters no longer helped their parents financially, although some wished that they could have done so.[57]

In the absence of a father the daughters had to shoulder the burden alone. They had to care for widowed mothers, young brothers and sisters and sometimes their own illegitimate children. Ivy Mitchell (23) of Greymont, one of a family of five was the only support of her widowed mother, although her sister was employed in a shirt factory and her brother was attending the School of Mines. When she lost her work at £ 2.19.6 £ 2.19.6 per week she was destitute and appealed to the GWU for a grant of two pounds per week whilst she was unemployed.[58]

She had begun work in the clothing industry in 1921 at the age of 12 and had been in the industry for 9 years when in 1930 she earned three pounds per week as an all round tailoress.

Miss. M. Martle an unmarried mother of Village Main, also appealed to the GWU for assistance when she had to stop working and lost her weekly wage of 50/- which had been used to support her family of nine. She and her sister Doreen were both employed at S. Malks and had to support their family of nine on their combined wages. Their father had been unemployed for the previous 8 years and due to the birth of her illegitimate child Margaret (21), had lost her job. Although she had no hope of receiving maintenance from the father of the child, Martin Schanell, a labourer in Newclare, who earned 5/6 per day, their combined wages disqualified her for a state confinement allowance. In 1934 Margaret found herself in a similar position. Although she had in the interim moved to Selby, she had to return to her parents home, as she did not have any income for the six months after her child was born in December 1933. Their father, a painter handyman, did earn some money after the Depression, but Margaret and Doreen remained the main supporters of the family which during the thirties had increased to ten members. In the mid forties after being employed at S. Malk's for 16 and 15 years respectively, they approached the union to help them to buy outfits for mourning, which they could not afford, for their father was expected to die shortly. They based their appeal on the fact that they had as yet no received aid from the union.[59]

Miss A. Cronje of Vrededorp, like the Martle sisters, was the sole support of her family as well. However, she fell ill and lost her job, an oc-

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[57] R.Cavan & K. Ranck, The Family and the Depression, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1938. p.166.

[58] Affidavit I. Mitchell, 14.3.1930, Bbc 16.1. Letter of Ivy Mitchell to GWU 1933, GWU Bbc 1.38.

[59] Gen. Sec. GWU to Factory Inspector, Dept of Labour, Pretoria, 28.1.32, GWU Bbc 1.138. Letter Inspetor of Factories, Johannesburg to M. Martle, 14.12.1931 and statement M. Martle, 1931. Affidavit M. Martle 21.11.1934, Bcd 4.1.1. Minutes Complaints Committee GWU, 26.7.1945, GWU, Bcd 1.2.

currence which increased the destitution of her family. In her appeal for the union to find her a job she maintained;

> "It is impossible for me to stay at home without work because my father did not work and we are a big family."[60]

A month later she again appealed for a job as the situation at home with her father still unemployed, had become impossible. With the aid of the union she did find employment and in October, wise to industrial ways, appealed to the union for help to get the raise due to her after her first six months in the industry.[61]

The fathers of Elizabeth Anderson and Maria van Rensburg of First Avenue, George Town and Second Street, Germiston respectively, had no occupations. The daughters' jobs as a machinist and factory worker respectively, probably were of great importance to their families' economic survival. Maria Bewick, Frederika de Kock and Doris Edwards' fathers were all retired men in Germiston, most probably dependent on their daughters wages, for Maria and Doris had not brothers and sisters over 21 living at home, although Frederika's sister, a shop assistant, most probably helped as well. Hester de Wet helped her brother, a laundry worker, to support their widowed mother and three brothers and sisters on a weekly wage of respectively 10/- and 30/- per week.[62]

These women supported their families at considerable cost to themselves, for;

> ".....many young women who earn wages upon which they themselves could live in fairly good circumstances, actually live under very poor circumstances owing to the necessity of assisting ailing, unemployed or casually employed parents, or numerous younger brothers and sisters."[63]

Both Mrs. Pennells and Mrs. B. had to help to support the family when their fathers, as prosperous farmers lost everything when they stood guarantee for a friend. Mrs. Pennells who felt that she had to contribute to the family income began working in Fordsburg tailoring factory in 1919. She felt that she wanted to work for all her peers seemed to be employed.

> "Ek wou graag gaan werk het..... mens voel ook jy wil gaan werk, ander werk, en hoekom kan jy ook nie." (I wanted to go and

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60 Letter A. Cronje to Solly Sachs, received 2.6.1930, Bbc 16.1.

61 Correspondence A. Cronje and GWU, October 1930. Ibid.

62 JPL, VR 1931, Germiston. Preliminary Statement of H de Wet to GWU Commission of Inquiry 1948, GWU, Bca 5.

63 Investigation into housing conditions of female factory workers in Germiston 18.4.1936, C. Division to Undersecretary. CAD VWN 468.

work....one also feels you want to go and work, others work, and why not you too.)[64]

On arrival in Johannesburg Mrs. B.'s father found employment as a lift operator and his daughters found employment in a clothing and sweet factory respectively to contribute to the survival of the family. However, her father's job was 'maar 'n hartseer saak', whilst both sisters felt it to be a humiliation to be employed in a factory. Their education had continued after st. 6 and as a result they soon moved into better jobs.[65]

Garment workers who migrated to the city without their families relied heavily on the help of kindly disposed kin for their survival in the urban environment. Mrs. Spangenberg and Mrs. Ae., although they had migrated to the city alone, were fortunate to have kin to whom to come in Johannesburg. Not only were they accommodated but were they cared for by their relatives and family. Mr. and Mrs. Britten's path into the city were likewise smoothed by the presence of kin who encouraged them to come and put them up for a while.[66]

On arrival in Johannesburg Mrs. and Mr. Voslco were put up by her husband's aged uncle and blind aunt, whom she looked after until their death years later. When more established, she and her husband in later years accommodated young relatives newly arrived in the city at no charge until they could find employment which would allow them independent lodgings.[67]

It would therefore seem that a similar system of familial support existed here as Haraven found in industrial Manchester in the USA;

"In a regime of insecurity where kin assistance was the only continuing source of support, family culture by necessity dictated that family considerations, needs and ties guide and control most individual decisions. "[68]

Observers on the Witwatersrand indicated that a similar system of assistance seemed to have been extended to strangers as well. Recently urbanised Afrikaners, although they could hardly afford it, seemed to have been kindly disposed towards destitute fellow migrants. Ds. J.D. van Niekerk, of the NGK Langlaagte found in an investigation of the working

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[64] Interview 21.

[65] Interview 27.

[66] Interviews 1,2 & 26.

[67] Interview 33

[68] T. Haraven, Family Time and Industrial Time; The Relationship between Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p.109.

girls in Langlaagte and Industria that many were accommodated by kindly people who at 12/- per week,

> ".....dit onmoontlik kan bekostig om meisies teen daardie prys te huisves, maar doen dit uit jammerte."
>
> (could barely afford to accommodate girls at that price, but do it out of pity.)[69]

Indications are however, that this was more the exception than the norm and girls without families found themselves in equally as desperate a situation as families without girls.

Housing conditions of single garment workers not accommodated by kin or friends were appalling.[70]

The Boucher family, a mother and seven daughters who inhabited one room, serve as a good example. Their conditions were so severe that welfare officials remarked that the health of one of the daughters who was a cleaner in a clothing factory, would hardly improve whilst she had to sleep on the floor.[71]

In overcrowded conditions especially in Fordsburg and Vrededorp in Johannesburg and George Town in Germiston, garment workers found accommodation in very poor and crowded conditions.[72]

Sometimes up to four garment workers shared single room and bed costing about a pound per month and used candle boxes as chairs. In addition the four girls had a bed, one cushion and two blankets to share and made their sheets and curtains of washed flour bags.[73]

A 1926 Wage Board report confirmed this tale.

> "the only way many of the girls who had no parents or friends to assist them could exist was by boarding at places where by sleeping

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[69] Letter ds. J.D. van Niekerk, to MP. Mr. A. Fourie, 5.2.1935. CAD, VWN 468.

[70] Inspection Report by Mr G Wood acting Inspector G Wood 30/9/1932 SBA, INSP 1/1/320.

[71] Report of Germiston Childrens Aid and Benevolent Society to Germiston Magistrate; 24.1.1936, CAD VWN 679.

[72] For a more detailed discussion of these suburbs see, E. Brink, 'Factory Meide....' In 1932 the European population of Vrededorp was 7674, that of Fordsburg 4727 and Mayfair 5707. Ibid.

[73] H Cornelius, 'Die Lewe van 'n Klerewerkster', GW/KW, November 1936.

3 in a bed and living on dry bread and black coffee, they could be accommodated at 6/6 to 7/6 a week."[74]

A decade later in 1936, an investigation done by Department of Labour officials, Miss. S.M. van den Berg and H.J.L. Verwoerd, into the housing and living conditions of young girls working in the clothing factories in Germiston revealed a similar situation.[75]

Many were living in 'iron and brick cottages, with no bathroom, crowded and lit by candle light'. The some 320 women who were investigated - the majority of whom originated from the country side - were found living in three distinct areas in and around Germiston. They congregated mostly in George Town, the slum area of Germiston, the better labourers' quarters of the town and in the surrounding more rural areas. The position in George Town seemed to be the worst.

"The area is a very congested one, and in almost every house, factory girls can be found living either with parents or in lodgings".[76]

The girls living in lodgings here paid 7/6 to 12/6 per week for their accommodation whilst those living in the semi-residential area of the town west of President Street in the so-called 'better labourers' quarters', paid from 12/6 to 20/- per week. At this price the girls preferred to prepare their own food in their rooms because food they received was 'te sleg' (too poor). Miss van den Berg explained;

"When asked what 'te sleg' (too poor) really meant, they said 'rice and potatoes."[77]

Garment workers living on rice and potatoes under these appalling circumstances had to fend for themselves on wages earned in industrial employment. These girls living without families found themselves in a more uncertain and perilous position than girls who still resided with their families. Although the latter were also exposed to considerable poverty which necessitated no mean sacrifices in order to ensure the survival

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[74] Wage Board Report into the Clothing Industry, 1926 as quoted in, 'Garment Workers demand a living wage', nd. GWU Bch 1.

[75] Information from CAD VWN 468, The report was compiled by Miss. S.M. van den Berg and H.J.L. Verwoerd. Hansi Pollak whose thesis on white women in Witwatersrand industries had been completed some years previously assisted in the investigation. See also E. Brink, Virtue is a Grace, seminar given at the ASSA Conference, Cape Town, July 1985.

[76] Rand Daily Mail, Germiston factory girls..... 22.4.1936, CAD VWN 468.

[77] Ibid. She also maintained that on such a poor diet the girls often lacked the energy to partake in any physical outdoor recreation and activity.

of their families, their existence was more secure. Girls without families however, would sometimes be forced to resort to other alternatives to escape their destitution and poverty.

Prostitution - From Frenchfontein to the Game Reserve

The wages of the garment workers were low, especially in the first and second year of employment, starting on some 17-20s per week. Board and lodging was expensive, ranging from 12-15s. per week for the cheapest but worst accommodation.[78] "I have no people here and and have to pay boarding", wrote Miss G. Green who boarded with a Mrs. Van Onselen in Mayfair in an appeal to the WTA after she had been unemployed for three weeks.

Such intense poverty forced these girls to restort to socially unacceptable means of supplementing their meagre wages. Johanna Cornelius described their plight having been on slack for several days per week.

> "Honger het ons gedryf om te doen wat ons nooit tevore gedoen het nie, naamlik steel. Ons gaan al vier in 'n winkel, die een koop iets vir 'n paar pennies en die ander neem hulle kans waar".
>
> (Hunger drove us to do what we never did before, that is to steal. We would all four go into a shop, the one buys something for a few pence and the other three benefit from the opportunity.)[79]

These four girls in order 'om nie te versleg' (not to be corrupted), eventually gave up their independence to find accommodation with families who allowed themselves to to house work in return for their lodgings.

Hester Cornelius' account hints at another publicly frowned upon way of making ends meet. A garment worker who had taken in two young girls as lodgers, was more explicit when responding to Hansi Pollak in 1931;

> "What are they to do if someone does not take them in cheaply? They will only go wrong and go through the same as I have had to do (i.e. an illegitimate child)",[80]

'Going wrong' was a very real alternative for destitute garment workers with no friends or relatives in the urban areas. Both the garment workers and the union realised the dangers. As early as 1920, albeit for propaganda purposes, Witwatersrand Tailors Association (WTA), forerunner of the GWU, declared:

> "We ask you to imagine <u>your sisters</u> in this struggle. We ask you to declare that the conditions of labour on the Rand for young girls shall be such as to safeguard them from the <u>terrors of prostitution.</u>" (their italics)[81]

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[78] Carnegie Commission, op cit, Vol.I, p.221 (A). see also Report S.M. v.d. Berg, Ibid.

[79] J. Cornelius, 'Die Lewe van 'n Klerewerkster.' GW/KW, November 1936.

[80] H Pollak, op cit, Addendum p.58. 'Case histories illustrating the living and home conditions in the form of investigators notes.'

[81] Pamphlet; Witwatersrand Tailors Association (hereafter WTA) 'The Tailors' Strike', 24.1.1920, GWU Aab 1.157.

In 1929 Mr. H. Lee, then president of the GWU saw the women as the charges of the union, for they ' who would be walking about the streets if not for the union.'[82] The GWU at least, was aware of the danger of garment workers going onto the streets;

> "....such wages lead to girls employed in tailoring being driven, in many instances on to the streets to become prostitutes to the deterioration of their health as they are not paid enough to provide even the most elementary necessities of life for themselves and in many cases their dependants."[83]

The forms and incidence of prostitution among white women and more significantly among white Afrikaner women migrants to the city, is difficult to assess. Observers, politicians and historians alike seemed to have preferred to draw a discrete veil over this discomforting subject which has been occassionally condemned but never explored. Says Stals;

> "Die verskynsel dat jong meisies, wat los van hulle ouerhuis in die stad kom werk het en met armoede en swak werks- en verblyfsomstandighede moes worstel, in onsedelikheid verval het, was vir die morele gewete van die Afrikaner, soos uitgedruk deur kerkorganisasies, politici en ander leiersfigure sorgwekkend en onaanvaarbaar."
>
> (The phenomenon that young girls, who had to come to work in the city divorced from their parents' home and had to struggle with poverty and poor working and living conditions, fell into immorality, was for the moral consciousness of the Afrikaner as expressed by church organisations, politicians and other leading figures, a matter of concern as well as unacceptable.)[84]

Van Onselen is one of the few who have attempted to lift the topic from its bed of obscurity. As he shows, ever since the early days prostitution was endemic to Johannesburg. Prior to the First World War the main body of prostitutes was composed of women who had migrated from Europe and America to Johannesburg in the wake of the gold rush and established themselves in what was then called 'Frenchfontein' in the centre of the city. After the War they were gradually replaced by young Afrikaner women originally from the local country side, who plied their trade in an area known during the thirties as the 'Game Reseve', which it was maintained 'on certain nights literally swarms with men who are looking for women'.[85] This change from foreign to local women is neatly encapsulated in the change in the name of the red light district of

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[82] Minutes, GWU meeting CEC, 22.7.1929. GWU, Aaa 1.

[83] Sweating Conditions in the Tailoring Industry, 6.8.1929., GWU, Aab 1.24.

[84] E.J.P. Stals, op cit, vol II, p.31.

[85] V.P. Steyn, Senior Probation Officer, Prostitution and Houses of Ill Fame in Johannesburg, 1939?. CAD, VWN 2017. (The 'Game Reserve' presumably was situated in the vicinity of Gold and Troy Streets in the city centre.)

Johannesburg. The name 'Frenchfontein', had a cosmopolitan ring which denoted the international origins of the men and women who made up this profession. By contrast the name 'Game Reserve', had connotations as an environment in which one had the liberty to hunt a protected species.

However, even Van Onselen is unable to shed much light on the female practitioners of this profession. During the 1910's one is fleetingly made aware of the existence of girls such as Maggie van Niekerk 'Trickey' Beukes and the Potgieter sisters, some of the first local Afrikaner women to become prostitutes in Johannesburg residing in Fordsburg and Vrededorp, but for the rest Van Onselen mainly concentrates rather on the male organisers operating in Frenchfontein.[86] These young women, Van Onselen maintains, were propelled into prostitution by their employment in menial jobs which;

> ".....had the disadvantage of pushing young women into the company of older and more experienced male labourers. This contact in the work place in turn gave rise to a certain degree of promiscuous behaviour and casual prostitution which in the hardest years of the depression more readily gave way to a full-time career in vice."[87]

While these circumstances were clearly factors in promoting prostitution, a range of other circumstances needs to be taken into account in order to get a full picture of the background to prostititution. Studies of prostitution elsewhere in America and Britain found that;

> "For young farm women who came to these towns, their isolation, low pay and vulnerability to unemployment easily led to prostitution."[88]

In South Africa similar factors which pushed young females into prostitution can be identified. Let us first turn to these. To begin with the seduction of the city in its guises seemed to have been considered the downfall of some young girls. Miss van den Berg, investigator for the Department of Labour, alluded to the spectre of prostitution and the 'blink-bedrog van die stad';

> "Moreover, the crowded and sordid conditions of the environment to which they return, combined with the craving of a number of girls for new and excitable experience, tend to make these girls suggestible to any type of diversion which offers."[89]

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[86] Undated letter, W. Cartlidge to Commissioner of Police, CAD, SAP 53. C. Van Onselen, New Babylon, New Nineveh, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. Ravan, Johannesburg 1982. vol.1. p.146.

[87] Ibid, p. 146.

[88] M. Vicinus, A Widening Sphere, Changing Roles of Victorian Women, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1977. Introduction, p. xv.

[89] Rand Daily Mail, Germiston Girls live on Rice and Potatoes, 22.4.1935, CAD, VWN 468.

Ds. Van Niekerk was equally aware of the vulnerability of these girls;

> "...die meisies buitendien aan allerlei versoekinge blootgestel word om hulle inkomste te vermeerder."
>
> (the girls in any event were subjected to all kinds of temptations to increase their income.)[90]

A garment worker living in a rented room at two pounds per month without any help highlighted these issues during an interview with Hansi Pollak in 1930;

> "I don't blame the girls who go on the street. Life's too hard. Many a night I've gone to bed hungry and cried my heart out, because I wanted a new pair of stockings or wanted to go to the bioscope."[91]

The garment workers were not only socially but economically vulnerable as well. On their meagre wages they could hardly keep body and soul together and when they were unemployed and had no one to turn to they had to resort to socially unacceptable ways of keeping alive. In addition, at times their growing dependence on wages and its accompanying rise in living standards and expectations would also serve to propel them into prostitution.

Finally, as Stals has argued, the disintegration of family life in the city also played a part. As he suggests;

> "Daarby was gesinsverbrokkeling in Johannesburg ook aan die eenkant die gevolg van ouers wat aan mekaar ontrou geword het en aan die ander kant weer die oorsaak dat daar sedelike verval by die kinders ingetree het."
>
> (The disintegration of the family in Johannesburg was on the one hand the result of the infidelity of the parents and on the other the cause of the moral decline which manifested itself in the children.)[92]

Although stoutly condemned, the presence and practice of prostitution in Johannesburg during the twenties and thirties was not thoroughly investigated or researched.[93] Information on prostitution during this period therefore is sparse. The situation is remedied to some degree by a lenghthy report written towards the end of the thirties by a Johannesburg

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[90] Letter van Niekerk to A. Fourie, Ibid.

[91] H Pollak, op cit, p.59.

[92] E.J,P. Stals, op cit, vol II, p.32.

[93] Freed's sociological investigation of the problem published in 1949 does however shed some light on the problem during the late forties. Cf. L. Freed, The Problem of European Prostitution in Johannesburg, Juta, Cape Town, 1949.

probation officer Mr. V.P. Steyn, on 'Prostitution and Houses of Ill-Fame in Johannesburg.'[94]

The total number of prostitutes in Johannesburg during the 1930's is difficult to estimate, but according to Steyn's calculations, an average of some 90 prostitutes were arrested for soliciting per year, totalling 557 women from 1932 to 1937.[95] It was estimated by the police that at the time of Steyn's investigation some 300 to 400 prostitutes were operating on the streets, to him a relatively small number given the history of Johannesburg as a mining camp.[96] In this report he identified four kinds of prostitutes. Besides the part-time and full-time prostitutes he also identified the mistress and 'fille de joie' or woman of easy virtue. The latter he maintained was not 'adverse to spending a weekend with a man if he had a car and can provide the necessary entertainment'. These girls usually had the reputation of being very good company and having the habit of borrowing money but not repaying it after having 'granted intimacy'.[97] Some garment workers fell into this category because they were forced to take a 'gentleman friend' for as one maintained;

> "its better being with one man than being dependent on many", one garment worker admitted.[98]

Steyn found that some 65% of all prostitutes operating in Johannesburg were part time prostitutes. They were mainly 'fille de joie' who had drifted into prostitution as well as girls who due to a sudden economic crisis had resorted to prostitution to survive. Having later found employment again they did not give up this source of additional income. Steyn was of the opinion that;

> ".....actually these girls gradually adopt a mode of living that demands greater expenditure than they can afford and that the temptation of securing additional income in this way is too great for them to withstand, especially when one considers the general moral tone of the environment in which they live.'[99]

Peggy Sachs' reservations against factory work echoed this point. According to Steyn she 'states she will have to resort to the other life

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[94] V.P. Steyn, Prostitution ..... Ibid. (This box dealt mainly with general welfare correspondence.) Much more investigation into this topic is needed though.

[95] V.P. Steyn, op cit, p.9.

[96] Ibid. Between January 1932 and June 1938 557 women had been arrested for soliciting.

[97] Ibid, p.5.

[98] H Pollak, op cit, p.210. Pollak observed that when they could not find accommodation they could afford or lodgings with friends or relatives, some garment workers were therefore <u>forced</u> into immorality. Pollak's emphasis. Ibid, p.189.

[99] V.P. Steyn, Prostitution..... Ibid.

to provide properly for herself'. So too, did Dora Pretorius (25) originally from Lichtenburg who, when she was repeatedly visited by the probation officer eventually told him 'to go to hell as she would please herself.' He observed, alluding to the observations made above;

> "I fear she took to this life because she was not prepared to live on the small wage earned in a factory. "[100]

Steyn also found married women in the category of part timers who resorted to prostitution 'as a result of sudden emergency consequent upon illness, unemployment of the breadwinner or some similar cause'. Mrs. Catherine Higgens (29), a mother of 3 children serves as an example of married women resorting to prostitution as well. As a factory worker she had the reputation of a fast and excellent worker, but when her husband was unemployed resorted to prostitution. She had supported her family on her her factory wages, but when she too lost her job, she went on the street again.[101] In Germiston, a Mrs. Nieuwenhuizen of President Street, probably into part time prostitution as well, seemed to have done better with her 'immoral life'. She was unemployed in receipt of a five pound grant for her children per month and paid four pounds per month the two rooms she rented. Although her husband was midway through a 6 year prison sentence and she had only a pound a month to live on, she was in possession of a new bicycle, a kitchen dresser and a 'fairly extensive wardrobe' a social worker observed.[102]

As van Onselen remarked, part-time prostitutes were often forced by economic circumstances and the adoption of a standard of living which demanded every increasing expenditures to solicit men. Freed also found in his study of prostitution in Johannesburg that the majority of prostitutes he investigated, had originally been employed in clothing, chemical, box and trunk factories, tearooms and milk bars.[103]

Women who first took up prostitution as part-timers, would eventually drift into full-time prostitution. They were usually very poorly educated, in many cases originally from rural families, aged from 14-60 and not interested in steady employment, but took up casual work in cafes or for example, worked as caterers as the dog races. Peggy Sachs again serves as a good example. Besides protesting against low factory wages, she also had a crippled foot which prevented her from standing as long as required in a factory. Winnie Henny (42), who was a full-time prostitute was also too old to take up other employment and in addition her appearance militated against her entering domestic service. By contrast Joey Cloete (22), a 'very well-known prostitute' was excluded from socially acceptable work in a tearoom or similar occupation where she

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[100] Ibid.

[101] V.P. Steyn, Prostitution.... Ibid.

[102] Senior Probation Officer to Germiston Magistrate, 5.10.1936, CAD, VWN 679

[103] L. Freed, The Problem of European Prostitution..... p. 179-180 and 195.

would be able to earn enough to maintain her standard of living, because she was too well-known in her profession as a prostitute.[104]

Garment workers were acqutely aware of how close to the brink of prostitution poverty could bring them. So was their community. Thelma Collins was 'a good type of girl' serves as an example. She tried to survive on her factory wage, but could only do so by living in Gold Street, 'a part of town where many prostitutes live'.[105] She was continually pestered by men, as was Johanna Cornelius, national organiser of the GWU when she lived on Troy Street and had to return home late at night after attending union meetings.[106]

The very precariousness of their situation made garment workers extremely sensitive to the supposed slur on their 'decency' and 'respectibility'. Thus they saw government notices put up in factories detailing the benefits for unmarried mothers under the law as a reflection on this respectibility and regularly tore down such notices from the walls in the factory;

> "Does the government think we're the class of girls who get illegitimate children? It's a disgrace to put up such a notice when only decent girls are employed."[107]

The garment workers were 'decent' girls, who did honourable work of which they were proud and which helped to reduce the poverty in their homes. It would seem that they were seen as being not 'decent' in many cases only by virtue of their employment in factories. Pollert similarly found in a study of British factory girls that;

> "Sexually the label 'factory girl' did not give them as high a price in men's eyes and they forced themselves to accept that they were at the bottom of the labour market both in class and in sexual terms."[108]

Given the prospect of no being seen as 'decent' by virtue of their occupation, the garment workers strove to underline their decency and respectability in all respects. A main theme during the strikes was accusations on behalf of the community that the factory girls were not

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[104] Ibid, It would seem that waitressing and prostitution at times went hand in hand. "Unless there is a state aided hostel for such girls they have to look to undesirable methods of augmenting their incomes in order to be able to live." Memo, Training at Housecraft Schools, 22.10.1937, CAD, UOD 92.

[105] V.P. Steyn, Prostitution..... CAD VWN 2017.

[106] Interview 35 , Anna Scheepers.

[107] H. Pollak, op cit, p.181.

[108] A. Pollert, Girls, Wives, Factory Lives, Macmillan Press, London, 1981, p.99.

decent solely by virtue of their striking.[109] The garment workers were aware of the fact that they were seen as not decent and respectable. As Sophie Meyer maintained;

> "In die fabrieke is net soveel ordentlike meisies en vrouens as in enige ander plek en die man wat n fabriekwerkster kry vir 'n vrou kan trots wees daarop, want dan het hy 'n maat gekry wat verstaan wat dit is om skouer aan die wiel te sit en deur dik en dun saam met hom in die lewe deur te gaan."
>
> (In the factories there are just as many decent girls and women as in any other place and the man who finds a factory worker as his wife can be proud, because then he has found a friend who can understand what it is to put the shoulder to the wheel and to go with him through thick and thin in life.)[110]

Addressing a meeting in Belgravia concerning the erection of a hostel for young working girls, Johanna Cornelius elaborated;

> "Tussen ons fabrieksmeisies is daar baie ordentlike en edele dogters en ons staan nie agteruit vir julle nie. Ons is gewillig om ons werk te doen, maar ons eis om met respek behandel te word."
>
> (Amongst us factory girls are many decent and noble daughters and we do not stand back for you. We are willing to do out work, but we damand to be treated with respect.)[111]

Sophie and Johanna's defense of the garment workers as workers labouring in honourable employment illustrates the measure in which the GWU sought to and succeeded in elevating the working class consciousness of these women. They were not doing work not befitting their social station, as suggested by Afrikaner nationalists, but they could take pride in the position they had acquired in the social structure of their community. Yet the ambiguity and unease with which they viewed their situation is suggested also by Johanna Cornelius' hint at the lack of respectibility of two Erasmus girls who had joined forces with the nationalists against the union.

> "These two girls do not look very respectable, their appearance is that of street girls."[112]

Poverty therefore propelled a minority of garment workers into socially unacceptable ways of earning a living of which prostitution was the most significant and the most frowned upon. Over time Frenchfontein became the 'Game Reserve' when, after the First World War Afrikaner girls re-

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[109] E. Brink, Factory Meide....

[110] S. Meyer, Ope Brief aan MP van die New York Klerefabriek, in GW/KW, October 1939, p. 9.

[111] Ons eie Korrespondent, Rykes van Belgravia weier om in die omgewing van fabrieksmeisies te woon, in GW/KW, June 1939, p. 9.

[112] Letter, J. Cornelius to S. Sachs, 7.3.1939, GWU, Bcc 1.10.

placed their foreign counterparts as the local constituents of the profession Here women who were not mistresses or 'filles de joie', operated as part-time or full-time prostitutes, much to the horror and censure of Afrikaner clergy and politicians and community leaders. However, in this condemnation often the women who made up the profession were as well as their motivations for doing so were lost sight of, an omission which has now hopefully been partially rectified.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to determine the extent to which the poverty experienced by garment workers on the Witwatersrand during the inter war years had shaped their lives and experience. It was attempted to show how these women firstly as mothers, especially with young dependent children, had difficulties in providing for their families when their husbands could not earn enough to support the family. Secondly, the contribution of the garment workers as daughters within the economic structure of the family once they attained a wage earning age, was analysed. The plight of single garment workers lodging with strangers in the city was looked at to see how they strove to combat the poverty they experienced. Finally, prostitution a threat which confronted a minority of garment workers in Johannesburg during the thirties was examined to ascertain its causes, extent amongst and influence on the lives of the garment workers.

This poverty and the ways in which the garment workers coped with it had a profound effect not only at home but at work as well. At home it contributed to a change in the roles of various members of the family, the father as previous head of the family having to relinquish some of his authority. The children, especially the daughters, gained in stature, independence and importance as major breadwinners in the family. In the work place a shared experience of poverty nurtured a a feeling of solidarity and conscience amongst the women themselves. Their experiences, especially during the strikes in the clothing industry which took place during the Depression, contributed to the nascence of a consciousness of themselves not only as workers, but as women workers who could work and agitate to the benefit of one another. As Johanna Cornelius succinctly explained;

> "What can we Afrikaner women do to better conditions on the land by remaining there? Nothing! In the towns we can help our fellow women workers who stream into the factories for a better life."[113]

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[113] J. Cornelius, Why I Left my Home on the Land to come and work in a factory, 1938. GWU, Bch 1.

Table 1.
Average Annual Wages in the Manufacturing Industry on the Witwatersrand, 1920-1945

Industry	'19/20	'24/25	'29/30	'34/35	'37/38	'44/45
agric.produce	265	309	300	210	196	411
stone,clay,etc	279	301	310	266	267	375
Wood work	274	282	311	314	321	392
metal engineering	357	304	322	317	311	405
food & drink	273	256	236	209	182	318
clothing	161	145	132	112	117	236
books & printing	244	279	313	295	299	366
vehicles & parts	249	206	223	227	246	367
furniture	235	183	209	222	251	377
chemical & drugs	284	281	267	275	216	345
surgical,scient.	216	234	216	247	306	381
heat,light,power	285	363	387	371	311	433
leather	161	127	129	117	142	288
building,contract	309	292	311	289	310	414
other	406	235	237	257	246	303
mining	485	375	375	385	407*	431

Source; Industrial Census 1920-45 for average annual wages of the manufacturing industry. Mining: Official Yearbook of the Union of South Africa, no 24, 1948.
* for the year 1938/39.