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THE DEGRADATION OF SKILL?

UNDERSTANDING THE ACQUISITION, DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF 'SKILLS' IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN CAPITALISM

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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DECLARATION

I, **Themba Tshabalala,** candidate number **319857**, hereby declare that this research report is my own original work. It is hereof submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Development Studies programme at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This report has not previously been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other University. Where I have used the work of other authors, I have properly acknowledged them and I have not copied any author or scholar's work with the intention of passing it as my own.

Signed: ----------

On-------- Day of---------- 2018

Contents

Abstract 8
Chapter 1 9
Introduction 9
1.1 Background and Context 9
1.2 Research Area and Topic 10
1.4 Rationale 10
1.5 Research Question(s) 12
1.5.1 Specific 12
1.5.2 General 12
1.6 Scope and Structure of Chapters 12
Chapter 2 14
Literature Review 14
Chapter 3 22
Methodology 22
1.7 Respondent Details 22
1.8 Data Collection 24
1.9 Data Analysis 25
Chapter 4 30
The Nature of Work in the Johannesburg Apparel Sector 30
1.10 Varieties of Labour and Varieties management in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry 31
1.11 The Division of Labour in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry 37
1.12 Scientific Management in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry 42
Chapter 5 53
The Nature of 'Skill' in the Johannesburg Apparel Sector 53
1.13 'Skill' as Discourse in Johannesburg Apparel 53
1.14 The Nature of 'Skill' in Johannesburg Apparel 56
1.15 The Discourse of 'Skills', Power and the South African Capitalist State 75
Chapter 6 82
Conclusions 82
References 84
Appendices 87

Dedication

To mother. Thank you for your sacrifices.

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To my family, thank you for supporting me through all the difficulties and for understanding and sympathizing. Zandile, Simphiwe, Nomthandazo, Cindy, Amu, Siya and Jabu. Thank you.

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To my supervisor, thank you for always being there and for literally holding my hand through this tumultuous journey. It was rough, but I was blessed to be mentored by a man of your stature. Thanks Ben.

To God.

Abstract

This research project has attempted to understand and articulate the relationship between 'capitalist deskilling' and the post-apartheid discourse of skills development. It has engaged the contradiction that seems to exist in the current 'skills' discourse, using a labour process approach. Put briefly, if all capitalist societies inevitably degrade skilled-labour for the purpose of increasing surplus-value, why is South Africa, as a capitalist society, constantly lamenting the lack of skills? What does it mean for management to complain about not having skills, if having them may mean fewer profits? Why, for the past three decades to date have there been concerted efforts, from government, industry and education to produce skilled-labour if skilled-labour has the potential of demanding higher wages? Using the ideas of Braverman (1974) on the capitalist labour process and its effects on skilled-labour as an entering-wedge, the findings from this project have articulated the state of 'skills' in democratic South Africa. Chisholm (1983) has argued that most of the discourse (and ensuing practise) that has arisen from the drive to revive skilled labour in South Africa was characterised by what she refers to as 'technicist' interpretations to explaining and dealing with the skills-impasse. These (in our generation) are typically initiatives to improve the education system for the training of skilled labour and create synergy between society, education, industry and government. These are 'technicist' because they focus on the 'technical' aspects of the skills impasse. They emphasize that the problem of skills is simply a technical discrepancy, that if pedagogy, transition-into-the-workplace strategies, labour and educational policies around skills are improved, this will lead to the eradication of the problem with all its ramifications. These approaches do not consider what the ideological and social dimensions of the skills-impasse may be and hence this predicament may plague South African society for a long time to come. Choosing skilled labour from the apparel sector as a case, this project has sought to provide a socio-ideological approach towards articulating the state of skills in South Africa. I argue that the discourse of 'skills' is a governmental strategy used by the South African capitalist state to rationalize the risks of free-market capitalism, to further segment the working classes and to transfer the responsibility of a lack of adequate social protection to the masses. The framework for this project is qualitative; the strategy is a case study with 'ethnographies of work' of respondents from the Johannesburg apparel sector. Open-ended interviews were used to collect data and discourse analysis was used to argue that the 'skills-debate' is a discourse in and of itself.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Since the inception of the new political dispensation, and even before, South Africa has been obsessed with the discourse of 'skills shortage'. Addressing skills is held up as a way to fulfil the promise of eliminating "poverty, unemployment and inequality" (National Planning Commission, 2011 cited in Reddy, Bhorat, Powell, Visser and Arends, 2016, pg. 14). From government initiatives such as the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (2009), National Skills Development Strategy III (2010), National Development Plan (2011) and the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (2013), one finds strategies that are driven by the discourse of 'skills'; whether as 'shortage' or 'development' or otherwise. This discourse is characterised by two main elements, namely, an inflexible labour market and a lack of skills (Allais, 2012, pg. 633). These, it is argued, are the building blocks of the unemployment problem and the slow growth problem in South Africa. In other words,unemployment and slow growth is due to people not having 'skills' at all, or not having enough to be absorbed into the labour market.

Historically, there have been two main approaches in the discourse of 'skills'. The first are 'demand-side' approaches (i.e. those that argue that there is a mismatch between the skills that people have and the demands of industry, for example Reddy et al. (2016). The second are 'supply-side' approaches i.e. those that argue that institutions that produce skilled labour are not properly run, the curriculum does not satisfy the changing nature of labour demand, not enough young people deem artisanship as an attractive career etc. such as Mukora (2007) Wildschut, Meyer and Akoojee (2015), Wildschut and Meyer (2016) and Mbatha et al (2014). Another example of a supply side argument is the DHET report which blames the lack of skills on the failure of artisanship (DHET, 2013, cited in Mbatha et al, 2014 pg. ix)

Allais (2011, pg.1) argues that the notion of 'skill' cannot be accepted as universal, since 'skill', is politically and socially constructed. Since the discourse of 'skills' fails to adequately explain what it means by 'skills', what is the nature of the 'skills' that are lamented and desired by South African Capitalism today?

1.2 Research Area and Topic

This project will be based in labour and the production process, using the ideas of Braverman (1974) on the division of labour and its effects as a starting point.

Topic: The Degradation of Skill? Understanding the Acquisition, Development and Maintenance of 'Skills' in the Context of South African Capitalism.

1.3 Purpose (Aims and Objectives)

This research project will attempt to understand and articulate the relationship between 'capitalist deskilling' and the post-apartheid discourse of skills-development. To do this, it will engage the contradiction that seems to exist in the current 'skills' discourse, using a labour process approach. This contradiction is; if all capitalist societies inevitably degrade skilled-labour for the purpose of increasing surplus-value, why is capitalist South Africa constantly lamenting the lack of skills? What does it mean for management to complain about not having skills, if having them may mean fewer profits? Why, for the past three decades to date have there been concerted efforts, from government, industry and education to produce skilled labour if it has the potential of demanding higher wages? Using the ideas of Braverman (1974) on the capitalist labour process and its effects on skilled labour, as an entering-wedge, the findings from this project may enable one to articulate the state of 'skills' in democratic South Africa.

I argue that the discourse of skills is a strategy by South African capitalists to rally for skilled labour while simultaneously ignoring the contradictory nature of capitalist labour relations. What I mean by this is that SA capitalism realises the importance of skilled-labour but wants to have it under capitalist terms, i.e. a fetish for accumulation alongside a cheap, disposable labour force that is simultaneously 'skilled' enough to keep the enterprise running. It may very well be that 'skill' cannot harmoniously exist alongside capitalism. Of course, South African industry is quite different from the context in which Braverman (1974) first formulated his arguments and therefore, his ideas cannot be taken as a given.

1.4 Rationale

This proposed research project is situated firstly and primarily 'in knowledge' in the sense that it is critical, interpretive and evaluative of the applicability of Braverman's ideas to the South African context and of the discourse of 'skills'-shortage. It is

important to consider these ideas as this may shed light on the persistence of the skills impasse and what the root(s) of the problem are (Van Zyl, 2017, pg. 1).

Chisholm (1983, pg. 369) has argued that the discourse of skills-shortage (and its ensuing practise), is characterised by what she refers to as 'technicist' interpretations to explaining and trying to deal with the skills impasse. These are typically initiatives to improve the education system for the training of artisans (for example Mbatha, Wildschut, Mncwango, Ngazimbi and Twalo, 2014) and create synergy between society, education, industry and government (for example Wildschut and Meyer, 2016). These are 'technicist' because they focus on the technical aspects of the skills impasse, emphasising that the problem of skills is merely an institutional discrepancy and that if pedagogy, transition-into-the-workplace-strategies and labour and educational policies around skills are improved, this will lead to the eradication of the problem with all its ramifications. These approaches do not consider what the socio-ideological dimensions of the skills impasse are and hence this predicament may plague our society for a long time to come (Chisholm, 1983).

Understanding what 'skill' is for South African capitalism may enable one to understand the 'why' and 'how' of the state of the skills-crisis more specifically and the state of 'skills' more broadly in South Africa today. Since the skills discourse has two dimensions, a demand side (industry) and a supply side (education and training), this project will focus only on the first aspect, which is the demand for skill. The focus on demand follows Braverman and the Marxist tradition of focusing on the capitalist labour process as it occurs and how it deals with skills. In other words, this project, analyses skill after is has been received by industry and what subsequently happens to it. More pointedly, this project looks at "successful skills-acquisition" and what this looks like in capitalist industry.

Secondarily, this project is located 'in the world' (Van Zyl, 2017, pg. 1) since it is situated in a context (South African industry) and seeks to provide empirical data on what the South African capitalist labour process looks like and how it conceptualises and puts 'skills' to work.

1.5 Research Question(s)

1.5.1 Specific

"How are 'skills' acquired, developed and maintained by Johannesburg based workers in the apparel sector?"

1.5.2 General

Is there Scientific Management in the South African apparel sector? If this is so to what extent? How is 'skill' organised, managed or controlled in an apparel factory? Understanding skill in a specific sector may shed light on how 'skills' are defined in South Africa. It may also provide insight into the history, current state and future of South African skilled-labour in general. Who gains and who loses from the conceptualisation and subsequent operationalisation of 'skill'?

1.6 Scope and Structure of Chapters

This project is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which has set out the background and context, the research area and topic, the rationale for doing this study and the research question. In this chapter I have attempted to show the significance of this project both to theory or knowledge and practise in the debate about skills. The second chapter is the literature review where I present the deskilling thesis or 'discourse of deskilling' as argued by Braverman (1974) and juxtapose it with three bodies of literature that either critique or agree with Braverman. In this chapter I set out the argument that argues that skills cannot co-exist with capitalism and show its pitfalls to pave the way for the findings of this project. In the third chapter, the methodology, I explain the methods I used to gather my sample, to collect my data and to analyse it. Chapters 4 and 5 are the empirical chapters. In the fourth chapter, 'The Nature of work in the Johannesburg Apparel sector', I set out to show how contrary to the deskilling thesis, there is no homogenous 'labour' and uniform management, the one being inherently opposed to the other, but there are varieties of labour and varieties of management. Here I also show the extent of the division of labour and scientific management in the Johannesburg apparel labour market to illustrate how capitalism is not the same everywhere. This chapter is primarily an analysis and critique of the discourse of deskilling as propagated Braverman. In Chapter 5, 'The Nature of skill in the Johannesburg Apparel Sector', I now move to interrogate the conceptualisation of 'skill' and argue that this has a bearing on how 'skill' is recognised, valued and rewarded. I begin by arguing that the debate about

‘skill’ is a discourse in and of itself with ideological and social ramifications. I then move to illustrate that skill is different for different people by using my respondents’ understandings of what constitutes ‘skill’. This is significant in that if only one understanding of skill is propagated, that conceptualisation can favour only certain interest groups while disadvantaging others. Following from this, the chapter ends by arguing that the discourse of skill is a governmental strategy used by the SA state to rationalise the risks of free-market capitalism. The last chapter concludes by summarising the arguments in the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Three bodies of literature have been identified to show the significance of this project. Namely, those that deal with historical craftsmanship, those that illustrate the weaknesses in Braverman's argument, and those that deal with supply-side approaches to the 'skills' impasse.

Three works were reviewed which I refer to as situated in the tradition of historic craftsmanship or the deskilling thesis; Braverman (1974), The Craftsman (Sennett, 2008) and The Decline in Craftsmanship (Percy, 1954). These works argue that what craftsmanship (skilled-labour) is known to be in this age is a far cry from what it used to be, highlighting what has changed due to the advent of global capitalism.

Braverman (1974, pg. 94) argues that the 'degradation of skills' is an inherent, defining characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. What Braverman means is that wherever and whenever capitalism is, there will be found diminishing rather than increasing levels of skill. By the 'degradation of skill' he means the cheapening of workers' skills through the gradual, inevitable loss of craft knowledge and autonomous control over the work process by skilled labour, in exchange for a fully thought-out work process that requires minimal to no skill to perform (Braverman, 1974) For Braverman*, the* 'capitalist mode' of production is the systematic, deliberate, division of labour into minute tasks, which ultimately leads to the cheapening of skill in the name of economic efficiency and capitalist accumulation (Braverman, 1974, pg. 57). In the other words, the division of labour is *the* only way that capitalist enterprises accumulate capital.

What is the 'division of labour'? For Braverman (1974, pg. 50) there are two levels of this process; the 'social division of labour' and the 'manufacture division of labour'. In the former (which characterizes all known societies), members of societies create various specialised occupations or 'crafts' in order to produce goods and services. It is this form of 'division'; that gave birth to the craftsman (who for Braverman is the ideal form of skilled-labour) (Braverman, 1974, pg. 50). The latter, is a further subdivision of labour (following from the social division) that is unique to capitalism, in that it is "the subdivision of 'productive specialities' into limited operations"

(Braverman, 1974, pg. 49). In other words, whereas pre-capitalist societies 'naturally' divided their occupations into 'crafts', with each category of workers banding together to form guilds that service communities through creative productivity, capitalist organisations take a further step by subdividing the performance of the work traditionally performed by one craftsman, into limited tasks, each performed by different workers. So for Braverman, the difference between a craft (by extension, a skill) and a task is that it takes a collection of tasks to make up a craft. Therefore, a 'skilled' worker in this narrative, is one who (alone) is able to undertake a collection of related tasks in the production of goods and services.

Braverman (1974, pg. 57) argues that through the manufacture division of labour, craftsmanship (or historical skilled-labour, which possesses the generalised knowledge of the production process) becomes not only "unnecessary" but also a clear impediment, a spanner in the capitalist mode of production (which must be degraded or cheapened, if capital is to increase its accumulative capacity). One may summarise this narrative by concluding that for Braverman there is a conspiracy by individual capitalists to collectively, deliberately and consciously enact work processes that will render the skills of workers superfluous, thus giving credence to a myriad of practices that favour management and are anti-labour.

According to Braverman, there are three gains to the capitalist from the division of labour in general; productivity (from the social division), management and control of the labour process (from the manufacturing division) and lastly, cheap, disposable labour since different individuals can be hired, fired and paid according to their ability to carry out these fractured tasks. For Braverman (1974), this last gain is the most compelling reason for its popularity in all capitalist enterprises and societies.

To sustain and maximise the manufacture division of labour, Taylorism or Scientific Management is used as a control mechanism, an underlying philosophy to force workers to acquiesce to the capitalist method of production (Braverman, 1974).Scientific Management, is a three-step process that involves "the dissociation of the labour process from the skills of the workers, the separation of conception from execution and the use of this monopoly over (craft) knowledge to control each step of the labour process and its mode of execution" (Braverman, 1974, pg. 77). In the first step 'managers' collect all the scientific knowledge and tricks of the trade by closely

observing workers and finding the “one best way” to do the work. In the second step, they give themselves the burden of systematizing this knowledge then breaking it apart into separate tasks that will serve as ready-to-use instructions simply to be applied by workers. Then by virtue of this ‘industrial disenfranchisement’, managers gain the legitimacy and the authority to control the work and the workers. It is important to note that according to this narrative, this is a historical process that began in the United States then spread to other parts of the world (Braverman, 1974, pg. 61). This would mean that in this age, when one enters a capitalist organisation, the one who is skilled will eventually lose their skill and the one who is not skilled will remain unskilled as the work process is already degraded and degrading. Also, the normalization of the authority of management in designing and controlling the work process would for Braverman have begun here. This would also mean that work design and human resource management departments are the auxiliaries of this process. These observations will prove useful later when we critically evaluate the concepts of control and consent according to the deskilling thesis.

An inevitable consequence of Scientific Management as argued by the deskilling thesis, is that there are different sites and individuals to carry out the two components of production (which are ‘supposed to be’ united in one individual);thinkers (managers, who handle conception)and doers (workers, who handle execution) (Braverman, 1974 pg. 86).Braverman (1974, pg. 94) further argues that craftsmanship was destroyed during the period of the rise of Scientific Management to transform men into cogs and levers, to strip them of craft knowledge and autonomy. In other words, Scientific Management transforms men into machines or at least parts of a machine, giving credence to the paying of low wages and lowering the time it would normally take to produce a commodity, thus increasing the rate of surplus accumulation (Braverman, 1974, pg. 94).

The above theoretical framework ultimately leads Braverman to declare that the capitalist work process has not only industrial but also, social-organisational implications. On the industrial side, what makes an occupation valuable, what makes an individual to be considered as ‘skilled’ is the ratio between conception and execution of the work process (Braverman, 1974, pg. 90). The more conception in relation to execution that the job entails, the more valuable and prestigious it is and vice versa. Hence an industrial engineer gets paid more than a laboratory technician

Braverman would argue, because he designs or conceives the work process but the technician merely executes it. So for Braverman, it is the work process itself, alone that determines workplace bureaucracy and hierarchy, levels of pay, status and prestige. This will be revisited in greater detail in Chapter 2.

On the social side, the way that work is organised not only has technical ramifications (the degradation of skill) but also has long-term social-organisational implications in the sense that as new opportunities for employment (i.e. low-skill entry level jobs that are already degraded and less costly to management) open at the bottom of the pyramid and those in the higher tiers of the organisation gain some form of upward mobility (entering the "planning, lay-out, drafting departments or foremanship" departments) fewer and fewer people permeate the realm of 'skill', thus the class structure remains intact (Braverman, 1974, pg. 89). In other words, the degradation of skill in the long term evolves or evolved (historically) into the degradation of the working class (leaving it with cheap technique, low value jobs and lack of scientific knowledge) and the maintenance of that degradation so that the 'skills 'only belong to the bourgeois along with status, prestige and power. So then in this narrative, the South African discourse of 'skills-shortage' would be a technical excuse, an apolitical, rationale for why economic equality cannot be achieved i.e. because the working class lacks skills or the skills they already have are not congruent to the needs of an ever changing labour market. The result then is a wild goose-chase for attaining skills through education and training, which will only keep those in the working class in the working class and those in the capitalist class in the capitalist class, since the work process is designed to deskill (those with the skills) and 'unskill' (those seeking to gain skills). Theoretically, the above framework seems sensible, but is this the actual nature of work in the Johannesburg apparel industry? The findings in this project have argued otherwise.

Sennett (2008, pg. 20), describes craftsmanship as the condition of doing 'good work for its own sake', being engaged not as a means to an end but as an end in and of itself. So the archaic craftsman developed skill, not to satisfy the needs of capital but simply in the spectrum between 'problem finding and problem solving' (Sennett, 2008). Contemporary skilled-labour cannot experience this due to the pressures of capitalist-accumulation; as a result, skill deteriorates. Sennett (2008), identifies three problematic ways by which capitalist society has organised craftsmanship. Firstly, the

manner in which people are motivated to work well is either through competition or ‘instrumental cooperation’ (i.e. teamwork for achieving a target, in a set time). The former erodes the ethic for practical rather than instrumental engagement. The latter erodes the spectrum between problem-solving and problem finding, wherein skill is consummated (Sennett, 2008, pg. 52). Secondly, the manner by which ‘skill’ is organised and conceptualised is intricately linked with the operation of a machine, which (as argued by Braverman, 1974) promotes the separation of conception and execution or what Sennett would refer to as the fracturing of head and hand (2008, p.52). What makes this second problem significant is that human learning (and subsequent mastery) occurs by doing. This ‘doing’ must be conceptualised in the mind and then find expression through the (same) hand (Sennett, 2008). Lastly, the modern craftsman (or skilled-labourer) is forced to either manufacture for ‘correctness’ (quality) (which means a longer time for production, fewer units sold etc.) or for ‘practicality’ (which means manufacturing as much as ‘is possible’ for the demands of a given market in a given time) which may mean that quality standards may be traded for selling (Sennett, 2008).

Percy (1954, pg. 1) argues that it was in the medieval guilds of Western Europe that one finds “the ideal condition of craftsmanship”. These ancient skilled-labourers were trained over long periods of time through seven year apprenticeships and mostly were born into the craft and it is in this way that the ethic of quality (rather than quantity) was inculcated (Percy, 1954, pg. 1). Craftsmanship also had a moral aspect to it in that all craftsmen took pride in producing good quality work for a ‘fair price’ (Percy, 1954, pg. 1). In other words, the pressures of accumulation and the troubles of perfect competition, then not prevalent, allowed the craftsman to find the perfect balance between quality and quantity, what one may refer to as “getting better” while getting by (Sennett, 2008, pg. 24).

Percy (1954) attributes this to the growing role of the merchant in western European economy, who then acted as a middle man between the craftsman and the people. The merchant, in his drive for accumulation (whom Percy posits as ancestor to the modern capitalist) transformed the craftsman from community service-man to an early form of contracted labour, whose livelihood depended upon the rate at which he could produce (1954, pg. 183). Secondly, due the market pressures that came with the emergent (capitalist) economy, the relationship between master and apprentice

changed from that of father and son (in some instances father and adopted-son) to that of manager and wage labourer (Percy, 1954, pg. 182). This then had the effect of lessening the time that it usually took to train craftsmen, promoting exploitation of hired labour and transforming craftsmanship, from a noble occupation, to a means of mere subsistence, transforming the ancient skilled-labourer, 'from craftsman to tradesman', a "pawn of trade" (Percy, 1954, pg. 183).

These works posit an inversely proportional relationship between capitalism and craftsmanship (or 'skilled' labour). They argue (at least for the Western European context) that where capitalism is, skilled-labour (in its most 'original' form) cannot survive. These essentially argue that 'skill' cannot coexist with capitalism. This project has sought to interrogate this discourse by arguing for a nuanced view of capitalist labour relations and their effect on skill. In this work, I suggest that the relationship between capital and skill is not so linear or simple, since SA industry is in actual fact demanding 'skill' and labour in the Johannesburg apparel sector actually has retained their skills throughout their relationship with capital. I argue that the focus on skill as something that does not exist, or that needs to be further developed has less to do with eroding skill in order to rationalise the payment of low wages (according to the deskilling thesis), but has more to do with protecting capitalism from being critiqued as a system that can only cater for a select few while disenfranchising the majority.

Webster (1985) and Littler and Salaman (1982) both caution one to not take the ideas of Braverman as gospel. Foremost among their critique is the idea that Braverman treats labour like a homogenous group that lacks any sense of agency as well as resistance to deskilling. Webster (1985) uses Marx (1867) who differentiates between two types of production, manufacture and machinofacture. Manufacture is the production process whereby craft or hand production is subdivided into minute tasks (Webster, 1985, pg. 4). Machinofacture on the other hand is the stage whereby large scale industrial production is primarily machine-based, with the worker being a mere "appendage" of the machine (Webster, 1985, pg. 4). For Webster, Braverman fails to acknowledge that as much as the capitalist mode of production tries to suppress the worker, its inherently contradictory nature produces interesting effects such as giving workers the ability to resist deskilling since "real subordination of the working classes is never complete" (Webster, 1985. Pg. 10; Littler and Salaman, 1982). The basing of production mostly on machines gives workers leverage to resist the despotism of

management by organising themselves into trade unions to collectively bargain for their needs (Webster, 1985, pg. 12). This point is critical for this project in that it illustrates the need to contextualise 'capitalisms' and to take into account how labour has agency in capitalist relations of production and can resist or intensify its own domination by management. This study has attempted to do just this. This project, though using Braverman as a theoretical lens, in the words of Burawoy (1998, pg. 16), seeks not so much to confirm his argument as to refute and add nuance "in order to deepen it".

In the South African context, works which critique the supply-side tradition, are Allais (2011, 2012 and 2013) and Chisholm (1983).Allais (2011, 2012 and 2013) which argue that historically (and to date), the South African discourse on 'skills'-shortage, has been characterised by market-led, or 'demand-led' approaches. Here, 'skill' is developed in accordance with the needs of industry and is supplied by the education system. Through initiatives such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Skills Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), the post-apartheid administration, in consultation with SA industry, tried to establish what 'key skills' are and transformed these into 'learning outcomes' or 'learning competencies'. These were to be supplied by education centres and thus solve the problem of not having enough 'skilled'-labour (Allais, 2011, 2012, 2013). Allais (2013, 2012) argues that the contradiction is that 'skills' have been conceptualised as self-salvation for the poor and marginalised, while ignoring the need for effective social welfare. This means that the search for skills is presented as a panacea for SA's skill and employment woes without guaranteeing citizens that they will be catered for in the case of unemployment. It becomes the citizens that lack the drive to 'save themselves' rather than the lack of state protection from the blows of capitalism. Thus, the skills-development-unison becomes a smoke-screen to protect free-market capitalism from criticism (Allais, 2013). This last argument is the basis upon which this study is based as it seeks to go further than the workplace, and illustrate the governmental aspects of the discourse of skills, to account for the skills impasse using a socio-ideological approach, as opposed to a technical one.

Two discourses are at work in this project as illustrated by the literature. The discourse of deskilling (the deskilling thesis) and the discourse of skill. Both these discourses are insufficient to address how skills are acquired, developed and maintained by workers

in the Johannesburg apparel sector yet there is a lament of their shortage. This project has attempted to answer this question.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The ideal site of research was EDCON holdings limited, a company that houses brands such as CNA, Edgars, Jet and Edgars Active. Formed in 1929, it is the largest retailer of non-food products in South Africa (EDCON, 2017).The focus was on the sewers in this organisation. Since their work requires a considerable amount of technical skill to perform, they were suitable respondents. A secondary focus would have been on the management staff that oversees the carrying out of this work. This would have helped me understand what constitutes 'skill', its development and maintenance from the side of management. Due to the inability to gain formal access to this environment, I spoke to a few of my leads (some sewers, some former management) not just from EDCON but in the Johannesburg fashion industry as whole to link me with workers in this sector.

1.7 Respondent Details

My respondents may be said to belong to three 'labour regimes' within the apparel industry, the factory regime; these are two workers (women) that were employed by large factories (Sesli and Divine Linen) at the time of conducting this research, the 'bespoke' or design regime; these are four fashion designers and one assistant (four men and a woman) who (with the exception of one) have employees that are mostly hired on an informal contractual basis but who also directly participate in the production process (the assistant is casually employed by one of the designers and sometimes assists his mother who is another one of the designers), and lastly the cooperative regime; these are five women that have banded together to form two cooperatives, 'Lindi's Creation' and the Soweto Manufacturing and Investments Cooperative (SMICO). This last category of workers survives through government tenders and a bit of design and alteration work on the side when business (i.e. a tender) is not available. In Chapters four and five, under each labour regime, these respondents are referred to in alphabets to maintain their anonymity. Under the factory regime, there are two Respondent A and Respondent B. Under the bespoke or design regime there are five; Respondents A, B, C, D and E. Similarly, there are five respondents in the Co-op regime; Respondents A, B, C, D and E. The following tables give more information on the respondents.

Table 1. Factory Regime

NAME	***AGE***	***POSITION***
1. A	34	Sewer
2. B	32	Sewer

Table 2. Bespoke Regime

NAME	***AGE***	***POSITION***
1. A	36	Designer, Manager and Sewer
2. B	35	Designer, Manager and Sewer
3. C	74	Designer, Manager and Sewer
4. D	32	Designer, Manager and Sewer
5. E	41	Sewer (Assistant)

Table 3. Cooperative Regime

NAME	***AGE***	***POSITION***
1. A	65	Designer, Co-owner and Sewer
2. B	56	Designer, Co-owner and Sewer

3. C	54	Designer, Co-owner and Sewer
4. D	82	Designer, Co-owner and Sewer
5. E	75	Designer, Co-owner and Sewer

1.8 Data Collection

This project was qualitative since I sought an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. This framework allowed me to engage rigorously with the debates around skills development as well as discover the actual nature of work in the Johannesburg apparel sector. This project was correlational as it sought to understand the relationship between skills development and capitalist work processes (Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole, 2013, pg. 57). This project was also evaluative (Punch, 2006, pg. 69) since it sought to test the applicability of the deskilling thesis in a different context other than that in which it was formulated by Braverman (1979).

The strategy that I used for this project was a case study of the Johannesburg apparel sector, using 'ethnographies of work' (as utilised by Bonnin, 2011). 'Ethnographies of work', are the life stories of work as articulated by the respondents themselves. This strategy revealed the historical factors that led to the development of these workers' 'skills' from their own perspective. The respondents in this project were very interesting as some of them are managers and employees simultaneously since they run their own clothing lines or are part of cooperatives. In this sense, 'management' was also interviewed in order to understand how they develop these 'skills', whether they consider the workers under them as 'skilled' and how they maintain and grow these skills.

The rationale behind using this strategy was to gauge what the respondents themselves understand by 'skill' and what they understand about their own work. This elicited data that was illuminating in the sense that in the deskilling thesis, the skilled-labourer is presented as a docile victim, at the mercy of the capitalist-mode of production. There seems to be no mention of the agency of the worker and the role (if

any) that the labourers themselves play in perpetuating or resisting the 'degradation of their skill'. By permitting workers to speak about the life stories of their work, thus revealing the attitudes, perceptions and conceptions of their work, I was able to gain insight into the subjective conceptualisations of skill and the experience of work in a capitalist context, both from the side of labour and management. This was crucial for my argument as it revealed the subjectivity of conceptualisations of skill. It also revealed the complexity of the Johannesburg apparel work process which in turn served as an empirical basis for broadening the simple account of the capitalist work process as presented in the deskilling thesis.

I used snowball sampling by first interviewing my leads, then asking them to refer me other workers in the apparel sector. The advantage with this form of sampling is that the familiarity with the worker who led me to the others enabled me to build rapport with the other workers, since they already know and trust him/her. The disadvantage was that the workers did not want to meet with me outside of their hours of work so with most of them, I had to schedule evening meetings in their homes.

Semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument for gathering data. The rationale for this was to not structure the interaction so much so that the respondents could not get to reveal other interesting details about how they see their work and the work process. By asking my open-ended questions, I elicit what Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013, pg. 214) refer to as "story-telling" by asking for instance "Tell me how you started working here…" and using follow-up questions such as "hmmm so did you need to go to school to learn this job or… what are your thoughts on that?" I listened to the respondents as well recorded the interaction using a voice recorder. This allowed me the freedom to focus on asking questions without worrying too much about losing the intricate details of the conversation. I also took notes as the respondents told their work stories.

1.9 Data Analysis

At the end of the data collection phase, my data was in the form of interview transcripts and policy documents. Since I argue that 'skill' is a discourse and want to understand how skill is conceptualised by various groups in the Johannesburg apparel sector, a discussion on discourse (and its analysis) is critical to foregrounding the arguments I make in my empirical chapters.

Discourse analysis is “the analysis of spoken and written word as it is used to enact cultural and social perspectives and identities” (Gee, 1999, pg. i). Discourse analysis serves as both a theory of language-in-use as well as a method of research (Gee, 1999, pg. i). Gee (1999, pg. 1) argues that many people make the grievous mistake or propagate the idea that the primary purpose of language is to merely ‘carry’ information. He continues to assert that this is paramount to arguing that what academics do is to simply ‘exchange ideas’ when actually, the transmission of information is but one of the myriad functions of language. Another function of language is to transmit attitudes, values and ‘truths’, thus precluding other ‘truths’. For Gee (1999), the function of human language is twofold; to provide a stage for the performance of social activities and to provide a platform or stage for human affiliation in cultures, social groups and institutions. In other words, human language is the platform upon which ‘the possible’ is imagined as well as upon which we perform the roles that legitimate our belonging to particular social groups. In this way, language has the potential to regulate both collective and individual behaviour. Collective and individual behaviour never exist in isolation, as much as social activities shape institutions, cultures and identities; institutions, cultures and identities produce, reproduce and transform or contest social activities (Gee, 1999). In other words, human language is the art of imagining the possible, the appropriate, and the acceptable in both individual and collective behaviour.

Gee (1999, pg. 1) makes a crucial point for this project by arguing that “language-in-use is everywhere and always political”. By ‘politics’ he means “anything or any place where human social interactions have a bearing on how ‘social goods’ are to be distributed” (Gee, 1999, pg. 2). ‘Social goods’ are anything that a group of people believe to be a source of wealth, status or power (Gee, 1999, pg. 2). This point is critical as it provides the rationale why I argue that the search for skills is itself a discourse. It is precisely in the political that “social goods are created, sustained, distributed and redistributed, where people are harmed or helped” (Gee, 1999, pg. 2). Since language is used to enact activities, perspectives and identities, it is inextricably linked with power relations. This has great bearing on my final argument about the discourse of skills being a governmental strategy.

(Gee, 1999, pg.5) asserts that theory and method are not stand alone, they go together, which means that even though method has been taught as if it can exist in

isolation to theory, one must acknowledge that any method of research is a way of investigating a particular domain of knowledge and must be suited to cater for the theory that attempts to articulate particular phenomena (Gee, 1999, pg. 5). Discourse analysis is perfect for this project as I seek to understand the discursive underpinnings of both the discourse of skills and the discourse of deskilling.

Whenever we speak or write, we build or construct six elements that count as aspects of 'reality' (Gee, 1999, pg. 12). These are the meaning and value of aspects of the material world, activities, identities and relationships, politics, connections and semiotics (Gee, 1999). The first means the use of the natural or tangible world in constructing meaning and building value, the second means what acts count as 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' in particular social situations, the third means the senses of self that are in relation to other selves, the fourth means what counts as value or worthy of reward, fifth is the relationships between ideas and behaviours and how their use in the past and possible use in the future affect how they are used now in the present time and place and the sixth means the way one form or category of symbol systems and knowledges becomes relevant or privileged over others i.e. 'sign systems such as gestures, images or other symbolic systems (Gee, 1999) .

Discourse analysis involves the use of 'reflexivity', which argues that language-in-use is both a reflection and a creation of its immediate context or situation (Gee, 1999, pg. 80). This involves moving back and forth between language and situations or contexts. Discourse analysis is concerned with how all languages, spoken or written consist of grammatical cues that help listeners or readers to construct the six aspects of what counts as reality (Gee, 1999, pg. 85). These clues or cues show us how to move back and forth between content and context, language and situations.

It is easy to assume that a transcript is the purest form of objective, untouched data, but discourse analysis involves a basic acceptance that the details of speech or writing that will be included in the transcript, are those that are deemed as relevant to the arguments that the researcher is trying to make (Gee, 1999, pg. 88). Thus, discourse analysis argues that the transcript is a theoretical entity, it does not stand outside the analysis, but is part of it (Gee, 1999, pg. 88). So what determined the relevance of what got included in this report, is the theory or argument that I use to conceptualise the two discourses that are investigated in this project.

Discourse analysis involves asking questions about how language and place and time can be used to interpret or say something about the 'situation-network' (or the social group that is specific to a situation) as it is realized in that specific time and place and what elements of that situation network then in turn can give meaning to the language used (Gee, 1999). In essence then, discourse analysis is about asking questions about the six 'reality-building' elements.

What constitutes validity or credibility for any discourse? Two major considerations are in order to illustrate why validity is not established by arguing that discourse analysis is a 'reflection of reality' in a simple way; firstly the construction of reality by humans is limited to or mediated through what is in actual fact 'out there' in the world, so 'reality' is not *only* constructed in the same sense that the God of the Bible can construct matter from merely speaking it into existence (Gee, 1999, pg. 94). Secondly, an analyst interprets data in a certain way and once that interpretation is underway, it makes the data analysis meaningful in certain ways but not others (Gee, 1999, pg. 94). So the argument I make in this report is also a discourse and cannot claim eternal or universal 'reality'.

On the other hand, does this mean that these two considerations render discourse analysis unable to achieve validity since it seems to be the mere opinion of a researcher? Gee (1999, pg. 94) argues that validity is something that different analyses can have more or less of, some analyses are more valid than others. What will determine this of course, is the strength or weakness of the evidence I have used to buttress my argument. Also, validity is not a once and for all, it increases or decreases as further inquiry, debate and discussion is made in the field in question (Gee, 1999, pg. 94).

What determines validity or 'believability'? Firstly convergence, which is the degree to which the answers to the questions related to the six 'building blocks' come together to support the analysis or the argument (Gee, 1999, pg. 95). Secondly, agreement, which is the degree to which other researchers tend to support my arguments, observations and or conclusions (Gee, 1999, pg. 95). Third is coverage, which is the degree to which my analysis can be applied to other sorts of related data, which includes being able to account for what has happened before and after the case being studied and also being able to predict what might happen in the future, using the

analysis (Gee, 1999, pg. 95). Lastly, linguistic details which are the degree to which I can argue that the way that the language is used in both the discourses I am investigating, serves the purposes and functions of those that are accustomed to speaking that language (Gee, 1999, pg. 95). Of course this final element is problematic for a language such as 'skill', a language that is not clear or objective in its meaning. In this case I have attempted to attach a particular meaning using other researchers' work as support to the purposes and functions I argue are attributable to this language. Discourse analysis can argue for validity, when some aspects of the above are apparent in the argument (Gee, 1999, pg. 96). Therefore, a perfect reflection of all of these in discourse analysis is an exercise one can safely reserve for the gods.

What gives Gee (1999) the audacity to argue that this constitutes validity? Because it is highly improbable that these four elements will come together to support a single argument or analysis unless there is a good reason to trust or at least consider it (Gee, 1999, pg. 95). Of course for Gee (1999) this does not automatically mean that all aspects of the analysis are truth. The way that social science develops is that it is incremental and generational. The analysis will need to be improved by other researchers. Nonetheless, the claim to validity does mean that any future inquiries in the same field that is dealt with in this project, must take the analysis into serious account (Gee, 1999, pg. 95).

Chapter 4

The Nature of Work in the Johannesburg Apparel Sector

In this chapter, I intend to present an articulation of the nature of 'work' within the Johannesburg apparel industry as narrated by my respondents. The term 'work' is used broadly here to describe the universe within which these apparel workers realise their working lives and is thus not restricted to, but to a greater degree, includes the process by which the 'purposeful activity aimed at the production of use values', the 'labour process', is enacted (Marx, 1976, pg. 290). The analyses and critiques of Webster (1985) and Littler and Salaman (1982) will be used to conceptualize phenomena within my data that is not accounted for or that is at least minimally developed in the deskilling thesis as championed by Braverman. In this chapter I argue that the deskilling thesis is not sufficient since it cannot account for why my respondents have technical know-how yet in a capitalist context.

Amongst others, there are four factors that render the deskilling thesis problematic and that illustrate why the findings from my data are not accurately accounted for in this thesis; firstly, Braverman treats labour and capital as homogenous groups, with pre-scripted, predictable behavioural patterns, thus precluding the existence of agency and heterogeneity. Secondly, in his narrative, the division of labour is presented as *the* one and only form of capital accumulation, which renders the relationship between capital and labour 'production-centric'. Thirdly, Taylorism or Scientific Management is posited as *the* only method of securing control and thus achieving consent within the capitalist organisation. What makes these two factors significant is that in the deskilling thesis, all manner of capitalist social relations are production-centric, i.e. are derived from the production process and are determined by it, but it will be seen that in the Johannesburg apparel industry, there are other factors that influence the behaviour of capital and labour and the relationship between them, which lie outside the production process, let alone the organisation. Lastly, the romanticisation or 'heroification' of the independent craftsman as the only natural and vital form of labour for human civilization, will be critically evaluated.

1.10 Varieties of Labour and Varieties management in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry

While the point made by Braverman (1974) is imperative, i.e. that class theory and work analysis are intimately connected, that the shop floor is an index of society, it is crucial to note that the relationship between capital and labour at the point of production is not as mechanical as is presented in the deskilling thesis but it is dialectical in nature (Webster, 1985, pg. 14). It is true that at the centre of the capitalist production process there is an inherent sense of antagonism, but this is a conversation between cooperation and conflict whereby cooperation is necessary for production to take place but at the same time conflict is apparent because though capital and labour are in a social relationship to produce a commodity, what is income for the worker, is an input cost to the owner, who will naturally seek to minimize this, but the outcome of this conflict is relative not absolute (Marx, 1976, pp. 449-450 and Webster, 1985, pp. 3-4) This means that the power to exploit or the power to resist exploitation is not automatic but negotiated through various factors that will be presented in this section, some outside the site of production. These varying degrees of power and resistance by labour and capital mean that these categories cannot be lumped together as homogenous groups in simple conflict with one another. A theory may posit a particular relationship in a particular way, but that does not automatically, unproblematically mean that in practise, it will be so smoothly. Braverman views the characters in the drama of work analysis of capital as theoretical categories that must obey the theory, not human beings with agency. He also views capitalist development as a smooth domino-effect, instead of an inherently contradictory process (Webster, 1985). Thus, it is not just labour that lacks agency and distinctiveness in that narrative, but capital too (Littler and Salaman, 1982).

It is more useful to think of labour within the Johannesburg apparel sector using Edwards' concept of a segmented labour market as opposed to a uniform one (1979 cited in Webster, 1985, pg. 196). There are three segments into which labour in the Johannesburg apparel sector may be said to be divided; the secondary market, the subordinate primary market and the independent primary market.

The occupations in the secondary market are marked by limited degrees of skill, tasks that are essentially repetitive and require a few days to a few hours' induction into the

job (Webster, 1985, pg. 196). For example, both the women in the factory regime belong to this labour market:

"*Prior training is not much of a barrier for getting employed at my work...Whether you're trained or not, there are many that were trained on the job. There isn't much difference that is put between the trained and the untrained, even the newbie... They will give them to us and say 'here, train her'*..." Respondent A (Factory Regime)

Notwithstanding other characteristics of the secondary labour market such as the acquisition of elementary skills, the limited scope for initiative and decision-makingduring the production process as well as not requiring prior training or formal education, the secondary market is marked by a lack of job security as well as the possibility of immediate replacement by a member of the industrial reserve army (Webster, 1985, pg. 198). This is clearly illustrated by the attitude of management in the factory regime:

"*Management doesn't treat us right because they will make you do jobs that are not in your job description and if you complain they will say 'there are many companies outside and there are hundreds of people outside these gates that want your job', then I'll respond by saying 'yes they are a lot because you pay them wages that are not suitable for them that's why you keep saying that'*..." Respondent B (Factory Regime)

The subordinate primary market is different from the secondary market due to the fact that it offers some job security, relatively better pay, relatively stable employment and relatively well-defined occupations (Webster, 1985, pg. 199). The five women in the 'cooperative regime' can be said to belong to this labour market because all of them have no less than fifteen years working as members of the cooperative. This means that once formed and given jurisdiction, the co-op is a form of self-employment within which employment is relatively stable and it is not easy to be replaced. The women are also able to hire labour on a casual basis to assist them in meeting tight deadlines and these workers are paid according to the standard factory rate (+/-R400 a week) and then the women share the remainder of the tender amongst themselves. Once defined, the duty of each co-op member remains relatively stable and distinct over time. Also, the credentials of each co-op member (training, education or experience in the apparel sector) are scrutinized before the department of social development

registers the co-op, so entry into this labour market is not as simple as it is in the factory regime.

Nonetheless, the subordinate primary market is distinct from the independent primary market in the sense that the work tasks are often repetitive, routine-based and in the case of those who have access to heavy, industrial machinery, it is subject to the pacing of a machine (Webster, 1985, pg. 199). The women in the co-op regime usually get tenders for making uniforms for schools, traffic officers, day-care centres etc. and this involves much repetition and routine and heavy machinery is enlisted where available, to assist in speeding-up the pace in order to meet deadlines.

The independent primary market is distinguished from the secondary and the subordinate markets in the sense that this market typically requires skills that were obtained in advanced training or specialized schooling such as tertiary education and jobs in this market require independent initiative and or self-pacing (Webster, 1985, pg. 200). The four fashion designers in the bespoke regime fall under this market. Three of the designers all underwent generalised (as opposed to specialized) education and training in the apparel industry and even while working in a factory, the appellation “fashion designer” has status rendering effects. This last point is crucial because there is differential treatment given to labour depending on the type of labour market they belong to. For example:

“I once worked at a factory that manufactures bedding and the situation was bad for those people...They came in at six in the morning and left at 4 in the evening. With me it was different...I told them how much I usually charge and they gave me. I was never shouted at when I took my smoke and tea breaks and I could come in and go as I pleased as long as I did my work” Respondent C (Bespoke Regime)

This designer attributes his privileges to the fact that he was head-hunted to assist during a stressful season for the factory and hence was not desperate like the others since he owns his own clothing brand but this is precisely the bargaining power that is conferred by the fact that he bears the title of ‘fashion designer’ i.e. belongs to the independent primary market. The treatment would’ve been far different for members of the other labour markets.

Why is the concept of labour market segmentation significant for an analysis of capital in the Johannesburg apparel sector? Firstly, this proves that the picture is far more complex, than the simple dichotomous analysis that is suggested by the deskilling thesis and in order to understand capital in the 21st century, one must eliminate deterministic frameworks that try to simplify the picture in order to predict the behaviour of the different actors within capitalist organisations and by extension, societies. Rather than adopting a deductive approach, i.e. theorizing then hoping that phenomena will obey the tenets of the theory, when analysing an ever-mutating entity such as capitalism, it is crucial to adopt an inductive approach which though complex and multi-layered, will be a representation of what is actually happening, rather than what according to a theory, is 'supposed to' occur.

Secondly, since the three labour markets have varied relations with management which then shape their behaviour, this allows oneto begin to understand why in spite of the deskilling thesis, in the Johannesburg apparel sector there is in the first instance resistance to deskilling and further, even this resistance is labour market specific. Put in another way, leverage over management increases or decreases according to the kind of labour market that one belongs to. Secondary market workers employ less direct methods of resistance, while independent primary workers lean towards more direct forms as suggested in the fashion designer's experience, quoted above. So resistance is also a negotiated phenomenon, mediated by labour market conditions and labour market-specific leverage. This is in keeping with the contradictory nature of capitalist social relations (Webster, 1985). Nevertheless, the critical point for this study is that there is the existence of resistance, a phenomenon that is not even imagined in the deskilling thesis. In this study, "resistance to deskilling" entails how workers resist the appropriation and monopolization of their skills by management, and how workers that have no skills eventually gain skills by virtue of simply engaging in the (capitalist) work process.

In the Johannesburg apparel sector, resistance to deskilling occurs in essentially two ways: firstly through extended or inadvertent job rotation and secondly through what I would like to refer to as 'embryonic' forms of labour market closure (Webster, 1985, pg. 13). Extended or inadvertent job rotation occurs in the apparel sector when a worker retains or obtains her/his skills by virtue of spending many years in the industry and working for different organisations. This is seen in the secondary as well as the

subordinate primary markets. During this time, the workers deliberately or inadvertently move from one job to another between different organisations or within the same organisation. This way, the existence of the manufacture division of labour does not automatically spell the demise of the skill but proving true to the contradictory nature of capitalist development, these two phenomena exist side by side. An example of deliberate job rotation is respondent A in the cooperative regime:

"Let's say you are still new and learning (on the job) and I am the one who is responsible for sewing-in the sleeves then one day I am absent, because production must continue, the managers will ask you to fill in for me. You may say you don't know how to, but you cannot stay for the whole year just sewing-in collars. You must ask me how I do sleeves you must find an opportunity to learn because when they want someone that specializes in sleeves and you can't, you will lose a job opportunity... You must be flexible!"

Me: "So in terms of that flexibility, do you get paid more for it?"

"I think it's something that you must do for your own personal development. You must tell yourself that you are here to learn and 'when I leave this place I won't stay here for twenty years just doing one thing, I have seen how other things are done'. When you leave this place and go to another organisation, one day, the person specializing on a particular job won't be around and this will be your opportunity to gain more skill and recognition by management..." Respondent A (Co-op Regime)

An example of inadvertent job rotation is Respondent B also from the cooperative regime who argues that she gained her skill by telling herself one must be humble and do whatever the managers want and be ready to chip in even if you won't get paid for it:

"You see we were raised in the factories and that's where we learnt to be all-rounders... I myself did not work for one factory I worked for a number of factories. But it was at the time when black people were now learning that it is wrong to be called boy or girl by whites and if that was your attitude you would not go far... When the supervisor says 'come handle this', you must go, when he says 'come do this for me once you're done with that' you go. If you were a person who is sober-minded, you would end up

knowing a variety of things...That's how I ended up so skilled, that's how life is..." Respondent A (Co-op Regime)

Labour market closure is a mode of exclusion in capitalist society that occurs partly through the control of professional qualifications and credentials (Webster, 1985, pg. 12). It is this strategy that craft workers employ to protect themselves from deskilling and it typically occurs through limiting recruitment to an occupation and demanding lengthy training which may result in the survival of more skill than the deskilling thesis indicates (Webster, 1985, pg. 13). In the Johannesburg apparel industry, I refer to these as 'embryonic' due to the fact that though apparel workers are yet to find formal structures to enact these strategies and protect their interests, the existence of craft consciousness is symbolic of a growing need to establish structures, policy and otherwise, to protect their skills (and the value attached to them). This strategy is used by the subordinate and independent primary markets.

"In this industry of sewing what is the degree? It's not there… There's a lot of people that just know how to sew but they don't know how to design a garment, then you ask yourself why when people sew the clothes come out skew, you ask yourself what went wrong? Even if there is some certificate… That's where, I emphasize formality, when someone has done a degree in any course they know that field like the back of their hand, so formality is scarce… It's lack of knowledge" Respondent E (assistant to one of the designers, Bespoke regime)

"So that is why the sewing vocation is not taken seriously because it is something that you just do, you just wake up in the morning and decide 'I'm a tailor', you just buy a small machine and you just take this and that and put it together…When you want to take the path of sewing you must go study, be a designer, get the certificate. For example in nursing, you don't just enter the field, you have to get trained, get the qualification and practise. That's why that field is still respected. Look at David Tlale, he is successful because he went to university… People are sewing in every corner in town. You look and there's five people but when you look at the clothes, it's a mess, everything is skew…Johannesburg fell because of that right? The immigration of all these people, I'm sorry to say but there are too many foreigners, Johannesburg is taken by them" Respondent D (Bespoke Regime)

"We no longer get work like we used to. Instead of coming here, people go to the Chinese and buy there. So it is the Chinese that have degraded the industry. Every winter we knew that we would get business, but now people go the Chinese, the Indians and the Pakistanis... They say our rates are too high and they are cheap… There is a difference, our products are quality, theirs is also quality but they are sloppy, they just sew. So even if they go to the Chinese, they come back to us and ask for alterations…" Respondents B and C (Co-op Regime)

This last quotation is particularly interesting in that the women agree that the differences between their products and those of their foreign competitors is merely in the details, and not necessarily in the quality. In this way, the plea for regulation becomes a way to maintain the value of their skills, i.e. by making entry into the apparel sector not so easy.

In the deskilling thesis once capitalism lays hold of the work process, it spells irresistible doom for skill and the skilled worker, but the findings from my data argue otherwise.

It is not only labour that is varied in the Johannesburg apparel industry but capital is not a unified mafia organisation that conspires against workers. In the following two subsections, it will be seen that the behaviour of individual capitalists is not determined by an agenda to unilaterally impose work conditions on labour, but this behaviour is determined by various factors such as the size of the organisation and the scope of production, the bargaining power or lack thereof by workers, which as suggested above, is itself relative to certain conditions and the organisational culture of each organisation.

1.11 The Division of Labour in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry

Within the deskilling thesis, labour and the production process are central to capitalist accumulation, such that Braverman argues that *the* capitalist mode of production is the division of labour. As highlighted above, the most compelling reason for the division of labour according to this narrative, is that is offers to management cheap, disposable labour by virtue of its ability to degrade skill. This argument is premised on the idea that the only way that capital accumulates surplus value is through the labour process since labour is productive yet at the same time it is the greatest input cost to management. Therefore, management will do all in its power to retain or even increase

labour's productive capacity and lower the cost of labour to management. Foremost in this then is the cheapening of labour via the "sub-division of productive specialities into limited operations" (Braverman, 1974, pg. 49).

It is true that the production process leads to the gaining of profit by the capitalist organisation, but in the deskilling thesis the assumption is that other alternative sources of income do not play a major role or even a predominant role in the drive for accumulation, which shapes capital labour relations and the way that work is organised (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 257). Capitalist organisations not only rely on the labour process to get surplus value, they may also rely heavily on financial manipulations such as monopoly pricing, taxation and other credit manipulations which make the control of the labour process the least of their concerns (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 257). Where the Johannesburg apparel industry comes in, is that capitalist organisations not only have to produce surplus value, but they also have to realize surplus value through finding markets, selling on those markets and only then making profits (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 257). Littler and Salaman (1982, pg 257) argue that means that for certain industries, certain periods and certain organisations, realizing surplus value may be more important than producing it, which is why it is in fact possible to find that in these industries, management makes profit without necessarily dividing the work process into minute tasks. When profits come primarily from sales efforts (for example in the newspaper and clothing industries), from hedging in raw materials (such as the textiles industry) and speculating in style and monopoly pricing (such as sections of the Johannesburg apparel industry), then the management of labour and the division of labour becomes a secondary focus (Soffer, 1960, pg. 145, cited in Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 257).

In the factory regime there is definitely the division of labour as my respondents made it clear, but the division of labour is not an inherent condition of all capitalist work organisation but a matter of degree and scope of production. So in apparel organisations that deal in mass production, the work process is usually divided into tasks performed by different workers. Yet even here, there is room for worker autonomy and initiative.

"You have to be creative when doing this work because sometimes the pattern you get has defects. For example, today we were making curtains and there was one

pattern that was nicer than the ones I had been making before it. My manager was telling me I should use the usual method but I showed him that if I sew it like this, it will come out like this... The pattern comes already cut and then you have to make it complete." Respondent B (Factory regime)

"They will bring a design that is already made then you have to put it together. But sometimes they will bring a design that is already made and only give it to one person that they are 100% sure that this person will be able to put it together..." Respondent A (Factory regime)

The women in the co-op regime who were literally born and bred in the factory regime also give some insight on the division of labour in the factory regime:

"The process we use here is different from the process in the factories. In the factories it starts in the cutting room, then it goes to the laying department, then by the time it gets to the machine, you will find that one person does this, then it passes and another does that until the work is complete. It depends on how you work in that particular factory and what it is that you are producing... This is because the production in factories is large scale and you have to meet the deadline, but factories are different, some factories you would start something from scratch and finish it, some factories even if you don't start something from scratch, you would be rotated after some time they would change you and give you another task so if you find a factory like that you would end up experienced in a lot of things because you are actually getting taught. In other factories people would come out not knowing anything because you will find that you spend so much time just sewing-in a collar, that person will leave that organisation just knowing how to put in a collar. Some factories were like that and some factories were different..." Respondent B and C (Co-op regime)

In the cooperative regime the accumulation of surplus value is not so much dependent on the structuring of the work process as it is on finding and securing tenders that is, finding markets and selling on them. This may be why in the co-op regime there is virtually none to minimum division of labour. The women mostly begin the garments from start to finish.

"Here in the co-ops it depends on how many you are and how you work and what it is you're producing, so one person will handle a particular garment, another, another

particular garment. But in the factories it differs because one person will do a collar, another will do sleeves just like that... There used to be a time when the department of social development would organise work for us and then we would deliver, but as time went on they said they will do 50% of the work and we will do 50%, then finally, when they put us in the coffin and buried us, was when they said 'we are now weaning you from the breast, now you must find work on your own', but it is different here, in large factories the owner has a person responsible for marketing and finding contracts, we don't have that, that is why we are struggling..." Respondent D and E (Co-op regime)

"If the government can help us out with business like they did before and help us out with machinery and also do something about the foreigners, then that will end the problem of people operating without proper documentation and things will go back like they were before" Respondent B and C (Co-op Regime)

In the bespoke regime, the accumulation of capital is not so much dependent on the division of labour as it is in meeting the client's requirements and speculating on what is stylish and trendy or selling the image of the brand.

"If you're hungry and someone comes in, 'hey man I need pants, just pants...' I'll do just pants. But if you need my signature pants (i.e. his branded pants)*, you need to pay a certain amount of cash" Respondent A (Bespoke Regime)*

"If you want to make clothes for individuals...clients come with different needs. Uhm especially today, people just take a picture from the internet and say that they want this you know? And if so, at all timesyou're doing different things, you're not doing one thing...Before we even meet the client we need to create a need for the client to come... We work on an image scenario rather than on an 'I want a skirt' or 'I want pants'. So you're a guy and you want pants? Great! Can we cover the belt? With the fabric can we cover the watch-belt? So we selling you an image that will complement your look, rather than you just getting one outfit... So if you have clients like that, 6 clients, then that means business is ongoing. And that's the direction we've taken to make it sustainable from January to December. So see where we can squeeze you more..." Respondent C (Bespoke Regime)

At the time of the interview, this designer had two employees and he also took part in the production process. The organisational culture of his business has interesting implications for the degree of the division of labour in the Johannesburg apparel sector:

"Uhm obviously in the factory number one is the volume of the work that they do. Uhm the expertise that they have in terms of financial muscle, uhm you know they have a pattern master for example, someone who works solely on patterns. And they have a fashion buyer, someone who looks at ongoing trends...So we don't have that and I have to play that role so hence I'm trying not to be as much hands on in the putting together of the clothes... It depends with the factory layout, uhm there's some factories that major on building more volume, so in order for you to build more volume your workers have to be specialized. That means if this guy is putting in zips, that's his job, it's just to put in zips. But with this worker he'll be so skilled at putting in zips but when he leaves the company, he can't make a full jean by himself because he's not aware of the different elements that take to do a full garment you know? So with my workers, they need to be rounded, we not that big to say 'you only do this and you only do that' you know? And mostly with the stuff that we do, I'd say 50-60% is new things all the time because of the clients' needs you know? ...So that means the skill that they learning at my base has a wider spectrum than what she (one of his employees who comes from the factory regime) *learnt when she was at the factory because when she came, she could only do pockets, and she was good. She does number one pockets, but she couldn't put in zips, she couldn't put in buttons you know? But now she can finish a full garment by herself" Respondent C (Bespoke Regime)*

Just in case one may assume that this characteristic is restricted to 'small, South African upstarts' this designer revealed interesting international trends from a big fashion brand:

"...Like I said uhm with your Tom Ford, his factory layout is every 6 months, the factory, if you were putting in zips, the next six months you'll put in pockets. So if you've been at that company for over three years, you've learnt all the different work stations. Unlike others, they just, you know, it's volume, volume, volume."

Me: "But he is still competitive in the market?"

"Yah! And what makes him that is, he creates much happier workers, and a happier worker will stay because he/she knows that there's a variety of skill to learn. Obviously the loss for him would be if that worker leaves, and now you have to get someone new and so the whole process which is tiresome you know? But 80% would remain okay no, the 20% will leave. Whereby in a volume concentrated factory, workers will leave anyway you know? But you don't lose much because that one worker was only doing one duty. So it's easier to replace that one person you know?" Respondent C (Bespoke Regime)

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above findings is that though there is some truth in what the deskilling thesis argues about the labour process in capitalist organisations, there can be no such thing as *the* capitalist labour process, as Littler and Salaman (1982, pg. 257) argue, any theory must be contingent upon a thorough sociological classification of industries, locations and as my data proves, even within the same industry, there is heterogeneity.

1.12 Scientific Management in the Johannesburg Apparel Industry

The first point of departure for this section could be to give credit to the deskilling thesis according to Braverman, in terms of its contribution to articulating some of the dynamics that have solidified the phenomenon of control of labour by capital in the capitalist work process. It is indeed true that the ability to control labour is to some degree, contingent upon the extent to which management is considered as the legitimate owners and sellers of commodities (Littler and Salaman1982, pg. 258). This, scientific management achieved by conceptualising management as a separate and crucial asset in the operation of the capitalist organisation and with the passing decades since its inception, this conception solidified, creating a moral backdrop against which the legitimacy of management is seen as inevitable or a rule of capitalist organisational culture (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 260).That said, it is crucial to note that this is merely the formal side of establishing the legitimacy of management. There is also the informal aspect that usually occurs outside of the organisational structures or the organisation and this is where the deskilling thesis ceases to be theoretically sufficient. Due to the dual nature of the capital/labour relationship, i.e. that managers need labour in order to produce a commodity, but labour which is at the same time a cost to them also need management and the success of the organisation to get their wages, there is an inherent sense of mutual accommodation from both

labour and management which ensures that the work process continues (Littler and Salaman, 1982). In other words, in order for a minimum degree of work to even be done, managers must be willing to bend organisational rules to accommodate the inherent disobedience of labour and at the same time, labour must accommodate management by consent to these rules because their livelihood depends on that. This brings to the fore, the argument by Littler and Salaman (1982) that it is conceptually limiting to want to consider capital/labour relations by beginning with the phenomenon of control as per the deskilling thesis. It is more useful to begin this analysis by considering the phenomenon of the achievement of consent, because a minimal level of consent by labour is at least necessary to make possible the achievement of control by management. This is due to the fact that the "real subordination of the working classes is never complete" (Webster, 1985. Pg. 10; Littler and Salaman, 1982).

Before delving into the factors that promote consent as it is revealed in the Johannesburg apparel sector, it is important to illustrate the degree of scientific management in this particular industry as this will serve as an empirical backdrop for why using consent as a theoretical starting point is more useful in analysing capital labour relations in this sector.

In all three labour regimes in the Johannesburg apparel sector there is unanimous agreement that scientific management, which accompanies the division of labour, is an unavoidable characteristic of the factory regime. The logic behind this conclusion is that the bigger the scale of production, the more labour that will be required and the more speed is to be promoted. Further, the implication is that the more pervasive the control of the labour process will be, by managers who 'simply want to meet deadlines'. The reverse of this argument is also true, that the bigger the workforce lumped together into one factory, the more difficult it is to achieve total control (Webster, 1985, pg. 209). This gives credence to consent as a critical starting point for analysis since control would not be possible without it.

In the example below, one sees the element of mutual accommodation at work notwithstanding the existence of the separation of conception from execution:

"You have to be creative when doing this work because sometimes the pattern you get has defects. For example, today we were making curtains and there was one pattern that was nicer than the ones I had been making before it. My manager was

telling me I should use the usual method but I showed him that if I sew it like this, it will come out like this... The pattern comes already cut and then you have to make it complete." Respondent B (Factory regime)

"We sometimes get into arguments with management. They are people it seems who have that habit from Turkey of thinking that when a black person is working for them, ideally they must not get lunch, they must not go to the toilet, and they must not knock-off from work. You must just be found constantly with your foot on the machine pedal you see? When he sees you going to the toilet, he will shout at you 'why are you going to the toilet? Toilet, toilet, toilet' you see? These are some of the things that cause us not to see eye to eye, but sometimes it becomes better"

Me: "Then how do you resolve these conflicts?"

"Sometimes you answer back, you tell him, and sometimes you just ignore him as if you heard nothing. You just keep quiet and just do your work"

Me: "Doesn't that get you into trouble?"

"It does get you into trouble if you're a person who is stubborn, but if you're a person who knows themselves and what they came here to do, it won't..." Respondent B (Factory regime)

So on paper that is formally, there is scientific management but in actual practise, there is the bending of authority, the accommodation of defiance simultaneously with the acceptance of managerial authority which is not as simple and straightforward as is suggested in the deskilling thesis.

In the co-op and bespoke regimes, there is limited to no scientific management. This is important because in the deskilling thesis, the imperative for control and the deterministic trajectory that it follows is presented as a general characteristic of all capitalist industry. Issues of degree and scope, type and variation within the same industry, are not considered. If consent, which leads to relative control, is not thoroughly accounted for by using scientific management, what concepts can be useful in beginning to do so?

Beyond scientific management, consent to capitalist control in the Johannesburg apparel industry is gained by management through the dynamics of the employment

relationship (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 261). The word ‘gained’ is also deceptive because it creates the impression that this consent that lies beyond scientific management, is the result of calculated efforts by ‘capitalists’, when the reality is that it is the result of broader, long term processes that have shaped the nature of capitalism, outside the site of production. The dynamics that shape the capitalist employment relationship in the Johannesburg apparel sector are dependency and career consciousness (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 261).

Dependency on the organisation is determined by two factors, namely the capacity for workers to organise against management and the availability of alternative sources of need satisfaction (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 261). The ability to organise into trade unions that will bargain for the class interests of the workers is affected by the relationship between capital and the state. In the instance that capital and the state have close ties, the state can enact policies that protect capital from trade unionization, or that prevents unionization from occurring. An example of this can be found in Webster (1985) when the apartheid state through its rigid racial laws was able to bolster management in the metal industry, thus preventing black trade unions from gaining legitimacy in the struggle against white capitalism. The Johannesburg apparel sector, specifically the factory regime is a curious case because unionization is in fact encouraged and is active. Here is what the women in this regime had to say about unionization:

“Unions are there. Our unions used to be fucked-up because, specifically the shop stewards. We changed shop stewards early this year so at least since this change took place things are changing bit by bit. For example they did not have that thing of saying that people that operate machines must be at a certain level, this one has this level of skill they must be at this level. That thing was not there but since these new ones came in, things a getting better little by little. You see our shop-stewards had that problem of coming into the manager’s office and then the manager checks to see which of the two stewards is full of nonsense and which one is sweet. They would pull the sweet one to the side and say ‘here’s some cash, speak to this colleague of yours, tell him to cool down’. Money as you know is another thing; he takes it, puts it into his pocket and says ‘no brother, let’s not rush these white people you see?’ So those that replaced the previous ones, they came knowing that the previous ones sabotaged us for a long time, we were suffering and they were not going according to the book,

everything they were telling us was not according to policy. So these ones just tell the boss 'we work according to the book'..." Respondent B (factory regime)

"Yes, our union works, especially if you have a strong organiser, it works. But if you don't have a strong organiser, like us, we are with SACTWU, our organiser works so much because I'm a shop-steward, I'm supposed to go and face the boss first. If the boss doesn't understand or doesn't want to hear what I want to say, then I will take the matter to the union and then meet the organiser. The organiser will then deal with them." Respondent B (Factory regime)

A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that due to the relative nature of union protection, that is, relative to the degree to which individual union representatives are 'corruptible', the dependency of apparel workers in the factory regime is heightened, thus making consent to managerial control possible.

Another factor related to the relationship between unionisation and consent is the divisions within the working class, either initiated by the working class or by the state itself (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 262). In the co-op regime, the workers there are not able to receive union representation because the department of labour does not consider them to be employees, but they are considered to be management even though they have working class life experiences. They are under the jurisdiction of the department of social development.

"Us here as co-ops, the laws of the trade unions do not cater for us. The department of labour I think also counts, but when we get there and tell them we're from the co-ops, the point us to another door (social development)" Respondents B and C (Co-op regime)

This inability for bureaucracy to enable them to organise leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by corrupt government officials who embezzle tenders that are supposed to go to them. The officials do this by appropriating the tender for themselves, then only hiring these women on a sub-contractual basis. The women in turn hire casual labour and they share whatever the officials give them. Their consent to this form of control is heightened by their lack of representation.

The availability of alternative sources of need satisfaction is intricately linked to alternative sources of employment (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 261). It follows from

this point that the less available or accessible are alternative avenues for reproduction outside the organisation, the more likely that labour is to acquiesce to managerial control inside the organisation. In other words, this acquiescence is achieved by factors outside of the organisation and workers enter the organisation already geared to accept managerial authority. This dynamic, as implied in the first subsection of this chapter, is varied and contingent upon the type of labour market from which particular workers are classified under.

Apparel workers in the factory regime who can be said to belong to the secondary market and co-op regime workers who may be said to belong to the subordinate primary market and who do not want to find themselves in the secondary market are basically locked-in their current vocations and it is difficult to change careers or change jobs. In this way, they consent to managerial authority as their livelihood is intricately linked to their acquiescence to the rules of the organisation. As mentioned above, in both labour regimes, the workers have been in the same job for no less than a decade. This is the case irrespective of the poor working conditions, conflict-ridden relations and unapologetic exploitation. Again, this is 'achieved' through systemic as opposed to deliberate dynamics by management within the work process. Workers from the bespoke regime (in comparison to the two labour regimes at least) enjoy a much more privileged existence and can float from form one job to the next at whim.

So far the discussion of dependency on the organisation has merely implied the concept of consent and has seemed to stress the concept of control, creating the impression that apparel workers are victims of circumstance, who have no choice in the matter. Littler and Salaman (1982, pg. 263) caution us to remember that even in the context of organisational dependency, workers can always bargain with their "obedience, effort and conscientiousness", since worker discretion irrespective of scientific management or organisational dependency is "never reduced to zero". It is in the second element of the employment relationship; career consciousness, that one sees the concept of consent clearly.

Career consciousness is the extent to which an individual is locked into an organisational career system such that future status depends entirely on the organisation (Littler and Salaman, 1982, pg. 261). What causes this element of the employment relationship to be a factor in promoting consent is that contrary to the

deskilling thesis according to Braverman (not forgetting Marx), the shop floor is a site of conflict whereby workers are inherently at loggerheads with management and they come into the workplace ready to sabotage management. Career consciousness forces one to acknowledge that in some capitalist organisations, workers consent to management control and the general atmosphere of the work environment since they see the organisation as intricately linked with their progression up the industrial ladder (Littler and Salaman, 1982). This effectively means that contrary to the deskilling thesis, in the minds of workers, there is no dichotomy between the success of the organisation and their own success. Due to this idea, workers view the success of the organisation as a crucial factor in their own success and do all in their power to follow organisational rules acquiesce to and even welcome exploitation because all these are seen as beneficial to their career interests. This element of consent precedes the actual performance of the work process.

In this study, I use this concept not just on an individual organisation, but on a whole industry because the workers in the Johannesburg apparel sector are part of different organisations formal and informal, large scale and small-scale. What links these workers is the argument that they see themselves as on different levels of the same apparel career trajectory. What I mean by this is that in the apparel sector, the ultimate form of 'employment 'is that of the 'fashion designer' and the workers in three labour regimes are either aspiring to reach this labour bracket or are already 'living the dream' and would not like to have it any other way. The archetype 'fashion designer' is also closely linked to the practise of entrepreneurship to the point of synonymity. For example, the women in the factory regime dream of a time when they will run their own fashion brands, dictate their working hours and earn profit. These women consent to managerial control as they see the factory regime as a temporary transition phase, a bridge that will lead them to where they aspire to be:

"You see when it comes to sewing, my wish was to go very far because I love sewing with all of my heart. I wanted one day to be also seen on TV, showcasing beautiful work because I'm not just settling for making clothes only. I would also like to make leather bags, belts and wallets and all that." Respondent A (factory regime)

Me: "If you were to begin from scratch, what would you do differently in your work?"

"Wow! I would do so many things. I would design a lot of things. In my mind I always have a lot of ideas. I'm always thinking 'maybe if I can do this, do that differently, people would really love that... Maybe if I can come up with something new, people will love that because you can't keep making the same thing for people. In your market you can't keep making the same thing.

Me: "So you think you would still continue with your job?"

"No I would focus on my business. The thing is for now I don't have enough money to start my business." Respondent A (factory regime)

The women in the co-op regime began their careers in the factory regime and when the cooperatives programme was initiated, they moved a bit higher up the apparel ladder and entered the realm of 'tenderpreneurship'. Under the protectionist policies of the waning apartheid government, they thrived though government contracts to sew school uniform for children in need and then with the new dispensation continued for a season. In no time, their bread and butter were gradually taken away by the introduction of neoliberal economic policies and the subsequent decline of the apparel sector. Now they are expected to fend for themselves and the situation is dire. They may not have direct employers, but they expect to receive their business from the department of social development, through the 'Batho Peele' programme. Contrary to the glory days, after receiving a tender from this programme, an indefinite number of years may pass before another tender is awarded to an individual cooperative. This brings forth consent to underhanded dealings, corruption and exploitation by government officials who embezzle tenders for themselves and only hire the women on a sub-contractual basis. For example:

"Last time we had a meeting with the SETA that the government must give us hospital contracts, that we sew 50 doctors' suits. That way you can hire about 2 people and work with them. This way you create work for someone else right? But now the government does not give us these contracts, we don't know who it gives them to. It knows who it gives these contracts to. I once refused to work with two men, people who just approached me, like yourself for example you get a tender, then tell your friend that 'I know a lady that sews', you come to me and say 'we need 100 pairs of pants, how much do you charge for one pair?' after I'm done sewing, I'll give you the garments but you won't write my name and it will be as if you're the one who sewed

those clothes, yet you don't have a place, you don't have machines, you're not part of a co-op but I am and I have those things but you are trying to rob me... I don't want to get arrested because when you get caught, you will say that I made those clothes, it's no longer you that did that, even though when you got the contract you said it was you... Many government inspectors have come to my unit, saying they are here to see a certain Mr X, then I ask them who is that person? Only to realize that it was the person that approached me the other day. I have a lease to this unit, this is my place, I don't know that person. Some of the women even had to return money that they had already received from these men as deposit to buy material; they had to return it to the government. These people moved to find other sewers in White City since I refused, but as the contractors kept asking them when they will deliver because time is running out, they kept pointing to me. In the end I found out that they told the contractors that this is their unit, they own everything and I work under them" Respondent A (Co-op regime)

The factory regime and the co-op regime seem to be alternative starting avenues for those who want to be designers and subsequently enter the route of entrepreneurship, but who could not be trained as fashion designers in college or university.

Upon asking the men in the bespoke regime how they reached the pinnacle of work in the Johannesburg apparel sector, one common characteristic of this form of career consciousness was what I refer to as 'volunteerism or consensual exploitation'. Consent to this form of control is again secured outside the labour process and propagated by the designers themselves. For example:

"*My first contract, I was supplying a boutique, did not get paid, but working with or making a dress for a celebrity boosted me, boosted me in terms of business, boosted my ego, boosted my brand... Firstly she started giving me designs, 'execute this for me, and execute that for me'. Then, 'what do you have? Do you mind for me if I put the logo of my company coz it's going to be in the boutique and you don't have a logo?' So she'd put 'Sissy-lace' on the clothes, but they do not belong to her, they belong to me..."*

Me: "And how did that make you feel?"

“The thing is this; when you still young, and you see such as a stature, it’s a boutique, it’s beautiful, and it’s all glasses, when you see shops in your Europes, your USAs... The best shops there you find that they are glass. So when I arrived there I saw glass, lighting perfect, floor perfect, mannequins perfect, that perfect, that perfect. There’s a woman standing there... She’s the owner. So I tried selling myself in a way to her... So it was a good start to my career...” Respondent A (Bespoke regime)

“I was ‘sharpened’ by being an apprentice to a boutique shop owner that I met at the event where I discovered my passion. In this boutique, I worked as a seamstress, a person who gets fabric already cut and simply has to put it together or stitch it. I now take pride in my position as a designer because I believe designing is far better to being a seamstress, because you make a garment from start, to finish. I worked for this guy for two years and the relationship was broken due to financial constraints. I can’t make you R45000 and you pay me R2000, it doesn’t make sense. What kept me so long in this gig was my anxiety and curiosity to learn, even when the shop closed, my heart would be broken as I would wish that the shop would operate the whole night. I would even take some of my work and finish it at home, come up with interesting modifications to the boutique owner’s designs, which would increase the owner’s profit but after all my hard work, my money would come back as is, and he won’t say I have added something”. Respondent B (Bespoke Regime)

Notwithstanding this sour end, it is very interesting how the exploitation was consensual and welcomed by the respondent, seen as a necessary evil to refining his skill.

“I’ve met a lot of kids who are studying fashion and I’d actually advise them to go to school number one and to do an internship with a designer, to say ‘look, take me in for free, lemme see what I can learn’. And learn as much as you can” Respondent C (Bespoke Regime)

In the section I have presented the degree to which scientific management is apparent in the Johannesburg apparel sector. It was seen that this method of control referred to in the deskilling thesis as “nothing less than the explicit verbalization of the capitalist mode of production”, is context specific and labour regime specific (Braverman, 1974, pg. 86). And even where it is found it is influenced by other factors that lie outside the work process, and even the organisation. These factors influence the consent of

workers to managerial control and even precede it. These factors include the informal accommodation by capital and labour and the employment relationship.

In this chapter I have illustrated how managers and labour negotiate the work relationship and how power is not exercised unilaterally by management on workers. In this chapter I have intended to show that in the apparel workplace, skill (technique) actually does exist and is not necessarily degraded or destroyed but is maintained by workers and is even promoted by management. If 'skill' is technique, then it exists even in a capitalist context. Therefore to say that it is the work process itself, alone that degrades skill according to the Johannesburg apparel sector, is false. This chapter has sought to illustrate that it is not a lack of skills which is the issue, but that skills abound. Maybe the actual question that one must interrogate is why certain 'skills' are more valuable than others. The following chapter will attempt to answer this question.

Chapter 5

The Nature of 'Skill' in the Johannesburg Apparel Sector

Having critically evaluated the deskilling thesis, which I will henceforth refer to as the discourse of deskilling, and having illustrated the degree of its relative applicability to the Johannesburg apparel sector, a critical evaluation of the South African discourse of 'skills', with the Johannesburg apparel sector as an empirical backdrop, is in order. By the 'discourse of skills' I mean the twin argument of 'skills shortage' and 'skills development'. This purpose will be fulfilled in three sections. In the first section, I will revisit the concept of 'discourse' so as to provide a theoretical springboard for this chapter. In the second section, I will illustrate how the discourse of 'skills' manifests itself in the Johannesburg apparel sector, through an interesting range of managerial and labour conceptions and practices which illustrate the nature of 'skill' in this particular sector of South African industry. Finally, by using the concept of discourse and the nature of skill in the Johannesburg apparel sector, in the last section I will argue that the discourse of 'skills' is a governmental strategy used by the South African capitalist state to rationalize the risks of free-market capitalism, to further segment the working classes and to transfer the responsibility of a lack of adequate social protection to the masses.

1.13 'Skill' as Discourse in Johannesburg Apparel

Hall (1996 p. 201) argues that 'discourse' is a way of representing a particular idea, notion or phenomenon and the relationship that exists between it and other ideas. This latter point will be elaborated shortly… He asserts that for a discourse to exist it must be constituted by a group of statements that enable one to speak about a particular topic or idea in a particular way. In other words, a discourse provides a linguistic and representational framework that allows one to articulate and imagine a certain idea in a certain way or ways. For example, the discourse of 'skill', gives one the ability to speak about and imagine what it means or what it looks like to be 'skilled' (Hall 1996). A discourse of 'skill' for example could include being 'skilled' as characterised by technical training, technical ability, professionalism, merit-based remuneration, a formal qualification, eligibility for employment, easy absorption into the labour market and increased bargaining power amongst others (Hall 1996, p.186). This effectively means that a person that possesses these 'characteristics' or that can be

conceptualized or described according these statements can then be thought of and spoken of, as ‘skilled’. The discourse, the ‘formulation by association’, makes this possible. Discourse as mentioned above creates a certain way of relating one idea to others in the sense that it combines statements that work together to form what is referred to as a “discursive formation” (Foucault 1926-84, cited in Hall 1996, p. 201). This ‘discursive formation’ allows one to relate certain ideas to one another in a way that enables them to agree or support one another in representing that particular object, idea or phenomenon (Cousins and Hussain 1984, pp.84-85, cited in Hall 1996, p. 201). The example above of combining technical training, technical ability etc. to characterise ‘skill’ is a discursive formation. Further than talking about a particular object or idea, discourse also allows one to talk about other ideas, since by producing a particular form of representing an idea, object or phenomenon; it simultaneously blocks other forms of representing the same. In other words, once the discourse of ‘skill’ has solidified in the minds and activities of men, all other forms of speaking about skill then become dubious or unthinkable. In our age, to refer to someone not possessing the ‘identifying marks’ in the example above as skilled, is absurd due to the solidification of the discourse of skill. This point in particular will prove very useful in the next two sections of this chapter as the solidification of discourse is resilient and does not usually bend to changes in the social, political and ideological context.

Following from this conceptual aspect, discourse then creates a way of talking about other subjects or people and creating difference or hierarchy between them (Hall 1996). Back to the example, if one person exhibits the characteristics above and another does not, then the former will be considered as ‘skilled’ and the latter as ‘unskilled’. Therefore, the discourse of skill would then firstly allow one to categorise individuals into skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled, then, due to the picture it has created in one’s mind through this system of representation, it provides a language of talking about and legitimizing the acts of discriminating between these different individuals (Hall 1996, p. 186). By implication, it creates a framework for comparison since it sets a particular standard and every person is judged and classified according to this standard. Lastly, since this standard is a sort of criteria, it produces knowledge about the subject of skill, which then produces certain attitudes about certain individuals. For example, “skilled labour is good and desirable” whereas ‘unskilled’ labour is bad and undesirable” (Hall 1996, p.186). Discourse then, since it produces knowledge and a

frame of comparison as well as certain attitudes attributable to this knowledge and standard, creates a situation of power and prestige (Hall 1996, p. 203). For example, if the discourse of 'skill' posits technically trained individuals as desirable and good, and of course those that do not fall into this category as bad, then by implication the former are 'winning' at the 'game' of skill and thus are represented as more powerful, superior or desirable than the latter. In a nutshell discourse produces power and power relations and in the example above, these would equal the legitimization of bureaucracies and judgements on workplace eligibility, amounts of pay, benefits etc. (Hall 1996, p. 203).

Hall (1996, p. 205) finally asserts that once a discourse becomes effective at creating and regulating power relations, it becomes a 'regime of truth'. In other words, it (seems to be) accepted as fact, as objective knowledge, as a universally applicable standard which all parties concerned must strive for in order to fit the bill. For the purpose of this paper, I would then add that whosoever controls this conceptualization and the practises that are conceived out of that discourse, wields significant power over those who are to be considered as 'skilled' as well as over those who are 'to do' this considering. Thus, since the South African state is the guardian of the discourse of skills, it can exercise a significant degree of power over all who accept this conceptualization since this ideology translates into certain practises, legitimizes certain attitudes, rationalizes certain hierarchies and ('is supposed to') give or take away power depending on the individuals concerned. This last point will be elaborated further in the last section of this chapter.

What gives any regime of truth an almost divine air, is its perceived sense of pervasiveness, objectivity and universal applicability. What makes it acceptable is the illusion that it transcends petty human trifles such as subjectivity, prejudice and power; that it exists on a plane that we can all relate to, that it has the right to regulate and shape our behaviour because it is accepted in the literal sense of the word, that is, as 'truth'. The discourse becomes reified and takes up a consciousness of its own as if it is not the product of human power relations and the desire to maintain them. With that said, how do workers conceptualize the nature of 'skill' in the Johannesburg apparel sector?

1.14 The Nature of 'Skill' in Johannesburg Apparel

At first glance, it seems that there is uniform understanding in the Johannesburg apparel sector about what exactly constitutes 'skill'. In all three labour regimes there was relative consensus that the three main elements of skill are 'talent', 'education' and 'training'. Upon further probing however, as to what exactly is meant by 'talent', 'education' and or 'training', it was discovered that the concept of skill is much more elusive and subjective than the discourse of skills would like to indicate. Below are three tables that have attempted to summarise the myriad and sometimes philosophical responses to the question "what is skill?"

Bespoke Regime	**What is 'skill'?**		
	Talent	**Education**	**Training**
Respondent A	- Raw material of skill, that needs to be "polished" through education(if preferred) and training	- Not a necessary-evil if one can find a mentor who went to school	- Mentorship "for the business side" -Internship
Respondent B	- Creativity and passion	-If you have the opportunity you can, but creativity cannot be learnt, it "sparks on itself"	- Trial and error ("I'm self taught") - In-house (on the job)
Respondent C	- "Catching on to something once and running with it"	- "Relative" since more than one pathway can be used	- Mentorship - In-house
Respondent D	- Love of the trade or "calling"	- Necessary, through college or university, *plus* training	- Mentorship - In-house

Respondent E	- No mention of 'talent'	- Formal qualification from college or university *plus* training	- In-house - Mentorship

For the fashion designers in the bespoke regime, what seems to constitute 'skill' is a combination of 'talent', of which it was not made clear how this is measured, and informal training, i.e. training that happens on the basis of volunteering, with remuneration as an incidental bonus. On the issue of 'talent' one designer describes it as inborn technical and artistic ability, another as a cognitive and affective quality (creativity and passion), the third designer describes it as the rapidity of learning and the last mention of talent is the degree to which one is drawn to a particular trade. Since technical ability is crucial in the discourse of 'skill', is it the same as 'talent'? And if it is, how does the discourse of skill measure it? Interestingly, formal education, in the form of university or college programmes, is mostly seen as an exception, not a rule. This last point has serious implications for the discourse of 'skills' (shortage) which argues that a lack of standardisation and formalisation in education and training is one of the key contributors to the national 'skills' crisis.

Co-op Regime	**What is 'skill'?**		
	Talent	**Education**	**Training**
Respondent A	- No mention of 'talent'	- Formal qualification from college or university with a strong emphasis on training to gain workplace experience which makes one eligible for employment	- In-house training in the form of paid internship
Respondent B and C	- No mention of 'talent'	- Formal qualification from college or university ***or*** training	- In-house - Mentorship

(*interviewed at the same time*)			
Respondent D and E (*interviewed at the same time*)	- No mention of 'talent'	- No mention of formal education	- In-house, in the form of ***actual*** employment (as opposed to an internship or mentorship)

In the co-op regime, the workers do not even mention the element of 'talent' as contributing to 'skill'. For most of these women, 'skill' is not so much a matter of inborn qualities as it is a matter of knowledge and practise. Even here, only two attribute the development of 'skill' to formal education. The other three place emphasis on the actual work environment as contributing to skill development. As a result, vocational education and training are mostly seen as indispensable to the acquisition and development of 'skill'. Of course it would be unfair to not acknowledge the emphasis on technical ability as a crucial factor for the women in the co-op regime. In this labour regime, however, the description of technical ability ranges from production without much supervision, the ability to produce designs from conception to execution and neatness. Again, these are highly subjective conceptualizations.

Factory Regime	**What is 'skill'?**		
	Talent	**Education**	**Training**
Respondent A	- Passion - Inborn ability	- Formal education is not really necessary because some people have "a gift", education is only needed if driven by passion to want to know more	- Peer learning - In-house (employment or internship)

Respondent B	- Not mentioned	Formal education (college or university) is very necessary as it helps to broaden scope of creativity	-In house or as entrepreneur (trial and error that is mediated by creativity)

The women in the factory regime see the role of formal education in different ways; for one it is necessary for the other not so much. Talent is equated with natural ability and creativity. Interestingly, the training that is supposed to result in technical ability can also be procured from friends or close kin, or refined on the job or through trial and error as an entrepreneur. These conceptualizations are a serious distortion to the emphasis on regulated and informal training and objective standardisation that is stressed in the discourse of 'skills'.

The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate the highly subjective nature of how 'skill' is conceptualized by apparel workers themselves. This is important because every discourse has conceptual underpinnings that regulate and shape behaviour, institutions, what is considered as valuable and thus how it is to be rewarded. The problem with this is that in order to fairly discriminate between value and 'unvalue', the standard must be the same for all. In this subsection, it was illustrated that this is only possible if the illusion of objectivity and universality is present, when actually, it is the powerful enough that get to impose their definitions and ensuing practises on others thus exercising power over them. What I am simply trying to say is that the conceptualization of 'skill', along with how this manifests as practise, is not so much a technical exercise as it is a political one. The following excerpt from Marx (1976, pg. 305) may illuminate the point:

"The distinction between higher and simple labour, 'skilled labour' and 'unskilled labour', rests in part on pure illusion or, to say the least, on distinctions that have long since ceased to be real, and survive only by virtue of a traditional convention; and in part on the helpless condition of some sections of the working class, a condition that prevents them from exacting equally with the rest, the value of their labour-power."

Marx reiterates the point that the discourse of ‘skills’ maintains the ability to discriminate between ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ labour and the benefits they are eligible to, through the illusion of qualitative differences between these forms of labour. These differences of ‘skill’ when using a purely technical criterion are superficial or have ceased to be real. The second element that reveals the political nature of ‘skill’ is the curious phenomenon that those whose labour power is deemed valueless, are so, not necessarily because of an inherent sense of worthlessness in the products of their labour or a sense of ease in the process by which they produce these commodities, but because of their inability to enforce why they deem themselves as worth certain rewards, symbolic, material or otherwise. In other words, the fact that engineers get paid more than teachers in South Africa is due to the historic valuing of engineering by capital, the maintenance of that valuing as well as the lack of power by teachers to enforce why they need to get paid equally or even more than other occupational groups. So what becomes ‘skilled labour’ is not so much what requires intense physical labour or intense cognitive labour or any other tangible criterion, but only that which is valued by capital. So “skill” is not a simple matter of technique, but simply a matter of one’s relation to capital. The problem, for our purposes, begins when such a highly subjective, highly relative, highly political discourse enshrouds itself in the garb of mere technicality, masquerading as a fair standard of judgement by which men are judged and are to judge themselves thereby accepting their fate in the South African capitalist zeitgeist as ‘natural’ or ‘sensible’.

I argue at this point that there are essentially two discourses at work in the discourse of ‘skills’; a formal discourse and an actual or hidden discourse. The formal discourse of ‘skills’ is seen in policy documents and government strategies such as the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (2009), the National Skills Development Strategy III (2010), the National Development Plan (2011) and the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (2013). There are a number of assumptions that are propagated by the formal discourse of skills, which make up its discursive formation. For example, “skill is the most potent form of bargaining power in capitalist labour relations”, an increase in ‘skill’ means an increase in bargaining power”, “skill is equal to technical ability, mental aptitude and or physical rigour”, and the most basic assumption of all in the formal discourse of skills is the assumption that “skill (or ‘talent’) automatically, unproblematically translates to economic value”

(Sennett, 2006, pg. 84). In this way, the formal discourse of 'skill' becomes purely technical, purely rational. It is this very discourse that is at work within education and training or the supply side of the skills debate, the side of the debate that has received most if not all of the attention, from scholarly to legislative to public circles. Of course there is the hidden discourse that operates simultaneously with the formal discourse. It is at work in industry or the demand side of the 'skills' debate and it demonstrates the significance of the focus on this side of the skills debate that is encapsulated by this paper.

In the Johannesburg apparel sector, to what extent is technical ability a crucial factor in securing employment? Responses from the three labour regimes will shed light on this. Firstly in the factory regime, notwithstanding the rigorous nature of the labour required to produce garments and the technical nitty-gritties required in that production, the possession of technical ability at the point of employment seems to be of little significance:

Me: "So in your work, you have to have prior training before they hire you?"

"*No. The rest come without having been trained, some learnt right there on the job. Some came already knowing something but not perfectly... Respondent A (Factory Regime)*

Me: "So is there something they use to differentiate between those that come in trained and those that are not?"

"Well it is all the same. There isn't much difference that is put between the trained and the untrained, even the newbie... They will give them to us and say 'here, train her'... There was never that difference of saying people that operate a machine must be classed according to these levels, 'this one has this number of skills they must be at this level' There was never anything like that, but since these new shop-stewards came in, things are changing little by little. " Respondent A (Factory Regime)

One of the ladies in the co-op regime sheds some light on how she was recruited into the factory regime when she started her career. Besides the fact that she virtually had no technical ability at the time this occurred is one interesting factor in the hidden discourse of skills. The actual criterion used in her recruitment is yet another...

"My history... When I finished school, in fact it had been a year since I finished and was sitting at home, it so happened that my mother sent me to Checkers in Fordsburg to buy some groceries. I was still very slender. There approached an Indian man, he said 'I like you'; I said 'oh thanks', 'you've got a nice figure, nice frame'; I replied 'thank you'. He then asked 'what are you doing at home?' In my mind I thought that maybe he is asking me this because he wants to tell me that his school can help me with furthering my studies... Then he asked 'don't you like working?' I said I would love to; it's just that I can't find someone who will help me get work. During those days, you would need someone to vouch for you, you would go job-hunting yes, but they would not want a CV, they wouldn't ask you about it, they wanted this experience for which you did not even have documentation... To tell you the truth, I didn't have that experience. So the Indian said to me, he gave me his address he said 'right down there, here in Fordsburg, I have a factory that manufactures jerseys. I would like you to work for me because I like your movement'. You see they used to prefer people who are fast, not sluggish people, with huge bodies that take five hours to move from this spot to that spot. You must go 'zip, zip zip, zip, zip!' You know, speed up like a car... He sat me down and said 'I know you have got no experience, but I think the way you're so fast, your movement, you will learn fast'. He gave me two overalls, I asked him 'when can I start?' he said 'now'..." Respondent A (Cooperative Regime)

It is very interesting how not even a demonstration was required and the fact that she was hired on the basis of her physical appearance alone is also fascinating. So in this particular context, 'skill' is actually physique and movement. The bargaining power is indeed increased by the possession of these 'qualities' but not in the universal, overarching, objective manner that is emphasized in the formal discourse of skills. The reality is more relative, much more prone to stigma and the use of 'intuition' .Even here, there was no assessment whatsoever as to whether that physical appearance would yield profitable results or not. The manager simply used his capitalist intuition and probably past experience as the respondent makes clear in her explanation of why her physical appearance was key to securing the job. This particular incident cannot be accounted for adequately by the formal discourse of 'skills'. Blackburn and Mann (1979, pp. 12-13) argue that there are no general measurements of skill, because managers have no incentive to measure skill (in the technical sense) since manual jobs require pretty much the same level of 'skill'. Interestingly, the respondent

above highlights that this dynamic is not restricted to ‘manual’ labour but also extends to ‘machine’ labour. Ironically or interestingly, managers do seek worker quality… How do they then determine ‘quality’, by using what Blackburn and Mann (1979, pg. 12) refer to as ‘screening devices’ instead of direct measures that are usually posited as general screening standards by the formal discourse of skills. These are observable traits that once recognised; signify the existence of ‘ability’. These include marital status, race, gender, ethnicity, age, citizenship, criminal record and in the incident above, physical appearance and body weight. These screening devices become instruments of both selection and exclusion based on the needs of capital at the time.

In the bespoke regime, similar sentiments are held by a fashion designer who has employees that work with him on a permanent basis. In one place he reveals that his criteria for employment is passion and the existence of a system of production that anyone can apply:

“My assistant she’s new into this, she didn’t go to school. She yah, she just wanted to know where to start, so I just took her in my wing and yah...So I’ve worked up a system to say if someone walks in and says they want a jean, she can just pull a pattern and cut that. And I designed that system so that I can find someone who didn’t go to fashion school, but can still do the minimal work...” Respondent D (Bespoke Regime)

Premised behind the statement that technical ability is crucial for securing employment is the belief or at least the argument that South African society is utterly meritocratic, that in this completely fair, rational society, all one needs do is get the necessary competences and all will fall into place, since all are rewarded according to what they have, not who and what, where and when they are. This discussion on the concept of meritocracy, brings us to a second assumption in the formal discourse of skills, an assumption that is the very bedrock of the discourse. This assumption argues that technical ability is automatically equal to economic value. Before diving into the Johannesburg apparel sector, let us revisit the concept of value.

In his labour theory of value, Marx (1976, pg. 38) argues that there are essentially two problems in the conceptualization of value; a quantitative problem and a qualitative problem. The word ‘problem’ is used deliberately to connote subjectivity, relativity and contextuality. Quantitatively, what makes a commodity or product valuable or more pointedly, what determines its value is the amount of workers that are necessary for

its production (Marx, 1976, pg. 38). Qualitatively, what determines the value of a commodity or product is the relative view that society has of the particular trade that produces it (Marx, 1976, pg. 38). This view affects the degree to which this product is seen as valuable irrespective of what it is actually used for. In other words, value is socially constructed precisely because the importance, prestige and value of craft (skill), is likewise socially constructed. Concrete social labour (the quantitative aspect) produces *use-values* of commodities, while abstract social labour determines the *value* of commodities, which then determine the manner with which the trade that produces them is to be valued and rewarded (Marx, 1976, pg. 38). Bear in mind that it is 'abstract' because it begins in the mind and is realised in the behaviour, thus keeping true to the concept of discourse and the effect it has in producing power relations.

The Johannesburg apparel sector remains a curious case for the formal discourse of skills because it essentially problematizes the assumption that technique is inevitably equal to economic value. The sector remains a curious case because there seems to be an undeniable, basic criterion for practise, i.e. the ability to do something to cloth and thus produce a commodity. Where is the socio-political in that? It seems technical enough. The socio-political is in the fact that all can do something to the cloth, all can relatively transform raw materials into commodities thus infusing them with value, but not all are allotted the same level of pay (material reward) and prestige (symbolic reward).

Below is tabulated the differential pay levels that are apparent in the Johannesburg apparel sector. These amounts are not universal to the sector but illustrate and summarise my participants' responses to interview and follow-up questions.

Labour Regime	**Average Pay**	**Total p/month**
Factory Regime	+/-R400 p/week	+/-R1600
Co-op Regime	-Depends on the awarding of a tender and alterations for maintaining cash flow	Undisclosed

	-Tenders can range from +/-R10 000 to R50 000	
Bespoke Regime	-Pants: +/- R500-R1000 -Shirt: +/- R200-R600 -Suit: +/- R1000-R5000 -Alterations (for cash flow): Relative to type of alteration	Undisclosed

The women in the factory regime have a basic pay that is given to them at the end of each week or fourth-nightly. They also have other jobs they do on the side within apparel, such as pushing their own products, or assisting fashion designers to meet their targets as a form of supplementing their income. To be fair to the factory regime, it is necessary to admit that among the three labour regimes, their income is the most relatively stable, even though it is lower than the last two. Of course factory owners do sometimes fail to pay their employees due them also waiting to get paid by their patrons. In this case, where there is trade unionisation, the union can contest this and find a working solution for both parties.

In the co-op regime it is pure entrepreneurship, where no selling or no tender means no pay. Of course the alterations market serves as a cushion as it provides constant cash flow to these women. When a contract is available, whether from government or procured by the marketing abilities of the women or from a local school or pre-school, these women can afford to hire labour on a temporary basis and pay them the standard +/- R400 per week, and share the remaining profits. The women in the co-op regime would be regarded by Soffer (1960, pg. 146) as “petty contractors”. They are also autonomous workmen due to the structure of their labour market and the philosophy of management that undergirds their specific labour regime (Soffer, 1960). They are

self-employed, but report to the department of social development. Compared to the women in the factory regime, their work rewards, both symbolic and material (including but not restricted to pay), are relatively better.

Then comes the 'cream of the apparel crop', the autonomous, trendy, mostly young male fashion designers. These workers enjoy a kind of protean existence because they can move between the first two labour regimes or choose to stay in the bespoke regime as owners of their own brands. In any case, they have symbolic and material prestige ranging from the ability to hire labour either casually (as one designer does) or permanently (as another does), differential treatment from factory management when contracted to assist in seasons of high demand and monopoly pricing on their branded products. They enjoy a double-prestige as artists and entrepreneurs or self-made "hustlers". Theirs of course is not a heavenly existence, they remain bound to the precarious nature of the global economy on this side of eternity, a point that will be elaborated further in chapter 3. Nonetheless, the point is that they fair better in relation to their two previous colleagues. In fact, as illustrated in the first chapter of this report, the women in the factory regime aspire to be like them and the women in the co-op regime aspire to be like them (again).

Notwithstanding, these interesting intricacies, the main point is that though these three categories of workers have pretty much the same basic form of technical ability, they are valued and rewarded differentially. Using the formal discourse of skills is not sufficient to account for this phenomenon. There is another discourse at work.

Ranciere (1983) in debunking the myth of the skilled worker, a myth that is held up as the gospel in the discourse of deskilling, suggests that in forming sociological categories, one must be careful not only of ignoring heterogeneity between seemingly similar groups (my argument so far in this dissertation) but also ambiguities within individuals that seem to belong to one group. I extend this argument by suggesting that in formulating socio-economic categories, one must be careful not only of ignoring homogeneity in trades that are seen as different, but also ignoring ambiguities in trades that are seen as similar. It is in these ambiguities that power relations and social constructs are revealed.

Why are there differential rewards in the three labour regimes of Johannesburg apparel? It should be clear at this point that technique or the ability attributed to it is

not a factor in the actual discourse of ‘skills’. Ranciere (1983, pg. 2) assists us by suggesting that we tend to project on to trades, the luxury that is associated with their end products. For example we tend to see the bespoke regime as luxurious because it is associated with luxury when in actual fact, luxury is only the end product of this regime, itself a complex mix of social and psychological processes Ranciere (1983, pg. 2). This causes one to overlook actual perceptions of the designers themselves about their work as well the actual conditions of their work, a point that was also illustrated in chapter 1 of this report. This also affects the way that people view skill and value (or reward) it. In French labour movement history, some trades were viewed as contemptible because they were perceived as requiring little skill, strength or cleverness. This was not necessarily because of the differentials in technical ability, but precisely because of the projections of and associations with luxury that characterised these prestigious trades (Ranciere, 1983, pg. 2). This is also the case for the bespoke regime in relation to the factory and the co-op regimes. Ranciere (1983, pg. 3) would argue that the supposed contrast between the quality of work produced by the bespoke regime and the ‘poor’ work produced by the factory regime or the co-op regime is a dubious one because the same workers that work in the factory regime or co-op regime, assist the designers in the bespoke regime as a way to supplement their need satisfaction since wages are low or when there is no business. This ‘dubiousness’ is illustrated by the fact that both of the women in the factory regime serve as casual labour to one of the designers in the bespoke regime and one of his more stable ‘assistants’ is also a technician in the petrochemical industry. In the following quotation, this designer further debunks the notion of technical ability being equivalent to economic value. Other subjective factors such as monopoly pricing, marketing and branding determine value and reward.

Me: “So how do you work? Do you have employees?”

“There’s this other old lady... I am relying on her. You see even these dresses? I want to cut them accurately, give her three of them, then she tells me how much she wants.” Respondent B (Bespoke Regime)

Me: “Then how do you decide how much to pay her? Do you negotiate or something?”

“She tells me how much she usually charges for labour, that is, how much does one dress cost when she puts it together, how much are pants... I charge my own rate then add her labour on top of that. I don’t get affected in this charge because for example if pants are R400, I can add R150, making the final price R550.” Respondent B (Bespoke Regime)

Me: So did you teach her?

“Oh no! She has been in the field for a long time. She is a person I got introduced to though one of the designers (Respondent D). Even if there isn’t much money, I do have something for them. I do give them work even though all I have is also little, at least so that they can be motivated. So that next time when I call them they can say ‘oh it’s him? Oh yes, we will definitely help him!’” Respondent B (Bespoke Regime)

Blackburn and Mann (1979, pg. 10) also assist us in understanding the hidden or actual discourse of skills by arguing that the discourse of skills is a neoclassical concept and neoclassically, skill is (or is supposed to be) a (stable) difference in wages that is determined by productive quality. The problem with this orthodox model is that it fails to predict or account for differences in wages in groups that do not necessarily differ in productive quality (technical ‘ability’) thus revealing it’s subjective nature. The fact that the differences are in race, citizenship and gender reveals that any discourse of skills cannot claim to be apolitical and concerned with only technical issues . The technicist view of skill, largely neglects the power (socio-political) relations of skill.

Works that have argued this same point that skill is socially and politically constructed include Webster (1985) and Soffer 1960). In Webster (1985, pg. 46), “unskilled youths” were being employed in the hollow drill steel operation, work which was traditionally constructed as ‘skilled work’ by existing moulders and apprentices. The latter argued that the work was skilled and could only be performed by them even though the work was already being performed by ‘unskilled youths’. So ‘skill’ becomes a cloak for protecting vested interests. In the iron moulders’ case, via the International Moulders Society, a craft union that was responsible for protecting the interests of metal craft workers, they had to fight efforts by their employer Union Steel to class, that is to say to conceptualise the operation as ‘semi-skilled’, since it was seen that unskilled youths can in actual fact perform it. It is very interesting how it is the conceptualisation of the operation as ‘skilled’ that bars people from entering into it which seems more important

than the actual performance or technique. In other words, the role of technical knowledge, no matter how superficial, is to discriminate between favoured and unfavoured groups and to monopolize certain trades which are deemed lucrative. The iron craft workers, when they could no longer use craft knowledge as a gate-keeper to protect their interests, ended up actually and brazenly using race as a criteria for skill, implicitly arguing that certain trades can only be performed by white people, since 'natives' do not have the mental aptitude to gain the knowledge necessary for the performance of that skill. This is the power of discourse. This is also the fluidity of discourse and its potential for contestation.

Soffer (1960, pg. 153) argues that when "unskilled" men do "skilled" work it is an 'unhealthy' situation as this unbalances the discourse of skills and questions the legitimacy of existing bureaucracies and power relations .On the other hand, this phenomenon illustrates the social construction of skill and reveals that technique is not the main ingredient in its conception and subsequent operationalization. It is interesting how in Soffer (1960, pg. 158) 'strategic position' is listed first, 'superior status' is listed second and 'abilities' only last in accounting for the power of the autonomous workmen in 19th century American labour history. He continues to state that "the foundation of their individual power was a system of work rules" (Soffer, 1960, pg. 159). So in the hidden discourse, technical ability elicits power when it is accompanied by bureaucracy or legislation that is friendly to the particular craft in question. This will be elaborated further in the last section of this chapter.

In a nutshell, there are complexities involved in any definition of the working man and any value(s) attributed to him (Ranciere, 1983, pg. 14). I would then add that whenever these complexities are overlooked or treated as trifles, there is a discourse at work that treats socio-political relations as merely technical categories that are natural to a rational society. In this way interesting power relations are obscured from view and the illusion of fairness is presented as the determining factor in the differences within South African capitalist society. Inequality becomes a natural phenomenon, an unfortunate fate shared by unfortunate actors, instead of the side-effect of an economic system that is designed to engineer and reproduce it. If inequality, is socially engineered, then in the same fashion, it can be resisted. The discourse of 'skills' prevents one from even imagining this possibility.

A third assumption within the formal discourse of skills is that education substantially increases one's 'skill' and the rewards accruable to it. By extension this would mean that the more time that one spends in the 'supply side' of skills development, the more lucrative are one's rewards going to be in the demand side. This brings to mind the words my mother once spoke me, when she asked me to spend as much time as I possibly can in school so that I don't suffer like she does. By 'education', this implies formal learning at an accredited institution of higher learning that consummates in the reception of a 'qualification'. This qualification is a document that serves to 'prove' that one is eligible for employment at a particular branch of industry. To what extent then, is this argument the case in the actual discourse of skills? Going back to the Johannesburg apparel sector will shed light on this.

The following tables summarise the educational backgrounds of my respondents as an attempt to test the idiom that 'schooling determines skill, thus creating a better quality of life'.

Bespoke Regime		
Respondent	**Educational Background**	**Number of Years**
A	- Obtained diploma is fashion design from SEW AFRICA	3
B	- No formal educational background whatsoever (*"I'm self-taught..."*)	?
C	- Did first year in Wits Tech (Now UJ) - Completed diploma in fashion design at Parktown College	3
D	- Diploma in Tailoring from Kline Institute	3
E	- No formal educational background in apparel (*"You*	?

	suckle these from someone who has experience...I learnt from my mother you see?" Respondent E, Bespoke Regime)	

In the bespoke regime, three of the fashion designers have some form of qualification from an institution of higher learning in the apparel sector. Two however don't, yet still enjoy the 'privileges' of the bespoke regime. In fact, respondent B is an interesting case due to his utter lack of any 'qualification' whatsoever and his exquisite disdain for such formalities. This is what he had to say about his rise into the bespoke regime:

"I am self-taught... Creativity is not something you learn, it is something that sparks on itself. Like now, I can't even sketch, I don't have sketches, I only have a pattern magazine that people can use to tell me which design they want then I work towards that with my own creation..." Respondent B (Bespoke Regime)

And how are his designs? They are incredible. I speak as a client, but of course like any judgement of 'quality', my recommendation is not free of bias and is subject to interpretation. In fact as highlighted above most of the designers see school as an option. One response from Respondent A is also quite interesting:

"...I had to teach myself, coming from school, teaching myself that, I was already... Could I say a designer by then? I was already a designer before finishing (high) *school... I already know what I want and art does not need you to have matric..." Respondent A (Bespoke Regime)*

Co-op Regime		
Respondent	**Educational Background**	**Number of Years**
A	- No **formal** educational background	?

B and C	- Dressmaking in Kliptown (Respondent B) - No **formal** educational background (Respondent C)	? ?
D and E	- No **formal** educational background	?

In the cooperative regime four of the women have no 'qualification' in the formal discursive sense of the word. They were "raised in the factories" as Respondent B so proudly puts it. As a result it was difficult to state the duration of their 'training' since in the formal discourse 'training' has a definite beginning and end and is separate from education.

Factory Regime		
Respondent	**Educational Background**	**Number of Years**
A	- Needlework in Intermediate phase (Grade 6-8) - Certificate in Garment Manufacturing	3 1 year and 6 months
B	- Certificate in Sewing from White City	?

In the factory regime, both of the women have a formal qualification, that is to say are 'educated' in the field of apparel. Of course their material and symbolic condition is a disjuncture from the prophecies of the formal skills discourse. What adds insult to injury is the fact that they are subcontracted by the very designer who has never seen a fashion school classroom in order to supplement their livelihoods. These are considerable aberrations.

One may argue that the bespoke regime is relatively 'well-off' due to the fact that most of the designers have diplomas from reputable apparel institutions. Nevertheless, the

fact that most of them argue that school is only one way to enter the bespoke regime and worse still that one of them couldn't even care less about formal schooling, is a serious phenomenon and draws the curtain from the formal discourse of skills. How can one make sense of these phenomena and thus reveal the hidden discourse of 'skills' in relation to the dynamic of schooling and the experience of capitalism?

Sennett (2006, pg. 84) refers to societies that stress skills as "skills societies" and just like South Africa, in these societies parents try to shield their children from the perils of capitalist crises by stressing that education is the key to immunity. Governments also become fixated on education as a silver-bullet to remedy the hazards of capitalist development. The problem with this is that in these very societies, unemployment, what Sennett (2006) calls the ghost of 'uselessness', is a reality that exists alongside the long and overbearing obsession with education or self-skilling. And who are the people that are tormented by this ghost? Who are the people that are unemployed? Is it only high school dropouts or those with a history of juvenile delinquency? No. It is the graduates as well, the people who are supposed to have the best chances; they are included in that majority. These are the people that are in actual fact "skilled" and educated. Sennett (2006, pg. 84) argues that this is because the work they want has migrated to places in the world where skill is cheaper. In the SA case, I would argue that capitalist development has brought labour that is cheaper by relaxing immigration legislation.

To what can one attribute this sad reality? The problem with the 'skills society' is that its 'skills economy' is not designed to cater for the majority, it only requires a select and ever narrowing number of ultra-qualified, elite graduates in the fields of high finance, space-age technology, futuristic science and sophisticated services in order for the capitalist machinery to keep running (Sennett, 2006, pg. 86). It essentially leaves the majority 'unemployable'. It churns out large numbers that cannot work, or at least cannot work in the fields in which they are educated, due amongst other things, to labour market saturation (Sennett, 2006, pg. 86). This means that only a small number of highly qualified workers are needed, and valued. Of course political rhetoric must continue to promise jobs in exchange for votes and university degrees must maintain their legitimacy. The problem with tertiary qualifications is that they believe that "brains are the remedy for an oversupply of hands" (Sennett, 2006, pg. 85).

A response about the labour process in the factory regime from the bespoke regime, may serve to 'ground' the argument:

"The name of the game is profits right? Now how are profits made? By obviously reducing the pay roll to be as little as possible. Now you take unskilled people, you teach them little just to get along, yah just a little... It goes back to that same thing, that industry does not absorb skills. Industry is the one that cuts corners you see? Because someone who is skilled is expensive. So you end up operating a pyramid of about 30 people. You only need two people in this 30 that know how to do the work thoroughly. The other 28 know nothing..." Respondent E (Bespoke Regime)

"We must bring back apprenticeships...These are going to be the muscles you see? And our children and everybody as individuals, we are given this picture that everyone will go to varsity. Not everybody is gonna go to varsity, very privileged few people who manage to go to varsity and pass! That's another part that people don't understand that all these kids running to your Wits, they are not going to pass all of them. So I'm saying in these muscles, everyone, that's where I see that that one skilled person might trickle-down, this thing and the ones at the bottom benefit because at the end of the day, it's all about earning money, work and get paid. Some people are satisfied with five thousand rand, not everybody is gonna earn one hundred thousand rand, there is no such thing." Respondent E (Bespoke Regime)

Webster (1985, pg. 64) in his account of how skill was contested between the IMS and state capitalism argues that as much as rapid mechanization led to the de-qualification of craft skill, due to the contradictory nature of capitalist development, another effect was the creation of the demand for a small number of 'hyper qualified' technicians and engineers. This is a defining characteristic of all industrialized countries because in these countries, production is impossible without these key individuals (Webster, 1985, pg. 64). The problem with the formal discourse of skills is that it fails to mention that only a small number is required in this order of industrialism. Interestingly, Webster (1985, pp. 64 and 70) argues that it was at this time that University enrolments in engineering for example, increased from 149 students in 1922 to 1351 in 1967. Precisely because the definition of what it means to be skilled had now shifted due to the phase of machinofacture, from craftsmanship to engineering, a shift that is not so much technical as it is socio-political.

One needs to be sceptical when considering neoclassical measures of 'worker quality' or measures of skill such as years of schooling because they are seldom used as criteria for selecting workers by managers (Blackburn and Mann, 1979, pg. 11). Things are more subjective than objective upon closer examination. In a country like SA, where educational opportunity is relatively pervasive, due in part to the obsession with education and training and the more recent announcement of 'free' education, it may seem at first glance that years of schooling are a criterion that illustrates work ability, but schooling does not measure ability, so much as it measures cooperation, perseverance and most importantly, acceptance of managerial authority (Blackburn and Mann, 1979, pg. 12). And even this does not guarantee employment in an increasingly narrowing, precarious economy.

In this section I have attempted to present the hidden discourse of 'skills' as it is manifested in the Johannesburg apparel sector. I have argued that there are essentially two forms of the discourse of skills that are at work simultaneously. The formal discourse, at work in education and training or the supply side of the skills debate, and the hidden discourse, at work in industry or the demand side of the skills debate. I have argued that there seems to be a process of transformation or evolution that happens to the skills discourse as it moves from the academy to the industry. The formal discourse seems to be the right hand that comforts us, telling us that all we need are competencies and we will survive these tough economic times, while the hidden discourse is the left hand that slaps us, awakening us to the realities of global capitalism. I will now argue that though these two discourses seem contradictory, they are complimentary, two hands of the same body because they are part of the same state capitalist dynamic of neoliberal governance.

1.15 The Discourse of 'Skills', Power and the South African Capitalist State

In the previous section it was argued that only a small, elite of hyper-qualified graduates are favoured by the discourse of skills and thus gain, while the majority is left to scavenge the margins of the labour market. Since the discourse of skills is primarily a state discourse, what are the benefits of propagating this discourse and what is the nature of the power that is exercised through this discourse?

Kenny (2016, pg.21) argues that the precariousness of retail labour in the heyday of apartheid was built into this form of labour through what she refers to as "regimes of

contract". These are "generalized and administrative rules and practices that describe what forms of labour are possible, as well as the generalised relationship within the social formation of the law to state governance" (Kenny, 2016, pg. 21). In other words, regimes of contract are the nexus of rules, practices and law that shape the experience of work in fulfilment of the State's ideology or philosophy of governance. In the context in Kenny (2016), apartheid was the philosophy of governance, thus, regimes of contract had a racial air to them which then shaped the construction of seemingly technical concepts such as 'skill'. To illustrate, in apartheid SA, administrative rules and practices in the retail sector were buttressed by a racially oppressive legislation. This created a situation that restricted the native worker to what were considered as menial jobs. In this way, three discursively significant effects were the result; firstly, the native worker could not get better wages because he was considered as 'unskilled', secondly, he is 'unskilled' because he is a native which is to say that it is his blackness or his nature that unfits him for a better quality of life and lastly he will remain unskilled forever since he will remain black forever. In this way, Kenny (2016, pg. 26) argues that race differentials were used to naturalize, immortalize and legitimize 'skill' differentials. Interestingly, unskilled vocations were first defined as such, using only the criterion of "rough manual labour" by some arbitrary standard and then by virtue of the regime of contract, black people were forced to stay in these jobs. So the conceptualisation of skill preceded the practise and regulation of skill instead of the other way round, thus illustrating the actual 'untechnicality', and 'unobjectivity' of skill. By being forced to stay in these vocations defined as lowly and unskilled, the native workers were essentially being forced to accept the conceptualisation of skill and its hyper-racial and hyper-gendered implications.

The philosophy of governance in capitalist South Africa is neoliberalism. According to Harvey (2005, pg. 64, cited in Karim, 2008, pg. 6) neoliberalism is an ideology that argues that human welfare is best served by the withdrawal or removal of the state from welfarist policies. In other words, neoliberalism argues that to solve the problem of poverty for instance, the state must be as uninvolved as possible because, since every problem is a market, when self-interested rational beings interact in that market, it will self-regulate and all actors within it will gain a share of the wealth in circulation. Ong (2006, pg. 4 cited in Karim, 2008, pg. 6) goes further by arguing that neoliberalism also forces people to act in accordance to the market principles of competition, self-

discipline and efficiency when it comes to matters of social reproduction and this then subjects people to rules that “inform and regulate behaviour”. In other words, neoliberalism is not just an economic ideology but it becomes also an ideology and a regime of governance, a political concept. Lastly, neoliberalism becomes the new relationship between the state and knowledge through which the strategies for ruling the masses are presented as non-ideological and apolitical problems that need technical solutions (Ong, 2006, pg. 3 cited in Karim, 2008, pg. 12). In other words, if for example the people in rural areas are living in abject poverty, due to the lack of state presence in issues of social welfare, then the discourse becomes, “the reason why this is so is because we the state have intervened too much in their lives and they need to be allowed to form their own relationships with capital and in exercising their rationality and self-interest, they will engage in productive behaviour”. The governmental rationality being neoliberalism, along with a particular governmental strategy that is ‘skills development’, produces a particular kind of subjectivity, one that regulates and perpetuates itself, what Brown (2016) refers to as ‘sacrificial citizenship’ (Rankin, 2001, pg. 22). What is meant by this is that in order for neoliberalism to retain its grip upon the masses, it must use a particular strategy that produces citizens with particular identities and these citizens must regulate themselves thus reproducing these identities.

The discourse of skills is an ideological and practical element in this regime of contract and thus has an air of ‘free-marketism’. This means that the rules, practices and laws in the apparel sector are such that they support the state philosophy of free-marketism, a neoclassical belief that since actors in the labour market are rational, self-interested beings, they will make economic decisions that will bolster their competitiveness and collectively, the market will self-regulate and everyone will win. Rational economic decisions are amongst other things increasing one’s economic value through ‘self-investment or ‘up-skilling’. And since education and training is so liberally provided by the state, all can compete in the labour market on a level playing field. This then creates the impression that those who remain ‘unskilled’ and therefore ‘unemployable’, are so because of their own lack of initiative and drive (since self-skilling is indeed available through education and training), and as a result cannot get better wages and will remain so forever unless they change ‘their’ attitude (Allais, 2011). Even so, the findings from this project have argued that in Johannesburg apparel, ‘skill’ as technical

ability that translates to bargaining power is simply not enough (Webster, 1985, pg. 117). In this way, "market forces" become responsible for inequality, rather than the admission that under capitalism, without adequate social protection, this is indeed the state of existence. In this way, the skills discourse is an indispensable element in the South African State capitalist regime of contract since it technicalizes, and subjectivizes what are in actual fact, systemic, political realities. It effectively obscures the reproduction of economic inequality while simultaneously removing the attention of the people from the state as relatively accountable. In this way, the state is exonerated from being responsible for any of the perils that are experienced under neoliberalism. A response from the bespoke regime could serve as an illustration of this phenomenon:

"…For most people we classify as unemployed in our country, a greater percentage of that unemployed people are 'unemployable'. What I mean by that, they cannot keep jobs, they cannot hold jobs…So because of our education system and our history in South Africa, we've created this unemployable class and with this unemployable class, somehow the government is fuelling this behaviour through SASSA, unemployment grant, mother, child grant. So that means that if a particular lady who has one kid receives R350, and say, just speaking out loud, I'm gonna pay them R350 for that month, and they say 'but if I get money for free why must I come work for it?' So those are the challenges I think nationally we struggling with on the ground you know so which we need to find answers and the only way a person can become ambitious, is they need to be stretched mentally." Respondent D (Bespoke Regime)

From a Foucauldian governmentality approach, neoliberalism ('free-marketism') is a political rationality, an idea that enables one to exercise power over another which must be buttressed by a governmental strategy and in this case, it is skills development that is used as a strategy through which the idea of neoliberalism is exercised on the masses (Foucault, 1991 cited in Rankin, 2001, pg. 22). In order for governmental power to reproduce itself, it must produce a certain kind of subjectivity or personhood, one that is self-regulating and self-sustaining (Butler, 2009, pg. ii; Rankin, 2001, pg. 22). A useful concept that encapsulates this 'personhood' is what Brown (2016) refers to as 'sacrificial citizenship'.

Sacrificial citizenship is the polar-opposite of active, democratic citizenship (Brown, 2016). The sacrificial citizen is a citizen that is conditioned to tolerate the sudden insecurity, deprivation and exposure to recessions, job losses, unemployment and intensification of inequality as basic to the health of the capitalism and does not complain when they are "sacrificed" (via unprecedented lay-offs, failing business models etc.) for the sake of the growth of the country or the team or the group which are posited as commercial firms (Brown, 2016). Sacrificial citizenship blatantly asks the individual unit to moralize sacrifice, to accept this as necessary for the survival of the whole (Brown, 2016, pg. 4). Often in the discourse of skills it is argued that South Africa has had a sluggish growth trajectory because it is in a 'skills-crisis'. Therefore when unemployment or any of the symptoms of capitalism hits, the justification can always be that the person concerned simply has no skills, or not the skills that are needed. The person in question will then go away understanding, accepting that this is just the way things are, and 'its business, nothing personal' or rather nothing political.

The first step to producing a sacrificial citizen is "economization" (Brown, 2016, pg. 3). Economization positions every individual as human capital, groups as commercial firms or businesses (i.e. with the ability to produce profit) thus technicalizing the political and commercializing the social. The second step to sacrificial citizenship is responsibilization and devolution (Brown, 2016). The first is making people responsible for their social welfare by promoting a spirit of entrepreneurialism, which means for example that it becomes the responsibility of the women in the cooperative regime to pursue savvy, competitive, self-investment ventures in order to make their human capital ('their' co-op) to appreciate, even though at the beginning of the Batho Pele tender program, they were servicing the department of social development exclusively without having to worry about finding and keeping business all on their own (Brown, 2016, pg. 9). Devolution means sending authority down the pipeline, from states for example to citizens so that citizens have to deal with the effects of poverty, economic instability without the necessary resources or training to do so (Brown, 2016, pg. 9).

The skills discourse, as argued by Littler and Salaman (1982, pg. 262) is a strategy by the capitalist state to further segment the working class and render it with increased dependency either on the capitalist organisation and or on individual, entrepreneurial initiative. By emphasizing the superficial differences between skilled and unskilled, the

working class is led to fight among itself in a highly competitive labour market in order for individuals to protect their material interests in an ever narrowing economy. In this this highly individualised context, solidarity is rather difficult. Thus, skill is only one of the myriad divisions that have been used to protect individual interests. For labour market stratification to be effective there needs to be a legal or institutional framework put in place that lies outside the immediate labour market (Blackburn and Mann, 1979, pg. 24).The skills discourse fulfils this purpose, it becomes a rationale that institutionalizes job discrimination or job segregation. Of course, as argued in Chapter 1, 'skill' can also be a working class stratification method imposed not by an external state, but this time by workers themselves to make entry into the labour market not so easy, thus, protecting their individual interests a phenomenon that Blackburn and Mann (1979, pg. 300) call "defensive sectionalism". Nevertheless, this does not swerve from benefitting an increasingly absent state.

To conclude this chapter, I will reiterate that it is difficult to formulate objective measurements of skill. It is difficult to try to define in isolation from the concrete labour process how skill is to be defined. Even when this is attempted, it is discovered that the measurements are often superficial and subjective. Formal definitions are less important than the strength of groups in promoting their interests in specific socio-historical contexts. Though a certain idea of specialized competence is yet a component, the fuller or at least 'actual' notion of skill is fluid, pliable and can be contested. The outcome of that contestation is contingent upon the relative strength of the parties involved and their ability to promote their vested interests or a State that stands to benefit from these. Why? The concept of skill is socially-constructed; different interpretations can be advanced by different interest groups or contestants. In Webster (1985) 'strength' is equal to organisation. In Soffer (1960) skill is equal to autonomy and in Sennett (2006) skill is equal to flexibility. What then is the role of specialized competence or technical ability? The role of specialized competence is to provide the misdirection for the 'illusion', in the same way that a magician asking you to focus on a particular part of his body, serves to distract one's focus from the other parts of the body that perform the actual 'magic' trick. Specialized competence has its place, but it is not as long and drawn out as is usually argued by university degrees and apprenticeship programmes (See Webster, 1985 pp. 56 and 62, on the time it took

for unskilled iron moulders in South Africa to produce munitions and armaments during the ‘emergency’ of the Second World War).

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to understand the nature of the relationship between the discourse of deskilling and the discourse of skills.

The discourse of Deskilling argues that Skills are bad for capitalism. It argues that having more skills means having less profit, because skilled people demand more wages. If as a capitalist I want to maximise my profits I must lower my input costs while maintaining or increasing my output value, and the greatest input cost is labour. So the solution is to advance the division of labour and use Scientific Management. I will also make sure that my workers aren't able to organise into trade unions, aren't able to band together and aren't able to get help from the state. I want skills but I don't want to pay for them. In chapter 4 it was seen that the picture is far more complex than the deskilling discourse suggests.

The discourse of Skills (shortage/development/etc.) argues that skills are good, in fact are vital for capitalist development. Without skills one cannot create employment, cannot end inequality and poverty. It further argues that the problem is that we don't have enough skills and the skills we already have are too rigid for the elastic nature of our globalised economy. The argument further develops by saying that is because the people that are in the industry don't have enough skills. Whose fault is it? Education? Industry? Both? This report has argued in Chapter 5 that it's actually because there are two discourses at work in the discourse of skills development, both which serve to protect the state from being responsible for the social reproduction needs of its citizens. An overarching conclusion is that by virtue of the findings in the apparel sector, it seems that the discourse of skill cannot solve the problems of inequality, and unemployment and development because the skills economy is only calculated to cater for a select few. Yes, if there is a 'skills' crisis in South Africa, it not caused by a lack of technical ability, but like any other 'crisis', it is caused by or inherent within capitalism. It is a package deal. Life under capitalism can be said to be characterised by precariousness.

What are the characteristics of precariousness? Standing (2011) uses many avenues to conceptualise precariousness but all of these are based on the

(changed) condition and experience of labour within the contemporary firm, what I call the 'economistic or industrial' approach to precarity. Similarly to the global evolution of microcredit, this approach argues that the global labour market has evolved as a response to neoliberalism from 'rigid' labour markets, to 'flexible' labour markets (Standing, 2011). Flexible labour markets are characterised by wage flexibility (i.e. unstable wages for labour), employment flexibility (i.e. the ability for organisations to reduce employment security and protection), job flexibility (i.e. being easily moved within a firm, from one job structure to the next with minimum complaint, resistance or cost) and skill flexibility (i.e. the ability for management to adjust the trained practise of labour from complex to simple with minimal cost and opposition) (Standing, 2011, pg. 6). This was done to make labour cheaper and attract more foreign investment to organisations within this age of late capitalism. Of course the result is that workers become more disposable and this then renders them 'vulnerable' or 'precarious' in relation to the cold conditions of neoliberalism, in a context when the state is withdrawing more and more from being responsible for the needs of citizens and being the purveyor of welfare to the people it governs (Standing, 2011). These 'vulnerabilities' lead to seven forms of 'insecurities' namely labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, job insecurity, work insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity and representation (i.e. trade union) insecurity (Standing, 2011, pg. 10).

There are problems with this conceptualisation of precariousness which are beyond the scope of this study. The point in bringing in this concept is to illustrate how crises are part of capitalist development and cannot be whisked away by an obsession with technical abilities because under this system of governance equality is impossible.

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Interviews

Factory Regime

Interview with Respondent A, Wednesday November 22, 2017. Emndeni Soweto.

Interview with Respondent B, Wednesday November 15, 2017, Orlando East Soweto.

Bespoke Regime

Interview with Respondent A, Sunday October 1, 2017. Johannesburg CBD

Interview with Respondent B, Sunday, November 12, 2017. Orlando East, Soweto.

Interview with Respondent C, Tuesday, November 21, 2017. Orlando East, Soweto.

Interview with Respondent D, Sunday, November 26, 2017. Southgate, Johannesburg.

Interview with Respondent E, Tuesday, November 21, 2017. Orlando East, Soweto.

Cooperative Regime

Interview with Respondent A, Sunday, November 19, 2017. Protea North, Soweto.

Interview with Respondent B and C, Wednesday, November 22, 2017. Orlando West, Soweto.

Interview with Respondent D and E, Wednesday, November 22, 2017. Orlando West, Soweto.

Appendices

Appendix 1

school of SOCIAL SCIENCES

SOSS Human Research Ethics Committee

Clearance Certificate

Protocol Number:	**DEV/18/02/05**
Project Title:	**'The degradation of artisanship: Understanding the acquisition, development and maintenance of skills in the context of South African capitalism'**
Investigator's Name:	**Mr Themba Tshabalala, 319857**
Department:	**Development Studies**
Date Reviewed:	**February 2018**
Decision of Committee:	**Approved**
Expiry Date:	**March 2020**
Date:	**02 March 2018**
Head of School	**Professor Mucha Musemwa**
CC supervisor:	**Dr Ben Scully**

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
School of Social Sciences
2018 -03- 02
JOHANNESBURG

Declaration of Investigator

To be completed in duplicate and one copy to be returned to Ms. Sarah Mfupa in the School of Social Sciences, Room 152, 1st Floor, Robert Sobukwe Block.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorised to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. If any departure from the research procedure as approved, I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the committee.

Student Signature **Date**

Appendix 2

Information for Research Participants

Name of researcher: ThembaTshabalala
Contact email: 319857@students.wits.ac.za or tshabalalathemba63@gmail.com
Contact number: 079 224 7830
University of Witwatersrand student number: 319857

I am a student from the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg (Wits) and I am pursuing my Master's degree in Development Studies this year (2017). I am doing a research study on the clothing industry and as part of my project, I am interviewing and observing sewers and or management in this industry.

I want to understand why there is a skills crisis in this country and what skills look like in our modern industry from the perspective of people in industry. This may help me understand why the skills crisis is such a difficult problem to solve.
Your participation in this project will help me understand how workers and or managers define skill and how they have acquired, developed and maintained their skills.

For this purpose, I would like to ask you some questions about your understanding of the nature of skills and your experience of your work. I expect to take between 5 and 30 minutes of your time.

I would be very grateful if you agree to participate in this research. Regarding participation, please note that:

- participation is voluntary
- you are free to withdraw from the study at any time
- you may refuse to answer any question for whatever reason
- there will be no direct benefit for you in participating in this study
- there are not likely to be any risks involved

Regarding expectations and confidentiality, please note that:

- You will be asked questions regarding your understanding of the nature of skills and your experience of work in the clothing industry
- Your name will not be used in the research report and every effort will be taken to keep your contribution anonymous. Your organisation's name will also not be used in the final report.
- You may request a digital copy of the final research which will be shared with you on completion of the project using the email address that you provide on the consent form.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please sign the participant consent form. You are welcome to contact me on the email address or contact number above.
Thank you very much,
Themba Tshabalala

Participant Consent Form

I, _____(Name of Participant) agree to participate in ThembaTshabalala's research study.

I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The reason I am being asked to participate in this project has been explained to me and is clear, and my questions about participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily.

Regarding participation, I understand that:

- participation is voluntary
- I am free to withdraw from the study at any time
- I may refuse to answer any question for whatever reason
- there will be no direct benefit for me in participating in this study
- there are not likely to be any risks involved

Regarding expectations and confidentiality, I understand that:

- I will be asked questions regarding my understanding of the nature of skills and my experience of work in the clothing industry
- My name will not be used in the research report and every effort will be taken to keep my contribution anonymous. My organisation's name will also not be used in the final report
- I may request a digital copy of the final research which will be shared with me oncompletion of the project using the email address that I provide below.

Email address for sharing final research report (optional): _____

I hereby give my consent to participate in this research

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Signature of Participant)

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule

For Workers

1. Tell me, how did you start working here?
2. Did you go to school for this? Where? For how long?
3. Do you think people need to go to school for this? Why?
4. Describe your work from start to finish?
5. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of good, quality work?
6. What has the working environment been like since you started working?
7. If it has changed, how has it changed?
8. Do you think I could do your work? What would this require?
9. Do you consider yourself as 'skilled'?
10. How would you describe 'skill'?
11. How would you describe a craftsman/artisan?
12. Do you consider yourself as a craftsman/artisan
13. Is creativity a factor in doing your work? How? Why?
14. How many times have you been absent from work this year? Last year? Why?
15. When doing your work, how often are you checked on by management or supervisors? What are your thoughts or feelings on this?
16. What is the first feeling that comes to you when you think of your work? Has this always been the case? Why do you think this is?
17. If you had a "blank-cheque" to rewrite your career, would you change anything? Why?
18. What are the challenges you face in doing your work? How do you solve these?
19. How would you describe your relationship to management? Why?
20. What do you think management thinks of you? Why?

For Management

1. Tell me, how did you start working here?
2. Describe your work from start to finish?
3. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of good, quality work?
4. What has the working environment been like since you started working?
5. If it has changed, how has it changed?
6. Do you consider yourself as ‘skilled’?
7. How would you describe ‘skill’?
8. How does/did training for these workers take place?
9. What are the challenges that you face as management in terms of getting workers to be more productive?
10. How do you deal with these challenges?
11. How would you describe your relationship to the workers? Why?
12. What do you think the workers think of you? Why?
13. What are your thoughts on worker-supervision?